

WORSHIP FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MAGNOLIA, ARKANSAS

Sunday, December 4, 2016, 10:45am

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter and take his seats. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The preacher will then ask...

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE "Angels We Have Heard on High" - Anna Laura Page Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" - French Carol The Choir

After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Isaiah 11 and printed in our bulletins?”

THE CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Isaiah 11)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,

And a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,

The spirit of wisdom and understanding,

The spirit of counsel and might,

The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear;

With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,

The calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow & the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;

The lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,

And the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;

The nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Let us worship God beginning today with the lighting of our second Advent Candle by the Sulchowsky family...

LIGHTING THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE

Mik & Gisela should be seated at the front, near the Advent wreath. There will be a lighter on the wreath. There should already be one purple candle lit. Adjust the microphone before the service to make sure it is on and set at the right height to pick up your voices. As soon as you are introduced by the liturgist, step to the microphone at the wreath, pick up the lighter, and begin reading.

Mik: The second candle of the Advent is the candle of peace. It is sometimes called the Bethlehem

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Our Father in heaven has provided for our every need, for food, for drink, for raiment, and for forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Having received the assurance of his providence, let us be at peace and share that peace with one another. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord prepared for them by Ms. Karen.”

CHILDREN’S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

As the children leave, the liturgist should step to the microphone and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

One way we prepare for Christ's appearance is to support the church's mission in our community and beyond. Our church's programs share good news, our outreach provides comfort and practical help, and our goal is nothing less than newness of life for all God's children. May our gifts reflect God's generosity as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

"The Rocking Carol" - Anna Laura Page

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

The Hymnal #592

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... Emmanuel, like Mary and Joseph, you have called us to be part of the unfolding drama of redemption. You have always been faithful to your promises to provide for us, so we, too, in our act of offering the fruit of our labor, put our trust and our lives in your almighty hands. Receive and bless these our gifts and use them to grow our faith even as you use them to make your presence known those in need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

ANTHEM

"Creation Will Be at Peace" - Anna Laura Page

The Choir

After the soloist finishes, the preacher will return to the pulpit & say....

Each Sunday of Advent we are using a short video produced by “The Skit Guys” to help introduce the morning message. This morning we will hear the story of the Nativity from the perspective of Joseph.

AN ADVENT VIDEO

“Joseph”

After the video, the liturgist will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from selected verses of the fifteenth chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Church at Rome, beginning at the fourth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 988 of your pew bible.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

The liturgist will take a seat on the chancel or with the congregation.

When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our second lesson this morning is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, the first chapter, beginning at the eighteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #835 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.”

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Our thanks be to God!

THE SERMON

“The Difference a Face Can Make”

In first century Jerusalem, it had been a long time since the people had caught even a glimpse of God. The Scriptures told them that God was with them. That he had not and would not abandon them to their fate. But they hadn’t seen a great deal of proof of that. The Romans had the necks of the people of Judea firmly under the heel of the Roman army. The king of the Jews, Herod, was not a Jew by race or birth but by conversion and convenience. And what the Romans didn’t take, Herod did.

What they needed was some hope. They didn't need much. It doesn't take much. But Biblical hope is not seen as a product of what we see or experience. It isn't like hoping for sunshine when there's a 70% chance of rain. It isn't planting seeds and expecting a beautiful garden, because we know that's what happens when you plant seeds. It is hoping for what has not been seen, what is beyond our experience, what could never be expected based on the evidence at hand.

The hope of the people of God is built on nothing more than faith, a belief in God that tells you he keeps his promises. Biblical hope is what Paul prays for us, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

For Paul, no image of hope is stronger than the one touched upon in Isaiah 11 and referenced here as "Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope."

Imagine that. You're a Jew, in the desert. Nothing green lives in the desert. There's an old stump, cut down years before, half-rotten. You see what you expect to see-- death and decay. But there on the side of the stump near a root, is a small green shoot. And that little shoot. That tiny little twig shall cause the nations to sing!

When John the Baptist was preaching in the desert, people came from everywhere to stand in the hot sand for hours listening to him preach. Why? because his message was a message of hope. The Messiah is at the door. The Messiah is at the door... Christ is coming. In John, the people found the hope they thought they had lost with the coming of the Romans, the rise of Herod, and the corruption of worship at the Temple by bureaucrats who wanted nothing more than to fatten themselves by feeding at God's trough.

But before the Romans... before Herod... before the mercenary priests... even before John... there was a simple carpenter from Nazareth. He had been the sole support of his mother and his brothers and sisters after his father's death. He hadn't been able to support a wife until the last of his siblings were grown and making their own way in the world.

But now he was in love. Never mind the gray at his temples, it was like he was twenty again. She was young and beautiful, and whether it was in spite of or because of her inexperience and youth, we'll never know which, she loved him too. A date was set, plans were made. Everything he had hoped for was finally coming his way. He had every reason to once again hope in the future.

But then came the news that his fiancée was expecting a child-- and it wasn't his. At first there was anger, partially directed at Mary for betraying him, but mostly at God for once again snatching his tiny little hope away from him. Can't you just hear his prayer of hurt and anger that night before going to bed, "I loved her so, O God! And you have allowed her to betray me! I love her enough to wish her no harm, so I will deal with her quietly and put all this behind me. But tell me why Father... my dream was such a little dream... I only wanted what every man wants... someone to love and to love me back... a child to carry on my name... a future? And you have taken even that away from me!"

He lay down on his mat, and finally his exhaustion forced his disquieted mind to yield to sleep, and then God mercifully answered his accusations and questions... "I have not taken anything from you... Your dream was simply too small and I have sought to bless you beyond your imagining, "for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Do not say, "I am just a dry tree." For I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give you an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.... Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And all this shall take place to fulfill what I have spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called "God is with us."

So Joseph rose the next day and took Mary to be his wife. They began the journey to Bethlehem, and there they were privileged to do what few mortals had ever been able to do and live. They were allowed to see the face of God. Moses once asked to see God's face and was told that no man had ever

seen the face of God and lived, and was allowed only to see God's back as he passed by. Isaiah was once given a glimpse of God that left him filled with shame and crippling fear.

But in that stable, Joseph finds himself with all he had wanted-- a wife to love and who would love him back; a son and a name that would live on after him-- though neither in the way he had expected. Joseph would be allowed to look on the face of God. Joseph would smile at God and he would see God smile back. And Joseph would feel a contentment that no man has felt before or since.

OK, then preacher. That's great for Joseph, but what's the big deal about the incarnation? Why is the miracle at Bethlehem a big deal for **ME?**

Because of Bethlehem's miracle, you too can look upon the face of God and answer some fundamental questions. Does God care if I'm sad? Look at the tear-streaked face of Jesus as he stands near Lazarus's tomb. Does God notice when I'm afraid? Note the resolve in the eyes of Jesus as he marches through the storm to rescue his friends. Does God know if I am ignored or rejected? Find the answer in the compassionate eyes of Christ as he stands to defend the adulterous woman."

Jesus himself stated, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

"Anyone who has seen me weep has seen the Father weep."

"Anyone who has seen me laugh has seen the Father laugh."

"Anyone who has seen me determined has seen the Father determined."

Would you like to see God? Take a look at Jesus.

Everything changes when we see the face of God.

He knows the burden of a broken heart. He knows the sorrow this life can bring. He could have come as a shining light or a voice in the clouds, but he came as a person. Does God understand you? Find the answer in Bethlehem.

Gaze where Mary gazed. Look into God's face and be assured. If the King was willing to enter the world of animals and shepherds and swaddling clothes, don't you think he's willing to enter yours?

He took on your face in the hope that you would see his.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Lord of all ages, regardless of our age, we have grown old-- stiffened by habit, blinded by prejudice, deafened by greed, crippled by sin --and we pray that you, who can make all things new, will effect in us new birth, new faith, new hope. Like Joseph, grant us faith enough to take the next step, to do what we must to finally take our place around your throne and behold your glorious faces-- Father and Son-- and to see and understand the totality of your goodness, love, and power for ourselves.

Eternal God, for some this day is full of pain and fear, with burdens so heavy they will be tempted to curse life. For some the day is bitter with disappointment and regret, so dreadful they may wish they'd never seen the light of day. For some it is dark with hopelessness and despair, so grim they will be tempted to give up on you. And for others this day is full of such unspeakable joy that it will be a foretaste of life eternal, showing them such beauty they will want time to stand still.

So if in our darkness we feel utterly alone, do not abandon us; and if in our joy we ask for nothing beyond the present moment, draw us ever deeper into that glorious future you have for us.

Let your blessing rest upon this bread and cup, O Lord. As you once took on human flesh to reveal your glory to those who would believe, be present to us once more through these symbols of your body and blood that you may be enfleshed once more in the members of this congregation. Persuade us to do whatever you ask of us. Make us your eyes and ears; your hands and feet; your voice proclaiming the Good News and calling all who will listen to come and behold your glory. May we stand forever firm in faith and witness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who 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.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

The Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

The Distribution of the Elements

The Prayer After Receiving

Almighty and merciful God, as you have set apart these common elements to be uncommon, so set us apart that we may be used to bring about your kingdom on earth. If it be possible, breach now and forever the wall between us and yourself, and grant that we may gratefully receive your gift of grace and carry it forth into the world. Amen.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

The Hymnal #44

*THE BENEDICTION

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”

God rest you merry, gentlemen, Let nothing you dismay.

Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,

To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.

O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy; O tidings of comfort and joy.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis