

December 14, 2025 + 10:30 A.M.
Third Sunday of Advent/Christmas Cantata

We Join in Worship

*If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our
Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.*

Liturgist: Tracy Oprea

PRELUDE *Of the Father's Love Begotten* Gilbert M. Martin

WELCOME

CHORAL INTROIT

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

***LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH** The Casiano Family

Leader: On this third day of Advent we light three candles to mark the season: HOPE, PEACE,
and now JOY. Joy is a feeling much deeper than happiness and much broader than
contentedness. It is a feeling from our souls that says, "My God is good, and my
redeemer lives!" We must share this joy.

ALL: **As he stood on the mountain, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built
on a hill cannot be hid. Let your light shine before others."**

(two purple and the rose candle are lit)

Leader: As we light the candle of JOY, we accept our call to spread that deep-down, far and wide
feeling. We commit to song, dance, art, smiling, and laughter. We choose to bear this
light out into the world and to declare, our God is indeed good!

ALL: **Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!**

*** CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 146)

Leader: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever.

ALL: **Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I
live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long!**

Leader: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,
who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry; who sets the
prisoners free; who opens the eyes of the blind.

ALL: **Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I
live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long!**

Leader: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,
who lifts up those who are bowed down; who loves the righteous; who watches over the
strangers; who upholds the orphan and the widow.

ALL: **Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I
live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long!**

***OPENING HYMN:** "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (2)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: James writes, "Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!" Together let us confess our grumbling and bitterness and commit to repentance.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

O God, we lift up our prayer of confession and commit to repentance for the wrong that we have done. We confess that we often grumble against each other, focusing on each other's flaws and ignoring each other's gifts. We expect the worst in each other and allow society's divisions to get in the way of our relationships as your children. All of this is rooted in our bitterness and cynicism, those enemies of joy. With our bitterness and cynicism, we forget that we are called to be a joyful people, not a jaded people. We fail to join the wilderness in rejoicing. Forgive us for our grumbling, bitterness, and cynicism. Help us to rejoice! In the name of your son Jesus Christ, the great joy giver, we pray. Amen.

KYRIE

**Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! James writes, "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

ALL: Jesus Christ forgives us, and he is near! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

GLORIA PATRI

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

STATEMENT OF FAITH (from *The Scots Confession*)

Leader: God's promise was repeated and made clearer from time to time.

ALL: It was embraced with joy, and most constantly received by all the faithful,

Leader: From Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to David, and so onwards to the incarnation of Christ Jesus.

ALL: All did see the joyful day of Christ Jesus, and did rejoice.

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader: Christ is the great giver of joy. As we continue our journey through Advent in a world broken by sorrow, it is necessary that we remember that the joy of our Lord is deeper and broader than any sadness. Let us give our tithes and offerings with joyful hearts so that we can share our joy with the world. Please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Let us reflect on stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY

O Come to My Heart, Lord Jesus

Robert W. Thygerson

***DOXOLOGY**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God, above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** (Unison)

O God, we dedicate these gifts to you and to your Kingdom with hearts full of joy. Please continue to fill us with joy as we carry on with your mission! We pray in the name of the great giver of joy, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We Hear God's Word

CHORAL CHRISTMAS CANTATA

"Night of Wonder"

by Jay Althouse & Sally K. Albrecht

- I. On a Night of Wonder**
First Reading: *Luke 1:26-31*
- II. Let the Christ Child In**
Second Reading: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
- III. Listen Here, Listen Here**
Third Reading: *Luke 2:1-7*
- IV. Once in Royal David's City**
Fourth Reading: What Child Is This?
- V. Gentle Mary, Tender Mary**
Fifth Reading: *Luke 2:8-14*
- VI. Angels We Have Heard on High**

Narrators: Jerry Veltman, Karen Lounsbury, Carol Callaway, Heather Casiano, Dennis O'Donnell

This Cantata is in memory of Linda Mann, Jeanne Nestor, and Murray Faris

We Respond in Faith

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Prepare the Royal Highway

James Mansfield

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* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

The *Cuetlaxochitl* Flowers (Poinsettias) in the Chancel today are given to the Glory of God by:

