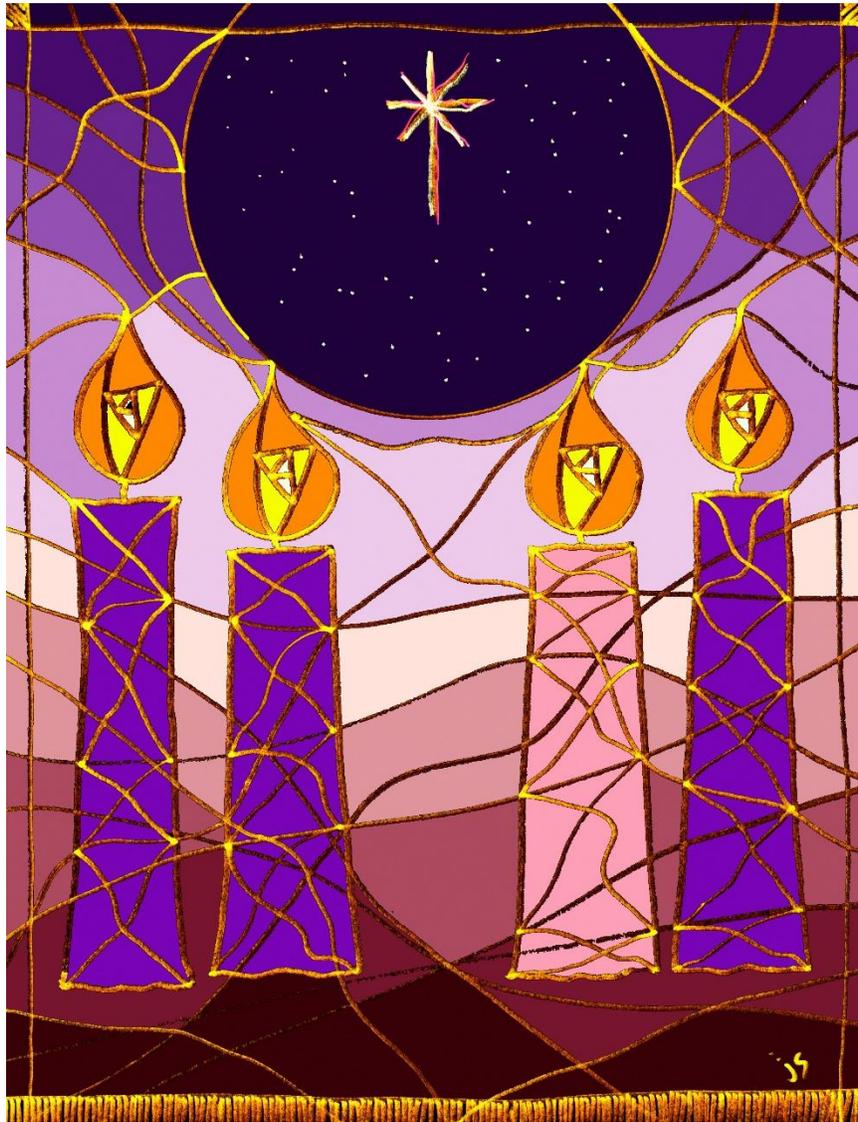


*First Presbyterian Church of Monroe
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2020*



For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6, NRSV

Fourth Sunday of Advent' "I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace"

WE GATHER

Prelude

Welcome

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Crossing the Threshold

Diane Adams, Liturgist

The "great light" prophesied by Isaiah in today's text is echoed in the first strains of John's Gospel good news: the light that brings peace—that saves the people from all that would extinguish it—has been there from the beginning. The Word is made flesh and dwells among us. This reign is now... will we believe it? Will we continue to put flesh on it, embodying the peace meant for all humanity?

Threshold Music

"I Believe" (verse 4)

Dean Tartaglia, Soloist

"I believe in the light, I believe in the light
That has come, that has come, and is coming."

