

FOR THE **BE**GINNING

The Table

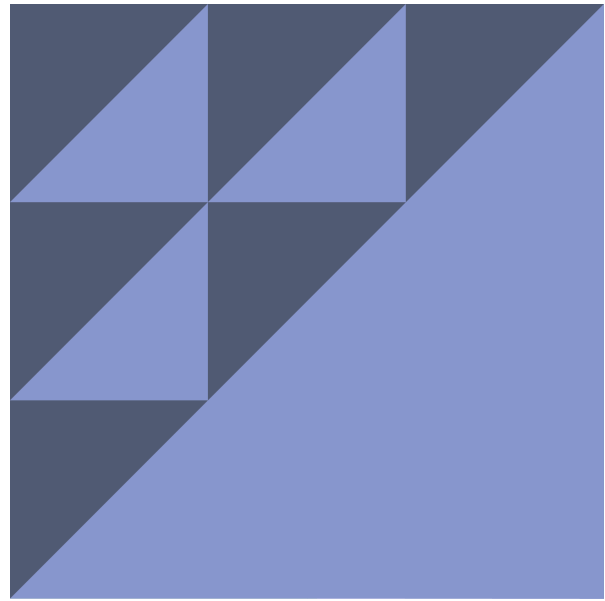
ORDER OF WORSHIP

December 22, 2024 ~ Fourth Sunday of Advent

HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

This traditional quilt square design is called "birds in the air." Sometimes when we take a risk, hope takes flight.

At times it may feel like you're falling, but you'll find that, in God's embrace, you are flying.



As followers of Jesus, we are guided by the Holy Spirit to affirm God's unconditional love and grace for all people by advocating for, serving and walking with one another and our neighbors.

OUR VISION is to experience and extend God's transforming love by—

- Being in relationship with God, set free to share God's grace.
- Building authentic relationships within our faith community and with our neighbors through accompaniment and service.
- Aspiring to love like Jesus.
- Growing in faith through spiritual practices including worship, Bible study and prayer.
- Extending genuine hospitality, especially to the marginalized, those who have been hurt by the church and those who do not know God's love.
- Educating ourselves and others, advocating for, and implementing practices grounded in social justice.

* An asterisks indicates that you are invited to stand in body or in spirit for this portion of worship

Words written in non-italicized **bold text** are an invitation for you to speak that portion of the liturgy aloud with those gathered for worship.

GATHER

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: In this weary world, we sing of joy.

All: In this fragile world, we lift each other up.

One: In this beautiful world, we look for God.

All: In this tender world, we hold onto hope.

One: 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.

All: With hope in our hearts, amen!

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

*CONFESSION

One: Blessed be the Holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever. Let us come before God with humble hearts and confess our sins.

All: 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... *pause for a time of silent confession*

*ASSURANCE OF GRACE

*GATHERING SONG - *He Came Down*

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. He came down that we may have love | 2. ...that we may have light |
| He came down that we may have love | 3. ...that we may have peace |
| He came down that we may have love | 4. ...that we may have joy |
| Hallelujah forevermore! | |

PRAYER OF THE DAY

All: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

***GREETING**

One: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, ☩ the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

***SHARING GOD'S PEACE**

TRANSFORM

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 1:18-25

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 with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

A TIME WITH YOUNG DISCIPLES

(children are invited to come forward for a moment with Pastor Pam)

SERMON

“Hope is Worth the Risk”

Rev. Pamela Meilands

Feel free to use this space to write down thoughts or reflections (or doodles) inspired by the sermon

SERMON SONG - *Canticle of the Turning

1. My soul cries out
with a joyful shout
that the God of my heart is great,
and my spirit sings
of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.

You fixed your sight on your servants light
and my weakness you did not spurn,
so from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?*

2. Though I am small,
my God, my all,
you work great things in me,
and your mercy will last
from the depths of the past
to the end of the age to be.

Your very name puts the proud to shame,
and to those who would for you yearn,
you will show your might,
put the strong to flight,
for the world is about to turn.*

3. From the halls of power
to the fortress tower,
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware
for your justice tears
every tyrant from his throne.

The hungry poor shall weep no more,
for the food they can never earn;
there are tables spread; every mouth be fed,
for the world is about to turn.*

4. Though the nations rage
from age to age,
we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must
deliver us
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.

This saving word that our forebears heard
is the promise which holds us bound,
till the spear and rod can be crushed by God,
who is turning the world around.

***Refrain:**

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**All: 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.”**

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

OFFERING PRAYER

One: Let us pray together

**All: Creator God, you made the whole world, even the farthest stars, and
you draw near to feed us. We praise you for these gifts of bread and wine.
Strengthen us with this food that we may live in expectation for the advent
of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

HOLY COMMUNION

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them to the Lord.

