

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, December 27, 2015

PRELUDE "He Whom Shepherds Once Came Praising" - Wilbur Held Dr. Elizabeth Davis

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 148 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 148)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens;

Praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Kings of the earth & all peoples, princes & all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted;

He has raised up a horn for his people, for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Almighty God, you have made yourself known to us in your Son, Jesus. In his birth you restored the dignity of human nature stained and scarred by sin. In his death and resurrection you revealed to us the fullness of your grace and mercy. Now in your love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, let us so hear and reflect on Your word this day, that we may respond with believing hearts and put our faith into practice. We ask in his name. Amen

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "Joy to the World", number 40 in our *Hymnals*.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

"Joy to the World"

The Hymnal #40

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

*CALL TO CONFESSION

There is a time for everything. This is a time to begin with what should always come first an honest confession of the wrong we have done. In the penitence born from an awareness of our sinfulness and in the faith born of our experience with God's grace, let us pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, we pause to look over the past year-- a year in which you were with us, but we were not always with you. We have wandered away to pursue our own goals and failed to make sure that you were with us on our journey. We begin looking for you only when we discover that the peace you bring was missing from our lives. Forgive us Lord and lead us into the new year in holiness and righteousness. We ask this that we might be a people pleasing unto you, a people who allow your light to shine in the darkness and who bring praise and glory unto your name. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION *(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)*

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Rejoice and be glad! You are forgiven. For everyone who asks, receives; and those who seek, find; for the one who was born in Bethlehem lives and intercedes for us before God. Friends believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*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

Having been reconciled to God through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's peace. 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 brought to them by Ms. Karen.”

The preacher will take a seat.

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 will step to the lectern and say,

“Let of of us who are able, stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “Good Christian Friends Rejoice”, hymn number 28 in our *Hymnals*.

HYMN OF PREPARATION

“Good Christian Friends Rejoice”

The Hymnal #28

After the Hymn, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Be Seated. . . . As we have been blessed, so we share. May our offerings express compassion and kindness in our outreach to our community and to the world. Let us give as generously as we have received 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

"In the Bleak Midwinter" - Wilbur Held

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. . . Gracious God, help us, with Mary's Son, to offer our all-- our time, talents, and treasures, even our bodies and our souls, in the temple of your service and world. Receive and bless what we offer here. Take us and use us as you see fit so that we might bring praise and glory unto your name both now and in the year to come. We ask it in the name of the one who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, both now and forevermore. Amen.

The liturgist will take a seat until after the Anthem.

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.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"Greensleeves" - Samuel Applebaum/Louis Golden

Dalene Baer, violinist

After the Special Music, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READING

Our first lesson this morning is taken from Paul's letter to the Colossians, the third chapter,

beginning with the twelfth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1027 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God....

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The liturgist will take his/her seat..

The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our Gospel Reading this morning is taken from Luke, the second chapter, beginning with the twenty-second verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #889 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Leader: ...This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Not a Bad Way to Begin”

The census at Bethlehem is over. On their way home to Nazareth, the new family makes a stop at the Temple in Jerusalem. Under Mosaic Law, every new mother had to present herself for a ritual cleansing 40 days after having given birth. While there, it was a convenient time to fulfill the law requiring parents to present their firstborn sons and to redeem them by offering a sacrifice. This had been the law since that night in Egypt generations before, when the angel of death struck every house in Egypt, claiming their firstborn sons, even as he passed over the houses of the Hebrews who had

marked their doorposts with the blood of a lamb.

Rabbis taught that the presentation of first born sons was an event designed to remind the Hebrew people of that God had made them, and just as importantly, redeemed them. They were not their own, their lives belonged to God to be used to his glory and according to his purpose.

This was different from the rite of circumcision, which would place a mark on every Hebrew male, that he would carry with him every day of his life and identified him as an Israelite, an heir to the covenant of Abraham and Moses. Circumcision established a human identity, and a place within the human family.

Today, our rite of baptism has conflated both of these purposes into a single act. At Baptism we are identified as children of our parents to whom we have been given by God, and we have an invisible mark placed upon us establishing our identity as children of the covenant-- the covenant of Abraham and Moses, and the new covenant in Christ.

