



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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All the Members, Ministers

Rev. Joseph Blotz, Pastor + Erik Haeger, Organist Olivia
Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT + DECEMBER 3, 2023

Welcome to Our Guests!

We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church... if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!

Chimes and Prelude

Welcoming the Light

How does a weary world hope?

**By telling stories of hope,
by lighting candles in the night,
and planting seeds in the winter that will bloom in the spring.**

**By praying for children as they grow,
and picking up trash on the sidewalk.**

By insisting that small acts can make a difference.

There are a million ways to practice hope. So today we light the candle of hope as a reminder and a charge.

With God's help, may we bring hope into a weary world. Amen.¹

Welcome and Greeting

Hymn

O Come O Come Emmanuel

CH119

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, we are weary.

For weary bodies that ache and cry out, we pray: **Forgive us for pushing ourselves too hard. Reminds us that we deserve Sabbath rest.**

For weary minds that feel overwhelmed and saturated with news, we pray: **Forgive us for creating so many distractions. Remind us that in the quiet, we can hear you.**

For weary hearts that long to feel the joy of this season, we pray:

**Forgive us for being impatient with ourselves.
Remind us that healing takes time, and that joy and grief can coexist.**

For the weary edges of our faith that struggle to hold onto hope,
Forgive us. Remind us of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Remind us that your good news knows no bounds. Amen.

¹ Our Words for Worship this Advent were written by the Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Family of faith, no matter how many times we wear ourselves thin, no matter how many times we lose ourselves to distractions, no matter how many times we ask ourselves, "How can this be?" God's love keeps showing up for us. So say this with me:

We are loved. We are claimed. We are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Song of Praise

Doxology for the Weary

WILD MOUNTAIN THYME

Praise the One Cre - a - tor, praise the Liv - ing Christ. Praise the Ho - ly Spi - rit,
7
praise both day and night. Praise when you are wea - ry, praise in times of joy.
13
Praise, my soul, with all your strength and your heart and voice.

Hebrew Scripture

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name
or attempts to take hold of you,
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,

and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Psalter

Psalm 80

ST. LOUIS



O Shep herd, hear and lead your flock, as lambs we crave your
God's lin - eage, like a vine, once spread and flour - ished in the
Up - hold us with your strong hand, Lord, the ones whom you have
4 care; what strength on earth ap - proach - es yours, what mer - cies can com -
land; but now the vine - yard fails, the fruit lies with - ered in the
8 claimed then we will ne - ver turn from you and al - ways praise your
pare? Re - store, O God, your fav - or, the ra - diance of your face to
sand. Re - store, O God, your fav - or, the ra - diance of your face to
13 name. Re - store, O God, your fav - or, the ra - diance of your face to
light - en and re - veal the gift of your re - deem - ing grace.
light - en and re - veal the gift of your re - deem - ing grace.
light - en and re - veal the gift of your re - deem - ing grace.

Gospel

Luke 1:1-23

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed.

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

Poetry Prayer

Wade In

Sarah Speed

Over time
wind and water
will sand down the edges of a stone.
For humans,
our wind and water
is the grief of the world.
Stay here long enough
and pieces of you
will be pressed upon
by life's never-ending stream.
It's enough to make you weary.
It's enough to make you question.
It's enough to make you quiet.
And yet, the stream continues.
So do not be afraid to stand in that water.
Wade in. Soak the hem of your jeans.
Drip wet footprints through every room in your house.
Let the water stains tell your story.
And when your body grows weary of swimming,
name the stream.
Acknowledge your weariness.
For eventually,
you will pick flowers from
the opposite bank.
And over and over again, we'll tell this story.
And over and over again,
a weary world will rejoice.

Reflection

Rev. Joseph Blotz

Call to Prayer

Creator of the Stars of Night

CH127

3

Cre - a - tor of the stars of night, your peo-ple's e - ver - last - ing light,
O Christ, re-deem-er of us all, we pray you hear us when we call.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. A rehearsal mark '3' is placed above the first note of the second staff. The music is simple and hymn-like, with a clear melodic line and a steady rhythm.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

Gracious God,

You carry us through our days. You know every word on our tongue, every hair on our head. You know the dreams in our hearts, and the weight of our bones.

You also know the weariness we bring with us into the morning and into this space. So with honesty we come before you, both with hearts full of gratitude and with prayer requests on our lips.

First, holy God, we thank you for the gifts of this life that give energy.

For birthday candles and sunrises, for handwritten cards and jobs that we are passionate about. For stories that can make us laugh until we cry, and for friends that feel like family. (Optional: Add in gifts relevant to your local community here.)

For all these gifts, thank you.

In addition to these prayers of gratitude, loving God, we also bring you the things that weigh heavy on our hearts. For gun violence, for family and friends in chemotherapy, for seasons of transition and grief that won't let us go—we ask for your attention. We ask for your love and care. (Optional: Insert concerns from your community here.)

Take this yoke from us. Relieve some of the burden on our backs, and wrap your arms around places where we feel most tender.

And as we enter into this new Advent season—a season marked with joy, hope and light—we ask that you would remind us that our full humanity is welcome here. There is room for both joy and grief. There is room for weariness and awe. There is room for faith and doubt, for nothing is too big or too far gone for your love to reach it.

So with hope in our hearts, we unite our voices once more to pray the words your son taught us to pray, saying:

Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is most comfortable for you.

The following are offered as examples...

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.**

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts/sins/trespases,

as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Musical Offering

Lo How A Rose E'er Blooming

Doug Andrews

*Offerings may be placed in the collection boxes at the entrances to our worship space,
mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC, Box 36, Mansfield Center, CT 06250,
or given online at www.myfcc.info*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise God all crea-tures here be low; Praise
5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

Prayer of Dedication

Accept, O God, this money offered, these gifts given, the goodwill of our hearts, that disappointment may be turned to hope, and worry may be turned to anticipation, as we await with wonder the birth of Christ.

Amen.

The Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

God is with you.

And also with you.

Open up your hearts.

We open them up to God and one another.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Musical Response

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

CH124

Sharing the Bread and Cup

All are welcome at Christ's table; we offer non-alcoholic juice and gluten-free bread.

Hymn

Precious Lord Take My Hand

CH628

Benediction

Family of faith, as you leave this place, you go into a weary world— so speak tenderly. Do the good that is yours to do. Choose connection. Hold onto hope. And remember that Christ took on flesh for you. You are God's beloved. So go rejoicing. The world needs it. Amen.

Tree of Joy and Postlude

The Week Ahead...

Monday, December 4	10am First Church leads Worship at St Joseph Living Center
Tuesday, December 5	10:30am First Church leads Worship at MCNR 6pm Adult Education on Zoom
Wednesday, December 6	1pm Book Group in Fellowship Hall
Thursday, December 7	9:30am Sewing and Service in Fellowship Hall 12:15 Contemplative Communion 7pm Choir Practice in Fellowship Hall
Saturday, December 9	9am-12noon WAIM Work Day
Sunday, December 10	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle