



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF FENTON

To be a loving community of faith dedicated to helping people know Jesus Christ and grow, share and serve as his disciples.

4th Sunday of Advent

December 22nd, 2024 10:00 a.m.

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GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

PRELUDE

WELCOME

INTROIT “Prepare Ye the Way”

CALL TO WORSHIP

In this weary world,

we sing of joy.

In this fragile world,

we lift each other up.

In this beautiful world,

we look for God.

In this tender world,

we hold onto hope.

This is the invitation of faith.

So in this time of worship,

may we sing, lift up, look for, and hold onto our with-us God.

With hope in our hearts, Amen!

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

One: In a weary and worn world,

how do we begin again?

Where do we start?

All: Let us begin with tenderness.

Let us begin with our hearts on our sleeve.

**Let us begin from a place of vulnerability
and hope.**

Let us begin with love.

One: Yes, let us start with love.

Today we light the candles of hope, peace,
joy, and love. (Light the Candles)

**All: May the warmth of these lights be
our cornerstone.**

**May the truth in these lights help us
begin again.**

One: May it be so! Amen.

HYMN PH #104 BH #11 “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You”

CALL TO CONFESSION

Friends,

Hope can feel slippery.

One moment we may believe that change will come, that good will win,
that the suffering of today will not be the suffering of tomorrow.

The next moment we can receive word of more gun violence,
of more mudslinging,

or yet another missile headed toward a group of humans.

Hope can feel slippery.

Fortunately for us, God’s grace is not.

No matter what we are able to hold, God is able to hold onto us.

So trusting that God’s grace does not let us go, join me in the prayer of confession:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

Gracious God,

You paint pictures of what could be,

but we declare those visions impossible.

You speak of the lion lying down with the lamb,

but we spout skepticism and uncertainty.

You dream of a more just day,

but we poke holes in the plan, unable to fathom that horizon.

Forgive us for losing sight of hope.

Forgive us for assuming that what we see is all there is.

Open up our hearts to see the world as you see it.

**Open up our hearts to risk hope, to dream dreams,
and to not be afraid of either.**

With gratitude we pray, Amen.

DECLARATION OF PARDON

Friends, no matter what you hold onto,

and no matter what you let slip through your hands,

God is holding onto you.

That good news will never change.

So hear and believe the good news of the Gospel:

Today is a new day. Today, we have reason to hope. Today, we are forgiven.
 And the same will be true tomorrow.
 Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy God,
 The stories of Advent are stories many of us have heard before.
 We've arranged the nativity scenes.
 We've read the children's books.
 We've seen the movies.
 We've sung the songs.
 But as we come to your scripture this morning,
 we pray: help us begin again.
 Clear the distractions from our minds.
 Center us in this space.
 Move through the protective barriers we surround ourselves with
 and speak to us here and now.
 We are listening. We are hopeful. Amen.

FIRST LESSON: Luke 1:46-55

Mary's Song of Praise

46 And Mary said,
 "My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
 Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name;
50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
 and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

ANTHEM “Can This Be the Child”

SECOND LESSON Matthew 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. **19** Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. **20** But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” **24** When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife **25** but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

SERMON Hope is Worth the Risk

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in a God who gives us reason to hope,
a God who fills our nights with stars,
who follows winter with spring,
who dwells with and among us.
We believe that this God has dreams for creation,
dreams of justice like a mighty stream**

and swords that will be beaten into plowshares.
 Therefore, we push cynicism aside.
 We risk vulnerability.
 We hold onto hope,
 and we declare:
 “My soul magnifies the Lord,
 my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

HYMN #105 People Look East

BEARING THE WORD OUT INTO THE WORLD

OFFERING

(If you would like a written prayer request included in our prayers today, please indicate that and an usher will collect them)
(Financial Offerings can be placed in dropbox located in the New Narthex)

Will the Ushers Please come forward.

OFFERTORY

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.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God,

We come to you today feeling tenderhearted.

We are tenderhearted because life is hard.

Our spirits are bruised from the ups and downs,
 from the onslaught of disappointment, fear, and grief.

In the midst of this tenderness, how do we risk hope?

How do we hold onto you?

With honesty on our tongues,
 we come to you today, God, to ask for your help.

Show us how to hope.

Draw near to the most vulnerable places in our lives,
 to the places where hope feels out of reach.

Draw near to our depression and anxiety,
 to our addictions and sorrows.

Feel free to add prayers of lament and grief here that resonate with the day or with the

needs of your community.

Draw near to the problems that feel impossibly big.

Draw close to the places where hope seems out of reach.

And as you do, show us how to dream a better dream.

When the night feels long, point us to the candles.

When the world feels empty, fill us with bread from this Table.

When grief threatens to capsize our boat, allow us to laugh.

When we feel alone in our loss, surround us with community.

In the ups and downs of this tenderhearted world, show us how to hope.

Show us how to live like Mary and Joseph, for they were courageous enough to believe the

angel's words. They were courageous enough to believe that change could come.

Give us the courage, the vulnerability, and the wisdom to risk the same.

With all the tenderhearted hope we can muster, we join our voices together to pray the words

your son taught us to pray, saying. . .

LORD'S PRAYER

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.

TABLETALK WITH GOD'S CHILDREN

HYMN PH #113 BH #23 "Angels We Have Heard On High"

CHARGE—2 Peter 3:13-15, NRSV

In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

BENEDICTION Gloria, In Excelsis Deo

POSTLUDE

Peace be with you!...and also with you!