Fred & Carol Callaway, in memory of Loved Ones
Peter & Gale Churitch, in memory of Loved Ones
Lois Fozkos, in memory of Loved Ones
Rodney & Peggy Fozkos, in memory of Loved Ones
Marvin Kohler, in memory of Helen Kohler
Shirley McKnight, in memory of her husband, Barry McKnight
Julia McStravog, in memory of Grahamantha
Melissa Melendez, in memory of Mary, Gloria, Cassy and Jackie
Marjean Reed, in memory of Dr. Ronald R. Reed; Reed & Maxwell Families
Tyler Orem & Vima Couvertier Cruz, in memory of Grandma Virginia, Sergio Centeno, Titi Isabel,
Pappy Jamie, Aunt Teresa, and Esther Chishala
Jean Smith, in memory of Jay Smith and Bob & Arlene Diekman
Cheryl Steen, in memory of Dr. Lowell H. Steen and Laura Wisner

In Lieu of Flowers:

Shirley McKnight, in memory of her husband, Barry McKnight

Life of the Church

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 12/14:	Third Sunday of Advent Worship in Person & Online Christmas Cantata
MONDAY 12/15:	Women's Bible Study 9:15-11:30 AM GA Christmas Party (FH)– 6:30 PM Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
TUESDAY 12/16:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) Session – 6:30 PM AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 12/17:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) “Bring Your Own Bible” Bible Study 7-8 PM (Zoom) GA – 7:00 PM
THURSDAY 12/18:	Choir – 7:00 PM
SATURDAY 12/20:	Gladys' Table Prep AA – 6:30 PM
SUNDAY 12/21:	Christmas Caroling After Worship

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **CRAFT SALE AFTER WORSHIP TODAY** The FPCH crafters ran a great booth on November 8th at St. James the Less Catholic Church! They will be selling items in Fellowship Hall. Come see what the creative crafters have made and get some early holiday gifts. Proceeds support our general fund.
- **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING DECEMBER 21ST AFTER WORSHIP** There will be a congregational meeting on December 21st immediately following worship for the purposes of electing officers for 2026 and voting on the pastor's terms of call. Please plan on being present for this!
- **CHRISTMAS CAROLING DEC. 21ST** Join us for Christmas Caroling on December 21! We'll be visiting a few of our congregation's homebound members to bring holiday joy and Christmas cookies. The Ministry of Faith Development will provide a light lunch for all carolers following worship and the congregational meeting scheduled for that day. Then we'll head out for caroling, and should be finished by 3 pm. If you'd like to donate a dozen cookies, please let Heather Casiano know. RSVP to Heather Casiano (hcasiano@fpchighland.org) by Dec. 17th if you plan on caroling, donating cookies, or both. Thank you for your participation!

- **CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE** Our *Christmas Eve* candlelight service will be Wednesday, December 24th, at 7:00 PM in person and online. Our *First Sunday of Christmas* worship will be Sunday, December 28th, at 10:30 AM online only.
- **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET** This year's advent devotional booklet, from the Presbyterian Outlook, is titled "Draw Near: Lighting the Advent Path with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love." There are a few printed copies of the booklet in the narthex for those who may prefer a printed copy instead of the email format, and for any guests. This Advent season, may you "Draw Near" to the Christ who has come, and who will come again, and will be forever!
- **The choir chairs are FINISHED!** They are the culmination of a decades-long held dream of choir members, many of whom have joined the Heavenly Chorus and were part of the desire to have the chairs either replaced or reupholstered. We are joyously accepting donations to the Choir Chair Fund from anyone and everyone who wants to make a contribution in honor of or in memory of a cherished person in their lives who loves/loved music.
- **"BYOB"** (Bring Your Own Bible) discussion group meets on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 pm online using Zoom. Each week this group takes a look at the scriptures from our Sunday worship services, asking questions, bringing up different perspectives, and hopefully encountering the Holy Spirit in a fresh way. The link for the Zoom meetings is emailed out weekly. You can connect to Zoom with a smart phone, tablet or computer. If you're not familiar with how to use Zoom, or to get on our e-mail list, please contact Pastor Tyler or Heather Casiano.
- **"THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD"** class meets on Sunday mornings from 9-10 am in the middle classroom (across from Pastor Tyler's office). This group is reading through the book, "A is for Alabaster" by Anna Carter Florence. Each week is independent of the other weeks, so come as you are able. If you need a book, or for any other questions, contact Heather Casiano.
- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.

Prayer List

Anthony
Brady Vanes
George Griner
Guy Hendricks
Bill and Anettia Holmes
David Markley
Pat and David Kingen
Diana and Ray Mendoza
Janet Orem
Cindy Waltz and Sister
Yvonne Suroviak
Georgette Sknerski
Jakob Holden
Denise Matthys
Jan Oprea
Florance Cody
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea
Laura Buono Domsic
The Windstrups
Rick Parker
Gary Everhart
Caroline Studer
Darlene O'Brien
Doug & Sue Matthews
Janet Terpstra
Glen Nahler
Tom
David Hamblin
Jana Tolley
Larry & Bonnie Perryman
Delta Rose
Winnie Owen
Breeanne
Mom Bechtler

Victor
Marian Clayton
Ella P
Melissa J.
Rita Stronczek
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon
OGB
Edna Cruz
Charlie
Jerry & Rena Martinez
Nicole
Greg
Pastor Jane
Mary Ellen Edeus
Jane and David
Flora R.
Tyler Gall
Phil
Luana Sulkowski
Sonny Buono
Shannon Sutton
Robin
Mary Hurtt
Eunice
Betsy
David
Trina & Scott
Joe & Kathy
Breanne Polan
Tammy
Alex
Ben
Mike Kelly
Sue Heth

The Wilderness Awaits

Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 3:1-12

When we read our scriptures, we have a tendency to think of the wilderness as a place of evil—where Hagar was exiled with Ishmael, where the Israelites were forced to wander for decades, where Satan tempted Jesus. We then translate this metaphorically into our lives, speaking of struggle and suffering and sickness and sadness as our own time lost and wandering in the wilderness. We think of dry deserts and gloomy swamps and murky jungles. We imagine the things of our worst fears and nightmares—giant snakes, mosquitoes, lions and tigers and bears, O my! We imagine hunger and thirst and disease and terror and death. These elements are certainly there. Ask Hagar. She certainly experienced thirst. Ask the Israelites. They certainly experienced hunger. Ask any of the thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who have to make their way through the

Panama Jungle on foot in order to get to the United States. They certainly experience hunger and thirst and disease and terror and death. So yes, the wilderness is indeed dangerous. But evil?

When it comes to the wilderness, I am convinced that we have this concept of evil because we humans are so obsessed with control. We want to control everything that happens in our own lives and in the lives of others. We want to be in charge of our own destinies. We want to be able to manipulate our environments to our own purposes. We want to know what's happening around us and what is going to happen in our lives. And the wilderness is the ultimate embodiment of everything that is not that. And so, throughout history we humans have demonized chaos and deified order. We have demonized the unknown and deified knowledge. We have demonized the uncontrolled or uncontrollable and deified control. And so we have called the wilderness evil and somehow made the wilderness opposite to God and God's intentions. Think even of our first creation story. The very human priestly writer was obsessed with control, and so he wrote it as God creating order out of chaos.

But that's not the whole story, is it? The fact that there was chaos at the beginning means that God created the chaos, the wilderness, first. If we really think about it, it makes more sense that the wilderness is an embodiment of God rather than a force standing opposite to God. Like the wilderness, God is beyond our control. Like the wilderness, God is beyond our full knowledge. Like the wilderness, God acts in ways that we do not understand. Let me be even clearer. God is wild! God is uncontainable, un-tame-able, un-name-able. What would happen, then, if we were to change our perspective on the wilderness from the demonic to the divine?

My hope is that we would then give ourselves permission to embrace the unknown, to sit in uncertainty without fearing it, to take adventures and risks. My hope is that we would allow ourselves to give up our obsession with tight control over everything and therefore be less worried, less stressed, less afraid. My hope is that we would get to know God more deeply, more authentically. After all, Hagar met God in the wilderness. Moses and the Israelites met God in the wilderness. Jesus met God in the wilderness. That makes sense to me. The times when we are least in control, the times when we are least in the know, the times when we are least certain, these are the times that we tend to turn to God.

Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is a Latin word in the vocative case, so it is a command. It means: "Rejoice!" So, today is REJOICE Sunday. This is why we light the rose-colored candle of joy today. To me, joy is an emotion that belongs in the wilderness. I've said before that it is our deepest down emotion, one that can exist even in the midst of struggle and sadness. It is an ancient, primordial emotion. It is difficult to define. It is beyond our control. It is love with abandon, life without inhibition. It is connection to others without control or barriers or shame. It is connection to God without control or barriers or shame. In short, it is wild! This Advent season, we are called to rejoice while we wait, for we are waiting for the source of all joy, our wild God, to become incarnate as one of us and therefore to liberate us from all of our restricting, constraining control.

*Rejoice in the Lord always;
Again I say, rejoice.
Rejoice in the Lord always;
Again I say, rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice,
Again I say, rejoice.
Rejoice, rejoice,
Again I say, rejoice.*

It is the wilderness herself who gives us the best example of rejoicing. There is nothing quite like a barren desert exploding into color with superblooms of wildflowers after their seeds have lain dormant for years. There is nothing quite like a quiet evening exploding with sound as cicadas join in song together after 17

years of silence. There is nothing quite like a still savanna exploding with quakes and tremors as millions of wildebeests run through their annual migration. There is nothing quite like dry, cracked dirt being sated by rivulets of water after the first rain, with vegetation springing seemingly out of nowhere wherever the water flows, with critters of all shapes and sizes finding the vegetation. In such cases, emptiness becomes fullness, absence becomes presence, stillness becomes chaos, death becomes life. This is the wilderness rejoicing!

Our Adventen prophet Isaiah, waiting for God's deliverance of the Israelites from their Babylonian captors, living in the uncertainty of exile, proclaims:

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God."

The vision of uncontainable, un-tame-able, un-name-able joy is that of the wilderness coming to life. It is the image of the ordered, controlled dry places bursting into beautiful, sensory, life-filled chaos. In the midst of this joyful, chaotic wilderness, Isaiah implores us to be not afraid for this is where our God will come to us.

"Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.'"

Isaiah reminds us that this is where miracles happen. For, what other word besides miraculous can we use to describe plants photosynthesizing, butterflies metamorphosizing, flowers blooming, fungi sporing, microbes multiplying, and whales singing? And so it is in the wilderness that Isaiah prophesies the miraculous for us:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes."

And in the midst of this miraculous, uncontainable, un-tame-able, un-name-able, joy-filled wilderness there will be a trail, a path, a way. “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way”

700 years after Isaiah proclaimed these words, a wild man ventured out upon that highway, that Holy Way. He wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. This, of course, was our other Adventen prophet, the wild haired, wild clothed John the Baptist. Isaiah had even predicted his coming, saying:

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

Who knows how long John the Baptist had been out in that wilderness communing with God and all the wild things, seeing wild visions of the uncontainable, un-tame-able, un-name-able God becoming incarnate as a human being? Was he out there for days? Weeks? Months? Years? Decades? We know nothing about his life from the time of his birth until the time of this coming out. However much time he was out there, it was enough time for him to learn the truth.

The one who was to come after him would be even wilder than he! John would baptize with water. The one who was to come after him would baptize with Holy Spirit and fire. The one who was to come after him would flip the tables of the temple. The one who was to come after him would upend the established order, exalting the poor and outcast. The one who was to come after him would befriend prostitutes and lepers and the demon possessed and all the others whom mainstream society pushes out into the wilderness. The one who was to come after him would perform miracles that defied reason. The one who was to come after him would start a movement that would catch fire and blow with the winds of the Spirit. The one who was to come after him would even turn Creation on its head, bringing heaven here to earth. How chaotic! How uncontainable! How uncontrollable!

Listen! Can you hear him shouting? “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!”

This Advent season let us embrace the wild side. Let us release our need to control everything, our need to be in charge. And in so doing, let us release our stress and worry. Let us be comfortable sitting in uncertainty. Let us marvel at the unknown. Let us take risks. Let us go on adventures. Let us find beauty in untamed chaos. Let us seek and find God in the wilderness. Let us worship the God of the wilderness. Let us reflect upon the uncontainable, un-tame-able, un-name-able, wild nature of our messiah, the incarnation of that God. Let us respond to that messiah’s call to lift up the lowly, to commune with the prostitute, to approach the demon possessed without fear, to touch the leper, to free the prisoner, to share our food and table with the poor—in short to create chaos out of the established order of things. Most of all, let us rejoice! For, the kingdom of heaven has come near!

The wilderness awaits the one who is to come. The wilderness awaits us. Are we ready to step onto that Holy Highway?

*Rejoice in the Lord always;
Again I say, rejoice.
Rejoice in the Lord always;
Again I say, rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice,
Again I say, rejoice.
Rejoice, rejoice,
Again I say, rejoice! Amen.*

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Charles Wesley, 1744

HYFRYDOL · 8.7.8.7 D

Rowland Hugh Prichard, 1831

1. Come, Thou long - ex - pect - ed Je - sus, Born to set Thy
 2. Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, Born a child and

peo - ple free; From our fears and sins re - lease us;
 yet a King, Born to reign in us for - ev - er,

Let us find our rest in Thee. Is - rael's strength and con - so -
 Now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring. By Thine own e - ter - nal

la - tion, Hope of all the earth Thou art; Dear de - sire of
 Spir - it Rule in all our hearts a - lone; By Thine all - suf -

ev - ery na - tion, Joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
 fi - cient mer - it Raise us to Thy glo - rious throne.

Alternate tune: STUTTGART, 1