It is not a bad beginning for one's life to settle at the very beginning of one's life the biggest question one can ask--- "Who am I?"

When a child is presented for baptism, we ask the child's parents, "What is the Christian name of this child?" and they answer, in effect claiming the child as their own. And then we pour water over their heads and say their name followed by the age old words, "Child of the covenant". From that moment on, they are heirs to the promise, princes and princesses in the household of the King of the Universe.

As a parent, the privilege of presenting a child to God is a priceless gift and true peace of mind because it represents a certain future for the sons or daughters we love more than life. From that moment on, neither death nor life, nor angels nor powers, nor anything else in all creation can separated them from the love of God which is their in Christ Jesus. If anything happens to us, we know that He who has begun a good work will bring it to completion.

And that my friends is the difference between being consumed and embittered by grief, and in continuing to thrive, though wounded and bruised, but not defeated by death which will one day claim every single one of us-- including our children.

When death knocks on our door, and we look through the peephole and behold his old ashen countenance and are gripped, even if but for a moment, by the unholy terror of being separated from those we love, we can open the door and make that old yellow coward fear wait outside even as we welcome death into the very bosom of our family. And we will remember, that if **this** earthly tent is destroyed, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and that whoever death removes from our inner circle will simple take their place in the great cloud of witnesses to cheer on those of us who still have a race to run and finish. And if our little ones should grow up and walk a path that we know will cause them great pain, our Father in Heaven will not abandon them. How many parents since Adam and Eve have seen their children's lives destroyed by ill temper, drugs, alcohol, the evil influence of others, or even their own inflated egos?

I had wandered away from God just before I turned 16. I was tired of being ignored or being fed pat answers to hard questions that said much more about the ignorance and laziness of those who spoke them than any of them did about the grace or wisdom or power of God. I spent the next 10 years of my life in the wilderness. And even there, God condescended to seek me, and to call me, all to deliver me from trouble. I heard that still small voice, not once but twice, and still failed to respond.

And then my daughter was born and I heard the promises..I spoke the promises, the same promises that my mother had made to God on my behalf 30 years before-- and something clicked inside.

And then my son was born, and we made the same promises for him. And my trust grew and deepened. Which was a good thing, since a few weeks later, I was on a table in a doctor's office having a needle biopsy done on what they thought was cancer of the liver. As a young father, I laid on that table, on my side, without moving for four hours so it could clot-- and I wondered what would happen to my son if it was cancer? Debbie and her sister and their mother could look after and raise my daughter, Maggie well enough, but who would be there for Josh? Who would see to it that he had a dad who

would go to all his games, football or soccer, or track, or band or whatever his thing turned out to be? Who would be there to make sure he got to go camping and that he would get a chance to learn the lessons of scouting and the outdoors? Who would be there to understand what it was like to be a boy?

And I remembered.... He belonged to God, He was only lent to me. Odds were, that under ordinary circumstances, I was going to die 30 years before his time came. Who would be there then?

God. My Father was also his Father. The promise was not just to me, but to my children, and to HIS children. God would always be there to watch over him, guide him, protect him, and provide for him.

And God reminded me of that fact, sometimes even painfully. I remember the lesson God taught me on my kids' first day of school in my first parish. I had arrived to find things way less rosy that I had been told by the Pastor Nominating Committee. I was worried about the church, but just as much about my wife and kids. Debbie hadn't found employment as a teacher yet. The church's financial situation was dire at best. And I wondered how in the world I was supposed to fix this!

We took Josh and Maggie to school that first morning, and they had instructions to ride the school bus home. I was waiting for the afternoon bus when it arrived, only Josh wasn't on it. I drove over to the school assuming he had missed the bus. But no, he wasn't there, and the vice-principal whose sole job it was to make sure that every kid who was supposed to ride the bus, got on the right bus, had no idea where he was.

I began driving every street in that part of town looking for him. After 45 minutes when he was still nowhere to be found, I called the chair of the PNC who was the former superintendent and asked him what to do. He called several friends and church members who all got in their cars and began looking. He called the police who began looking. They in turn called the radio stations with a description and asked people to keep an eye out. But 3 hours later, he was still nowhere to be found.

Anger and fear consumed me. I imagined him dead and worse. Finally, I had the good sense to pull over, and pray. I asked Him to help me find my son. And I then I heard that still small voice asking me, "WHOSE son?" And I remembered. God had given him to me, and at baptism I had wisely given him back. He was on loan to me. But now, the ONE who was really His Father, would take care of him no matter what."

A peace fell over me, I said thank you and amen, pulled away from the curb, turned the corner, and behold, there he was sitting on the bench in front of the school where all of this drama had started 4 hours before.

He explained that he had missed the bus and just decided he would walk home. He wandered around, got lost, and finally just gave up and decided to rest and wait there until we came looking for him.

During the Civil War a mother went to plead for the life of her son with President Lincoln himself. Her boy was a very young Union soldier sentenced to death by hanging for desertion under fire. She begged and pleaded for the life of her son as only a mother can. Mr. Lincoln told her that her boy had done a despicable thing, and how, if they failed to make an example of him, his failure to stand and fight would spread to others and the war and the Union might be lost. But she pulled an old tin type picture of her son from her purse, and said, "That may be, Mr. President, but he is my son, and I love him." At that, Lincoln gave up the argument, wrote out a hasty pardon for her to give the Captain of the Guard, and as he took one more quick look at the innocence captured by the old tin-type, he said, "Still, I can't help but wish that we could give him a little bit of hanging."

That day I got my little bit of hanging, and I finally learned, my never again to be forgotten lesson that, Josh is my son only because God has lent Him to me for whatever time we have together on earth. And he has proved it more than once.

God delivered him from ulcerative colitis, a rare spontaneous remission of a debilitating disease, allowing him to excel at sports, pursue whatever he chose academically, to marry a sweet girl who is now the mother of his children.

God delivered him from going overseas to the Middle East. The mild color blindness that we now dismiss so easily, kept him from choosing a military specialty that would virtually have

guaranteed his going into a combat zone. Josh probably thinks that he missed that last deployment because of his friend, Caleb. Well, here's the skinny on that one, Caleb was just a tool in the hand of God who was working in YOUR life to keep His promises to YOU and to your mom and me. And why? Because you are a child of God, an heir to the covenant, and a beneficiary of his promise. He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion.

As parents we can only do our best-- even when our best isn't good enough. But because we are children of the covenant, heirs to the promise, and children of the King, we can ask for His help, and he can accomplish far more than we can ask or even imagine. He will pursue our wayward loved ones wherever they go. He will call them by name, and even strike them if all else fails, bringing them to their knees and to a teachable moment, and then he will speak the words that we all long to hear, "You are my child and I will neither leave nor forsake you, for I love you with an everlasting love. There is nothing you have done that cannot be forgiven. There is no good thing that will be withheld from you. You are my child. Kill the fatted calf and prepare a rich feast. I will place my best robe upon your shoulders, and my ring upon your finger. I will wash your face and your feet with my tears of joy, for this child who was dead is alive forevermore. Welcome home, MY CHILD!"

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

You are with us, O God. We come from you and, when our days here are ended, we shall return to you. Illumine us with the light of eternity and lead us through the years allotted to us that we may live wisely and well to your glory. Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of Him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; and with that love burning, make this world of ours a world of Hope and Promise - for all peoples, and for all times...

May the remembrance of His birth may be a new beginning for us. Just as His life was to mature in wisdom and stature until it embraced the whole globe with its love and its power; may our own observance of Christmas be a commencement, and not a conclusion!

Teach us the lessons of Christmas. That your strength is made perfect in weakness. That you still care about all of your creation, that you have not abandoned us to the consequences of our sins, and that your love remains mightier than the might of all the evil round about us.

Confound us when we wallow in self-pity. Oppose our temptation to say that nothing can be done to change what has been. Stir us out of lethargy. Prod us into labor. Lead us into the joy of doing the good within reach-- what we can, where we can, when we can, all to the glory of Jesus who came to save us, and 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.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", hymn #31 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

The Hymnal #31

THE BLESSING

Now O Lord, let your servants depart in peace, according to your word; for our eyes have beheld your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people; A light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Go Tell It On The Mountain"

Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.

Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis