



Pennington Presbyterian Church

Service for the Lord's Day

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Forty-first Sunday of COVID-19 pandemic

"Those who dream are not alone."



PRELUDE

Réverie

Louis Vierne

Don Dolan, *organ*

WELCOME

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent! Our theme today is "Those Who Dream Are Not Alone." We are grateful for the themes, liturgy and art from Sanctified Arts for this Advent season.

Our sanctuary looks so beautiful all decorated for Advent and Christmas. I want to give a special thanks to those who helped with the decorating. Well done! Thanks also go to Suzanne Borgos and Pat Coats for their leadership and families and children who put on a Living Nativity outside the church yesterday.

Our Worship, Justice, and Peacemaking Committee is leading a book drive in conjunction with NJ Senator Turner. We are collecting new books and are especially looking for books that celebrate diversity. Books for young children through teens are welcome. We will deliver the books on Tuesday, Dec. 22, so we hope you will act quickly. There is a basket for donations between the double glass doors off our courtyard. If you want to help but can't make that deadline, go ahead and bring your donations later. We'll be sure they get to some kids!

It's now time for our annual special Christmas Offering. Gifts will be equally divided between Arm in Arm's utilities fund which helps keep the heat on in people's homes and our Living Waters for the World partners in the Yucatan who are working hard to bring clean water to more and more people. The needs are great because of covid 19 and because of damage from hurricanes. Please label your checks or your online donation with the words Christmas Offering. Please note that all year end gifts must be postmarked by December 31 to count for this year. Thank you.

Christmas Eve Worship is going to be wonderful! It will be available on line from our website beginning at noon on Christmas Eve so you can worship at whatever time is best for you. You'll enjoy

the carols and candlelight, scriptures and a time with children, a brief homily and special music. The link will be sent to you or you can access it from our website.

Worship for Sundays Dec 27 and January 3 will be live and interactive at 10:15 am over the zoom platform. We'll be able to see each other and have times to interact. The service on January 3 will include communion so be ready with your own bread and juice. It will also feature our tradition of sharing Epiphany Star stories from 2020. You will receive an email with the zoom links in order to participate. These services will not be recorded so 10:15 will be the only time to worship on those days.

Our liturgists this morning are Casey Aldridge, Christine James, and the Wisinski Family

CALL TO WORSHIP

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

I knew joy, but when I heard the laugh of my child,

Suddenly, joy was overflowing.

I knew love, but when you held my hand,

Suddenly, love was overflowing.

I knew God, but when you showed me grace, when you forgave me, when you loved me, when you raised me,

Suddenly, God was overflowing.

So, let us worship Holy God together as a reminder that God is here and we are never alone.

This is community.

This is the body of Christ.

Welcome home.

Our first hymn is "*People, Look East*" which is hymn #105 in the Glory to God hymnal.

HYMN

People, Look East

Glory to God #105

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

The Wisinski Family

I dream of music that makes my heart swell.

I dream of trees that take my breath away.

I dream of sunrises that wrap me in light.

I dream of family dinners that feel like home.

I dream of love as the default.

The first Advent candle was for hope.

The first purple candle is lit.

The second Advent candle was for peace.

The second purple candle is lit.

Last week we lit the candle for joy.

The pink candle is lit.

So, today, as we draw near to Christmas day, we light the candle of love.

The last purple candle is lit.

May the light burn bright as a reminder that God is here and God is love. We are not alone. Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION and WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Rev. Casey Aldridge

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In humility and faith let us therefore confess our sin against God and our neighbor.

God of Good News, you say to me, "You are highly favored," but I struggle to see how that could be. You say to me, "Do not be afraid," but I am afraid all the time. You say to me, "Even the impossible is possible. Just look at Elizabeth!" but hope slips through my hands like water. The impossible still feels impossible. So today I pray. Today, we pray: Teach us to sing like Mary. Teach us to laugh like Elizabeth. Teach us to trust like the angels. Forgive us when we can only do one at a time, or none at all.

Hear us now, O Lord, as we lift our individual prayers of confession to you in the silence of this moment.

30 seconds of silent confession

Amen.

Friends, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. There may be fear within us, but God's Holy Spirit promises to be our courage. Hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, and join Mary in singing his praises. Thanks be to God!

Let us all join together in singing the following response of praise, as it comes to us from the third verse of "O Come, All Ye Faithful," Glory to God #133.

RESPONSE OF PRAISE

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Glory to God #133

Verse 3

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Dr. Christine James

Holy God, before you could speak, you were speaking--leaping in wombs, kicking, stretching, jumping

for joy. You have always found a way to show up in our midst, particularly on our fearful or lonely days. So today, as we crack open our Bibles, fluttering through these old beloved pages, we ask that you would move again. Stir in us. Speak to us. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, and if we are not able to hear your Word clearly, then give us Elizabeths who will point out your presence in delight and joy. Before you could speak, you were speaking so here and now, Creator God, we are listening. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

Dr. Christine James

Romans 16:25-27

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith - to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Dr. Christine James

HYMN

He Came Down

Glory to God #137

SCRIPTURE READING

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

Luke 1:26-45

In the sixth month 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 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. 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."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

SERMON

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

Sarah Are, the creator of much of our Advent liturgy through Sanctified Arts wrote this poem, entitled "Not Alone."

He never said to me, "I feel so alone,"
But I could tell every time we talked on the phone.
For you can hear loneliness move through the line.
It sounds like quiet and feels like tired.

But I never brought it up.
I pretended we were fine,
Passing stories like chess pieces
Until he'd resign.