Pastor: We see the star rising
People: We see the star rising
Pastor: We hear the glad tidings
People: We hear the glad tidings
Pastor: We know we are not alone
People: We know we are not alone

Prayer

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of the depths of joy.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we are not sure
of your presence,
ignite the flame of joy within us,

**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Those gathered virtually join in singing
**I believe in the light,
I believe in the light,
That has come...that has come...
And is coming.**

Pastor: Help us face the sorrows and pain of life and embrace the assurance that light is already here and is always coming.

People: **Amen.**

Pastor: You are invited to light the third candle of Advent, the candle of Joy.

Opening Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”
(verses 1, 5-7)

GTG 88

- 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 5 O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 6 O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 7 O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; bid envy, strife, and discord cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Call to Confession

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Prayer of Confessionⁱⁱ

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Your love is good news for the oppressed, O Lord, for you bind up the brokenhearted. God of the Brokenhearted, forgive us when we think that your good news is only for us. Forgive us, when we twist your gospel into something that fits comfortably into our lives. By your light, let us see our homeless sisters and brothers as prophets, calling us to task as we lie down in warm comfortable beds. By your light, let us see heavenward raised fists as hands once held open but now curled shut from “less than” treatment and unjust systems. By your light, let us see our hungry brothers and sisters as heralds for all who have little, while living in our country where there is more than enough. Forgive us, God of the Brokenhearted, for living from a place of scarcity rather than abundance. By your light, illumine our brokenness and set our feet on a new path. By your light of love transform us and challenge us to ask tough questions of ourselves and to daily to be more like you. Amen.

Silent Confession

Declaration of Forgiveness

Passing the Peace

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

WE PROCLAIM

Children's Time to Shine

"This Little Light of Mine"

Ann Lux

Isaiah Reading

Diane Adams, Liturgist

Isaiah Reading

Isaiah 9: 2-7 (CEB)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.
You have made the nation great;
you have increased its joy.
They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest,
as those who divide plunder rejoice.
As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that burdened them,
the staff on their shoulders,
and the rod of their oppressor.
Because every boot of the thundering warriors,
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned, fuel for the fire.

A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

There will be vast authority and endless peace
for David's throne and for his kingdom,
establishing and sustaining it
with justice and righteousness
now and forever.

The Witness of Music

Diane Adams, Liturgist

This week, Ann Orwin and our pastor, Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler will be co-hosting discussions of the documentary film, "Sweet Honey in the Rock: Raise Your Voice! We are excited about sharing this film with you. This ensemble of African-American women has, for three decades, been touring and singing to delight audiences but also to teach, preserve, and promote the power of songs for the people of African descent and the role of music in raising our voices against injustice. Information about the Wednesday evening film documentary study of "Sweet Honey in the Rock: Raise Your Voice! was emailed in the mid-week bulletin on the afternoon December 16th. If you are not on our mailing list you may email call the church office and asked to be added to our email list. You may also simply request the Zoom link for the film documentary study this coming Wednesday, December 23rd.

We will be reprising the theme anthem, "I Believe," in its entirety on Christmas Eve. For this Sunday, we present to you the debut of a new anthem of Mark Miller, "When Angels Sing."

Music

"When Angels Sing"

by Mark A. Miller

Gospel Reading

John 1: 1-18 (CEB)

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.
What came into being
through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness
to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone
would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his
mission was to testify concerning the light.
The true light that shines on all people
was coming into the world.
The light was in the world,
and the world came into being through the light,
but the world didn't recognize the light.
The light came to his own people,
and his own people didn't welcome him.
But those who did welcome him,
those who believed in his name,
he authorized to become God's children,
born not from blood
nor from human desire or passion,
but born from God.

The Word became flesh
and made his home among us.
We have seen his glory,
glory like that of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.

John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;
as the Law was given through Moses,
so, grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God.
God the only Son,
who is at the Father's side,
has made God known.

Sermon

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

WE RESPOND

Litany of Belief

Diane Adams, Liturgist

In times when humanity disappoints,
when even our thoughts and behaviors disappoint,
it is important to call out, name and own, the consequences of our wrongs.
In times of distress, it is a prophetic act to call out,
name and own, our belief in our hope for tomorrow.

Leader: I believe that humans sometimes have a penchant for conflict AND

***People:* I believe that we are capable of learning non-violent ways to negotiate differences.**

Leader: I believe that we have perpetrated deep suffering upon each other AND

***People:* I believe that we can face up to the facts of privilege and work for equity.**

Leader: I believe that fear has told us that we must *win* in order to survive AND

***People:* I believe that winning at the cost of others can be called out and changed.**

Leader: We believe, even when we are discouraged.

***People:* We believe, that when we are discouraged, raising our voices for justice offers us peace!**

Prayers in the Stillness

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Pastor: I invite you to get in a comfortable position of rest.
I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can.
I invite you to a deep breath and a deep listening posture—
perhaps eyes closed—
or fixed on a candle—
or focused on the visual images that will be shared during the music
as we prepare our mind, body and spirit for a time of prayer.

Music**“Stillness”**

Mark Miller and Lindy Thompson

The gentle pull of God
is often lost amidst the rush
of all the obligations which lay a claim on us.

Yet just beyond the frantic pace
our restless feet have trod
lie deep still pools of quietness—
the dwelling place of God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive

O take me to that secret place
where lost in wonder and in awe,
the moment comes and I rejoice
to be and be with God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive

**The Prayers of the People
The Lord’s Prayer**

Sung/Played Coda: Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive, to receive.

Offering Announcement

Diane Adams, Liturgist

Doxology*tune of “Give Thanks” GTG 647*

Believe, with a peaceful heart!
Believe, and shine your light!
Believe, because the song we sing is sung for all!

And now let the weak say, “I am strong;”
let the poor say, “I am rich
because of what our God has done for us.”
Believe!

WE GO FORTH

Introduction to the Carol

Diane Adams, Liturgist

Our Carol of Resistance this week is part of the repertoire of Christmas songs that were created by people who endured brutal hardships as the result of African colonization and North American slavery. But, though people of African descent were ripped from much of their cultural heritage, they maintained their heritage of group song, punctuated by West African rhythms and vocal stylings. Of course, the safest thing for oppressed peoples to sing about was the religious beliefs that, first forced upon them by their oppressors, later gave many hope in the midst of suffering. “Go Tell It On the Mountain” is probably the best-known African American Christmas song and the words “seeker” and “watchman” are thought by some to have been code words for those seeking freedom on the Underground Railroad. It was made popular by the [Fisk Jubilee Singers](#) in the 19th century as these college students—themselves freed slaves—traveled the country to raise money and awareness. They were turned away from hotels, railway waiting rooms, and even some churches because of their color. As we sing, let us honor them, honor all who have endured slavery and the continued systemic racism caused by slavery. Let us...

*“Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.”*

... indeed, that the Prince of Peace that calls us
to break the chains of oppression... *is born!*

Carol of Resistance

“Go Tell It On the Mountain”
(verses 1-3)

GTG 136

- 1 While shepherds kept their watching o’er the silent flocks by night, behold,
throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.
Refrain
Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go, tell it on the
mountain that Jesus Christ is born!
- 2 The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! above the earth rang out the
angel chorus that hailed our Savior’s birth.
Refrain
Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go, tell it on the
mountain that Jesus Christ is born!
- 3 Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born, and God sent us
salvation that blessed Christmas morn.
Refrain
Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go, tell it on the
mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

Benediction

Pastor: You are invited to pick up the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of peace and hold it high for the Benediction.

We wait for justice
but we do not wait to work for change;

We wait for restored health
but we do not wait to work to heal;

We wait for wholeness
but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace
but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news
that the light has dawned and shines on all people,
fill the night left by sadness with messages of peace.
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that peace alive in you
and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.
Raise your voices and repeat after me...
“do not be afraid!”

People: “do not be afraid!” Amen!

Handbell Benediction Postlude

ⁱ Worship series design © Worship Design Studio by Marcia McFee. Used, adapted, and live-streamed with permission. www.worshipdesignstudio.com

ⁱⁱ Prayer of Confession adapted from *Call to Worship, Lectionary Aids for 2020-2021, Year B. Volume 54.1*, p.24.
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