



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 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT + DECEMBER 10, 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 practice peace?

By listening before we speak and saying sorry when we need to.

By advocating for justice and caring for our neighbor.

By practicing Sabbath and forgiving seventy times seven.

By choosing grace over hate and opening the door for each other.

There are a million ways to practice peace.

So today we light the candle of peace as a reminder and a charge.

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

Welcome and Greeting

Hymn

Comfort, Comfort You My People

CH122

Prayer of Confession

God of laughter, God of open front doors and family reunions,
we confess that we often doubt good news.

**We move through this world waiting for the other shoe to drop,
waiting for life to fall apart, waiting for our humanity to get the best of
us.**

Instead of leaning into joy, we lean into scarcity.

We lean into fear. We lean into isolation.

Forgive us for forgetting that joy is amplified when shared.

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

Heal the wounds we have from past hurts, and teach us how to throw open our doors like Elizabeth. Show us how to find joy in connection. Amen.

Faith family, I imagine that when we come before God with the truth of our lives, God meets us like Elizabeth meets Mary in our scripture today. The door is thrown open. There is laughter. There is joy. There is embracing—and it is holy. So trust this; believe this:

We are loved. We are claimed. We are forgiven. We are sent to serve. Amen.

Song of Praise

Doxology for the Weary

CRANHAM

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 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her

that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers; the flower fades,

when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.
The grass withers; the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Canticle

Magnificat

CH130

Gospel

Luke 1:24-45

After those days Zachariah's wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

In the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Poetry Prayer

Lessons in Connection

Sarah Speed

It's been a long day,
long enough to complain,
long enough to wine and dine my
disappointment,
to give weariness
keys to the house.
But then you get the giggles
dancing with the dog in the kitchen.
Paws-sliding, tail-wagging,
side-cramping giggles.
I can hear it from across the house.
Your joy burrows its way
through the cracks in my armor
and then we are both laughing,
gulping for joyous, electric air.
And that's when I know—
if you grab my hand,
if you ask me to dance,
if our weary human souls can
make room for connection,
then we will survive.
Joy will take root.
Love will keep
her keys to the house.

Reflection

Call to Prayer

Creator of the Stars of Night

CH127

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.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

God of today and God of tomorrow,
 We come to you this morning to thank you for the way that joy binds us together.
 Thank you for contagious laughter,
 for inside jokes,
 for stories around dinner tables that can make us laugh until we cry.
 Thank you for comedy shows,
 for the familiar sound of a loved one's chuckle,
 and for the universality of smile lines.
 What a gift you have given us.

Our text today reminds us that joy is better when shared,
 so today we thank you in particular for the Elizabeths and the Marys in our lives.
 Thank you for the people who spark joy in us.
 Thank you for the people who pull us out of our shells,
 who teach us how to dance and show us how to laugh.
 Thank you for those who declare, "Blessed are you."
 In a moment of gratitude, we silently lift their names to you now.
 Moment of silence for the naming of our joy-bearers.

Holy God, although we know that joy is better when shared, there are days when that is easier said than done. Like Elizabeth, who stayed in isolation for months after receiving her good news, we too have a tendency to choose fear over joy. Without the help of someone at our door, we can often keep our joy to ourselves.

So gracious God,
 when those days come,
 when the waters of fear rise,
 when isolation steals our joy,
 comfort us.
 Comfort us like a shepherd with their flock.
 Gather us into your arms and carry us to safer ground

that we might experience joy in the ways you have in store for us.
And until that promised day,
like Mary and Elizabeth,
we will do our best to keep finding one another.
Like Mary and Elizabeth,
we will do our best to open the door to one another,
to you, and to the joy that connection brings.
Together we unite our voices in hope,
praying the words your Son taught us to pray, saying together:

*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/trespasses,
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 *Come, Messiah!* Lloyd Larson
*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 blessings flow; Praise God all creatures 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.**

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 11

10am First Church leads Worship at St Joseph Living Center

Tuesday, December 12

5:30pm Governing Board on Zoom

7pm Adult Education on Zoom

Wednesday, December 13

1pm Book Group in Fellowship Hall

Thursday, December 14

12:15 Contemplative Communion

7pm Choir Practice in Fellowship Hall

Sunday, December 17

10:15am Worship and Worship Circle