And as I look back, if I could do it again,
I'd get on a plane and say to him—
You are made from nothing but love,
Inside and out, you are more than enough.
And if I could build you a home out of beautiful things,
I'd write all day and sing and pray.
But I cannot build your home,
Or make you love your own.

All I can do,
Is open my door and turn on the light,
So if you walk by you might stop inside.
And if you did, there you would find
The light is on.
The table is set.
The music is loud.
The bed is soft.

The food is warm.
What's mine is yours.

For no amount of space or time,
Or grief or doubt,
Or pain can subside
The fact that I am by your side.
Love and I will always abide.

I learned that from God.
I learned that from you.
Love doesn't go away.
I'm here to stay.
So like Mary and Elizabeth,
This door is open.

You didn't have to say you were lonely.
I could hear it in your voice.

MOMENT FOR MISSION

Hope Anderson

Christmas Offering

The Mission Committee has selected Arm-in-Arm and Living Waters for the World to receive this year's special Christmas Offering. The offering will be split 50-50. The Arm-in-Arm contribution will support their winter utility relief fund. Each year this organization helps hundreds of families avoid having their utilities shut off, and this is particularly important during a pandemic. The Yucatan network of Living Waters for the World supports partners as they work to keep water plants operating and delivering water during the pandemic and in the aftermath of the hurricanes and storms devastating the region.

You may make your contribution any time through the end of the year through the online offering feature on the home page or by a check mailed to the office. In both cases, please put in the 'memo line' that the offering is for Christmas.

OFFERING

Rev. Casey Aldridge

We are not alone! We have one another and we have God-with-us. We have Jesus Christ who loves us. Thanks be to God! And because we know that we are not alone and that we are loved, we are called to go out into the world to love and live in solidarity with our neighbors. We do so in the everyday work of the church, as well as in the particular ministries of the Christmas offering our Mission Committee has called for, which Hope has just outlined for us.

To contribute, you may mail a check to the church or click the secure 'Donate Now' button on our website. Whether you mail a check or donate online, make sure to put the words 'Christmas offering' in the 'memo line'. Thank you for supporting the work of Christmas through Arm in Arm and Living Waters for the World in the Yucatan. May God bless and use these gifts.

DOXOLOGY

NEW MEMBER WELCOME

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

Randy Schmidt (whose family includes his wife, Nadya Pancsofar, and son, Leo)

It is always a joy for us to welcome new people into our congregation. At our November Session meeting, Randy Schmidt came forward to join the church and so we want to take a moment to welcome him, along with his wife Nadya and son Leo. Randy has recorded a message for us.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Rev. Casey Aldridge

Let us pray.

God of Advent, we have waited all year for Christmas joy. Some of us have waited all year to feel the presence of your Spirit among us. We have been wracked with doubt, despair, depression, listlessness, and loneliness. Come to us in glory and power and love this week, Holy One. We believe that you who took on human form in the infant Jesus so many years ago in Bethlehem have not abandoned us, but continue to gather your people from the ends of the Earth into the body of Christ.

We are always overjoyed to see the body of Christ receive new members, especially in our congregation here in Pennington, and so we lift up celebratory prayers at the news of Randy officially joining our church family. Thank you, Lord, for your movement in Randy's life, and for the great gift of Randy, Nadya, and Leo. Pennington Presbyterian is richer for their presence in our community. God, be with Randy and his family, and equip us all to make sure they feel loved, embraced, and included here.

Our hearts go out to the two historically Black churches in downtown Washington, DC, that had signs and materials attacked and vandalized by racist militias a week ago. Creator of all, we ask that you make your presence particularly known this week to the members of Asbury United Methodist Church and Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. We pray also that with the coming of your Son this Christmas, that you send a spirit of anti-racism upon this land and upon our hearts as well. Turn us into agents for your kingdom of love and justice, your beloved community where racism and white supremacy are no more.

We pray for members of our church family and neighbors in our community who are recovering from surgeries this week. Be with them as they heal. We give thanks for doctors, nurses, and technologies that bring healing wherever there is illness and injury. We lift up prayers as well for my Mamaw, Evelyn, who watches our online worship from Mount Pleasant, North Carolina every week. Be with her in the wake of a breast cancer diagnosis. Comfort her and place your spirit of healing upon her.

Once again, we give thanks for medical professionals and procedures that tend to those battling cancer and COVID-19. We ask that you be with medical workers during this season of holidays, family gatherings, and related virus transmission. We pray for those making difficult decisions to protect their loved ones this week, and for all who are celebrating their first Christmases without loved ones.

God of Advent, we have waited all year for Christmas joy. In the form of God-with-us, our Lord Jesus Christ, bring us Christmas joy, and Christmas justice, and Christmas healing. We pray all this, as well as the words Jesus taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, 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, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Our final hymn this morning is “That Boy-Child of Mary,” which is hymn #139 in our *Glory to God* hymnal.

HYMN

That Boy-Child of Mary

Glory to God #139

BENEDICTION

Rev. Nancy Mikoski

Friends, we are not home alone! Through God’s gift of grace in Jesus Christ, we are home! And we are not alone! He is Emmanuel, God with us. And may the blessings of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us now and forever. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Besañçon
Don Dolan, *organ*

Wayne Wold

Graphic Design by Lauren Wright Pittman | Original photography by Lisle Gwynn Garrity | Designs by Hannah Garrity | Guide developed by Lisle Gwynn Garrity | Commentary by guest contributor, Dr. Marcia Y. Riggs | Liturgy by Sarah Are | Prayer by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org