



**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 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT + DECEMBER 17, 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 joy?

By dancing, and throwing birthday parties.

By hanging Christmas lights, and holding sleepy babies. By singing loudly, and looking for good news.

By telling the story of Jesus, and showing up for our community.

There are a million ways to practice joy.

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

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

Welcome and Greeting

Hymn

All Earth is Waiting

CH139

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, Somewhere in our childhood we face pressure to outgrow awe. We turn into adults who obsess over data and facts. We praise those who have answers, and assume that wonder is an answerless game. Forgive us for closing that door to you. Remind us that the kingdom of God belongs to children. Teach us the ways of awe and wonder, so that like Zechariah, when we find ourselves speechless, our first words will be words of praise. With hearts open wide, we pray, Amen.

Family of faith, just as we marvel at mountains and newborns, at sunrises and sunsets, God marvels at us. There is nothing you could do or leave undone that could prevent God from loving you. So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

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

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

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 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Psalter

Psalm 126

When the Lord brought home our trea - sure, all de - lights were like a dream;
 Bring us back to for - mer glo - ry, lost through years of ex - ile's pain;
 5
 in de - feat, a shout of vic - t'ry; in the sand, a flow - ing stream.
 gen - er - a - tions long for - got - ten seek God's fa - vor to re - gain.

9

Mouths that once were parched with an - guish now with shouts of joy are filled;
Those who plant their seeds with grie - ving, wet - ting soil with fall ing tears,

13

lau - ghter now dis - pla - ces sad - ness for the good - ness God has willed.
shall re - joice in time of har - vest, reap - ing hope for all the years.

Gospel

Luke 1:57-66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

Poetry Prayer

All the Way to Joy

Sarah Speed

We could play hard and fast,
not let anything touch us at all, keep
composure,
have all the answers.
Or we could crack ourselves open and let
everything in.
We could feel everything, every
touch, every marvel.
We could stand gaping
at the beauty of the world,
mouths wide open (because sometimes
a mouth wide open is the very best gratitude).
We could laugh so loudly
that the whole restaurant looks, and err on
the side of goofy whenever possible.
We could put our defenses down. We
could grow soft.
We could choose awe.
We could take her by the arm.
We could let her lead us all the way to joy.

Reflection

Call to Prayer

Creator of the Stars of Night

CH127

The image shows a musical score for two stanzas of a prayer. The first stanza is titled 'Call to Prayer' and the second is titled 'Creator of the Stars of Night'. The music is written on a single staff in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked '10'. The lyrics are: '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 score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The first line of music is for the first stanza, and the second line is for the second stanza. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

Holy God, Christ with us,

Once again we bow our heads.

Once again we close our eyes.

Once again we draw ourselves closer to you in prayer. Meet us here. Surround us with your loving presence.

From sunrise to sunset, you fill us with awe.

For that, we pause to give you gratitude.

Thank you for the way the sun shines through our windows,

for the mist rising off the river,

for the warmth of a cup of coffee,

for the joy of returning home,

for the beauty of a crowded table,

and for the glory of a sky full of stars., we are in constant awe of you.

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth reminds us that there is nothing you cannot do, and there is no grief that you do not know. For that we give thanks.

However, even with this good news at hand, we know that there are many in this world who cannot find the energy to practice awe or wonder because they are so deep in grief. So today, gracious God, we pray for those for whom awe feels out of reach.

Be with every parent who worries about a sick child.

Be with every child who worries about a sick parent.

Be with every person waiting on the doctor's phone call,

waiting on the next month's paycheck,

waiting for the next warm meal.

Holy God, surround those with broken hearts who are trying to stitch the pieces together, praying that one day they might be able to feel awe again.

All the while, we will keep gathering together and turning to you to remind us that you are the God of the impossible. You are the one who floods our world with awe. You are the one who knows our names.

So together we pray, using the words your son taught us to pray, saying:

**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

Peace!

Patricia Mock/arr. Richard A. Nichols

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.**

Hymn

Lift Up Your Heads O Mighty Gates

CH129

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...

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| Monday, December 18 | 10am First Church leads Worship at St Joseph Living Center |
| Tuesday, December 19 | 10:30am First Church leads Worship at MCNR
6pm Adult Education on Zoom |
| Wednesday, December 20 | 1pm Book Group in Fellowship Hall |
| Thursday, December 21 | 12:15 Contemplative Communion 7pm Choir Practice in Fellowship Hall |
| Sunday, December 24 | 10:15am Worship and Worship Circle
7pm Christmas Eve Worship with Paper Bag Pageant, Communion, and Candle Lighting |