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION & THE COMMUNION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

One: Come to God's table. There is a place for you and enough for all.

(Please come forward to receive the elements. Take a cup from the tray then proceed to the pastor to receive the bread and the communion assistant to receive the wine. If you would prefer, there are also sealed, pre-packaged wafer and juice combination cups on the tray. If you are not able to come forward but would like communion, please signal to the pastor or the communion assistant and we will be glad to bring it to you at your seat.)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

One: Let us pray

All: Generous God, we thank you for the gift of life, for the bread of salvation. We thank you for coming among us, for leading us into peace. We thank you for showering us with mercy, for sending us into the world. Come, Lord Jesus, and go with us as we feed the hungry in your name. Amen.

SEND

BLESSING

One: God of endings and beginnings, God in the darkness and the light, God, our hope for the journey, bless and keep you now and forever.

All: Amen.

SENDING SONG - *Sing Out Earth and Skies

1. Come, O God of all the earth;
come to us, O Righteous One.
Come and bring our love to birth;
in the glory of your Son. (Chorus)

2. Come, O God of wind and flame;
fill the earth with righteousness.
Teach us all to sing your name;
may our lives your love confess.
(Chorus)

3. Come, O God of flashing light;
twinkling star and burning sun.
God of day and God of night;
in your light we all are one. (Chorus)

4. Come, O God of snow and rain;
shower down upon the earth.
Come, O God of joy and pain;
God of sorrow, God of mirth.
(Chorus)

5. Come, O Justice, come, O Peace;
come and shape our hearts anew.
Come and make oppression cease;
bring us all to life in you. (Chorus)

Chorus:

Sing out, earth and skies!
Sing of the God who loves you.
Raise your joyful cries,
Dance to the life around you.

SENDING

One: God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others. We go out to follow Jesus in the world – to show and tell the good news of God to everyone.

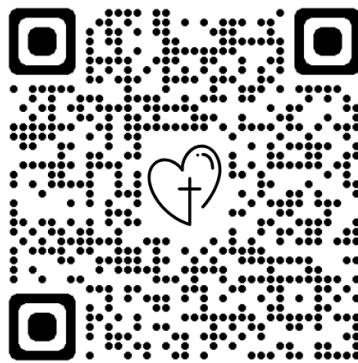
All: Thanks be to God!

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

Portions of today's liturgy are by or adapted from
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

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Joseph's Dream

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25 Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink on patterned paper

The angel holds Joseph as his dream unfolds in quilted vignettes. At the top, Mary gazes ahead, pondering her role in welcoming the Son of God into the world. Below, a squishy baby Jesus peacefully rests as his glory shines on a longing world eager to soak up the light of Emmanuel. Just as a dream holds layers of meaning, this image reflects more than the sum of its parts.

I'm fascinated by symbology. Stars have come to represent both Mary and Jesus in liturgical art, so I decided to research stars in quilting. It turns out that quilting holds its own wealth of symbology through choices in color, shapes, patterns, etc. A star quilt holds significance in a number of different cultures, including the Lakota. Star quilts are given at important moments throughout one's life, including birth, and the eight-pointed morning star "represents fulfillment, the release from darkness, [and] ushering in a new day." (Quote from Kevin Locke, Lakota Sioux)

This brings me to another fascination of mine, Biblical numerology. One of my most well-worn resources is a glossary of common liturgical symbols in European Christian art called, *Symbolism in Liturgical Art*. In it, the writers describe that the eight-pointed star is often used in imagery of Christ as an allusion to the eighth day of creation when Christ rose from the dead, "a beginning of days outside of time." It delights me that this eight-pointed star is made up of triangles with three sides. The number three references the Trinity, and therefore, the communal fullness of the Divine.

In researching imagery for Mary, I realized that both stars and lilies are often used in European art to celebrate Mary's purity. My glossary reads: "Her bearing of Christ without loss of her virginity is seen as similar to stars sending out their light without loss of brightness." Of all the things we can lift up about Mary, such as her courage, strength, or steadfast love, why emphasize her virginity? This feels incredibly limiting and dismissive and misses how incredible and multifaceted Mary is. In my image, I want to reclaim the imagery of stars and lilies to represent how Mary is a brilliant, shining example of radical faithfulness in the face of every possible earthly fear. Lilies are resourceful, hearty plants which represent rebirth across cultures. I would argue that Mary is resilient in the face of an impossible task, and in many ways, the entire story of the people of God is reborn through Mary's bravery. —Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman