

**12.24.23, 11:00 am Christmas Eve Day Service**  
**Meditation “Love Conquers Fear”**  
**The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA**

**PAM: Welcome!** And Merry Christmas! It is so good to see you, whether you come every Sunday or whenever you can. For our guests who’ve never been in our building, we say welcome and practically speaking, restrooms are in the back, down the hall; for those returning, we say “welcome home” to a sanctuary of serenity in an otherwise anxious holiday season.

There are helpful hints about the service in the bulletin on the small side entrance table. We no longer pass the offering tray, but we do invite you to give to our Church Ministries or to the Benevolence Fund; the brass collection plates are at the door and on the white column as you enter and exit if you are so led to contribute. Thanks to your generosity, we served many people in need this year; and those we serve and pray for often share their gratitude for your compassion.

On behalf of our congregation and guests, “thank you” in advance to all our instrumentalists and vocalists for performing beautiful music to enhance our seasonal worship; we thank our regulars who are committed every Sunday, and especially our volunteers who teach, greet, open/close, and help with the poinsettias, the garden, and more. We also are blessed by David Evans, our Minister with Music, for his leadership, talents, and skills.

We gather this last Advent Sunday of Love and Christmas Eve to celebrate the wondrous miracle of tomorrow – the birth of Jesus – so please join me for a short moment of silence to gather ourselves, breathe, clear our heads, and open our hearts to receive the word of the Lord. [*SILENCE*]

**David: Instrumental Selections**

Christmas for Five (Wind Quintet)

How Great Our Joy (Organ)

Christmas Suite (Wind Quintet)

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day (Organ/Piano Duet)

Woodwind Quintet & Organ

arr. Francesco Leone

arr. Rettop

James S. Sclater

arr. Gail Leven Pollock

**PAM: Invocation -- Let us pray together:**

Loving God and Giver of Life itself, as we worship this Christmas Eve Day, we are filled with anticipation, hope, and joy. We thank you for the precious gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate. May our faith in Him and relationship with Him deepen and mature as we reflect on His birth, life, ministry, and ultimate sacrifice. Bless this gathering, Lord, and may your presence be felt by each of us through music, prayer, candlelight, and Scripture. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Lighting the Christ Candle, Music (Hymn #76 “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”)

David: Hymn #76: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” ~ Congregants

**\* PAM: Let us remain standing for the \*Litany of Light printed in your bulletin:**

**Leader: In the beginning was the Word. And the Word came and dwelt among us. And the Word was the light of all peoples. Into the waiting night, the Christ child is born!**

People: Into the silent night, songs of hope, peace, joy, and love ring forth. In anticipation, we wonder with curiosity and awe about this news.

**Leader: Into the darkness of the world's night, the light of the world has come. Let there be light.**

People: Christ, our Lord, is born!

**Leader: The flickering light of his candle burns before us.**

People: The radiant light of his love burns within us.

**Leader: May we share this love of God with a world longing for light and hope, purpose, and love. May our generosity shine in a world of despair. For Christ, our Lord, is born.**

**ALL: Let us rejoice and give thanks! Alleluia** (*normal*)  
**Alleluia!** (*loud*) **Alleluia!** (*louder*)

**CHOIR:** "Past Three O'clock"

*Trad. English Carol, arr. Patrick Liebergen*

**PAM:** The following Scriptures give us God's Assurance of Hope

**Isaiah 9:2-7** <sup>NKJV</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness

Have seen a great light;

Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,

Upon them a light has shined.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation

*And* increased its joy;

They rejoice before You

According to the joy of harvest,

As *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil.

<sup>4</sup> For You have broken the yoke of his burden

And the staff of his shoulder,

The rod of his oppressor,

As in the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup> For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle,

And garments rolled in blood,

Will be used for burning *and* fuel of fire.

<sup>6</sup> For unto us a Child is born,

Unto us a Son is given;

And the government will be upon His shoulder.

And His name will be called

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of *His* government and peace

*There will be* no end,

Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,

To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
 From that time forward, even forever.  
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

**Isaiah 52:7-10** MSG

<sup>7-10</sup> How beautiful on the mountains  
 are the feet of the messenger bringing good news,  
 Breaking the news that all's well,  
 proclaiming good times, announcing salvation,  
 telling Zion, "Your God reigns!"  
 Voices! Listen! Your scouts are shouting, thunderclap shouts,  
 shouting in joyful unison.  
 They see with their own eyes  
 God coming back to Zion.  
 Break into song! Boom it out, ruins of Jerusalem:  
 "God has comforted his people!  
 He's redeemed Jerusalem!"  
 God has rolled up his sleeves.  
 All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm.  
 Everyone, from one end of the earth to the other,  
 sees him at work, doing his salvation work.

David: \*Carol, Hymn #93

"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

Congregants  
 Sears, Willis

**PAM: Let us hear more of God's Blessing of Peace**

**Psalm 29:1-4, 10-11** NKJV

<sup>1</sup> Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones,  
 Give unto the Lord glory and strength.  
<sup>2</sup> Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name;  
 Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.  
<sup>3</sup> The voice of the Lord *is* over the waters;  
 The God of glory thunders;  
 The Lord *is* over many waters.  
<sup>4</sup> The voice of the Lord *is* powerful;  
 The voice of the Lord *is* full of majesty . . .  
<sup>10</sup> The Lord sat *enthroned* at the Flood,  
 And the Lord sits as King forever.  
<sup>11</sup> The Lord will give strength to His people;  
 The Lord will bless His people with peace.

**Luke 1:26-33** NKJV

<sup>26</sup> Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was* Mary. <sup>28</sup> And having come in, the angel said

to her, “Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed are you among women!”

<sup>29</sup> But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

**PAM: Mary shares her Magnificent Joy**

**Luke 1:34-37, 45-50** NKJV

<sup>34</sup> Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered and said to her, “*The* Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son (in her old age); and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God **nothing** will be impossible.”

<sup>45</sup> Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

*The Song of Mary*

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

<sup>48</sup> For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

<sup>49</sup> For He who is mighty has done great things for me,  
And holy *is* His name.

<sup>50</sup> And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him  
From generation to generation.

**DAVID/PAM/CHOIR: CHORAL MESSAGE: “Nova, Nova! (News, News!)”**

**PAM: God’s Glorious Love Personified**

**Luke 2:1-14** NKJV

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. <sup>3</sup> So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup> And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

*Glory in the Highest*

<sup>8</sup> Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup> Then the angel said to them, “Do **not** be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you this day in the city of David a **Savior**, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

**DAVID/PAM/CHOIR: Choral Meditation:** A Star, A Song

**PAM: Offertory Prayer**

David: Hymn #100: Angels We Have Heard on High ~ Congregants

**PAM - MESSAGE:** *Lessons from Advent: Love Conquers Fear*

**Please pray with me:**

Father of our Savior, Jesus, we come to you grateful for the time to prepare during Advent and tomorrow to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. Thank you for the Christmas story; let us keep it in our hearts year-round. Help us to embrace the gift of your Son. Speak now through this messenger. “**Amen**”.

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As the Scriptures, music, and message title suggest, we who celebrate Christ’s birth today and tomorrow have a divine love and assurance that conquers fear and despair. Yet our world and culture have experienced more fear in the last six months than my memory holds since 9/11. Wildfires, floods, huge weather events, mudslides, death, destruction, genocide, kidnappings, war, violence, starvation, politics, mass shootings, etc. Not to mention the personal losses and illnesses to overcome and grieve. Yet even so, we find a way to celebrate Christmas with family and friends, as did the shepherds that glorious night of revelation there would be a new king! A new government with anointed leadership. With our hindsight, we know and will see this March that things went a bit differently than expected. Such is life.

This year, people have overcome their lingering violence or pandemic fears by facing them, attending concerts, plays, and light shows. More people travelled this year too, now that we have skills and tools to stay healthy in crowds. There are still challenges, worries, and fears about violence and repercussions of global war here in the states. Our church family celebrated two new great grand and grandsons this year, congratulations; new parents must have some concerns about their future, given the times in which we live – will I be a good mom or dad? How can I care for this little one? Is he or she healthy? How do we save for college?

There may be fear for some who live paycheck to paycheck or unemployment payment to payment or handout to handout. Anxiety is a real emotion that needs God's grace and healing, but how can we share Christ's love with others or look forward to the birth of Jesus when our own minds are full of fear or worry? <sup>11</sup> "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me," Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 26:11, as he's anointed before he is captured. The cross is present at his birth, and the empty tomb of resurrection is to come!

Now, we have heard the scriptures tell the sacred Christmas story this morning, beginning with prophetic poetry proclaiming the Messiah and God's love for us. Mary and Joseph, beloved and chosen by God, were both separately visited by angels to announce a wondrous miracle of virgin birth. Can you imagine their fear of the consequences of a child out of wedlock in that day or the responsibility of raising the Messiah? It is clear from the readings that after a temporary skepticism, Mary's love for God and of the baby growing within her was good news, and she agreed to be God's vessel and servant. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18)." And from John's letters:

<sup>9</sup> God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. <sup>10</sup> This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other (1 John 4:9-11 <sup>NLT</sup>).

During Advent, we as a church prepared ourselves to receive the baby Jesus tomorrow, and to demonstrate our love to others. Some helped decorate; one team made sandwiches to feed those in two local Shelters (you are invited to help on the first and third Wednesdays at 9 am). Many cleared out closets and donated warm heavy coats, sweaters, scarves, hats, and gloves which were shared with those without. Others bring non-perishable food for ACCA, our local food pantry, or give to the benevolence fund to help others. These opportunities to share God's abundance remind us how great the need is, and how we can serve others. Two of our own members we lost recently, Berniece H. and Jack C., demonstrated their whole lives the love of Christ to family, friends, and strangers who became friends. Simple acts of love, prayer, resources, and time give hope and joy to those who have none.

Even the baby Jesus was born outdoors with little shelter, no savings bonds or hospital gown, and placed in a horse trough, made of rough stone with straw! The Shepherds who rushed to his side were the poorest class in Mary's time, yet they dropped everything to find the Christ child and respond to the angelic message. Making space in our lives for generosity and serving others is an act of love, so during the Instrumental Response or when we light the candles, I encourage you to place your anxiety or fears intentionally and figuratively at this altar table. God heals and transforms any life surrendered to him. Only with loving hearts and minds can we receive the hope, peace, joy, and love that the Christ child brings to earth and into our lives. *Emmanuel*, God with us, we ask you to change our perspective and transform our lives.

After the Sussex Carol, when directed, please come forward with your candles. I will light yours from the Christ Candle as we sing one verse of "Silent Night;" music will continue until we safely light all candles. After the spoken benediction, we ask you to extinguish your candles singing one verse of "Joy to the World" as you make your way back to your seats for the postlude. Please remain seated to enjoy the music. The instructions are printed in your bulletin.

**RESPONSE:** Sussex Carol ~ Instrumental Ensemble w/cello & piano

**PAM: Prayer of Gratitude** – *Please pray with me,*

Thank you, Lord, for sharing the life of your son with us. We are grateful for your mercy, grace, and love. We ask you to take on the world's troubles, to build peace, give comfort, healing, and light. We pray for all who do not yet know you. Help us to be wholistically present to your spirit as we notice your work or a need we might fulfill. May we also support and appreciate the creative arts, knowing that they uplift our spirits and enrich our deep connection with you, our Creator and Redeemer. Amen.

**PAM: Candle lighting** – instructions in bulletin; [*get the Lighter*]

**Hymn #91: Silent Night** – 1 verse – music continues till end

**PAM: Spoken Benediction:**

In darkness we arrived. In light we now leave.

Though once we stumbled, we now walk with confidence and joy.

Rise up and go, for the grace of God has appeared,  
bringing salvation to all.

May the light of Christ lead us forevermore. And may we show that light through our love, faith, and generosity with others.

**PAM: Please safely extinguish your candle and sing only verse 1 of Joy to the World as we go back to our pews. AND please remain seated for our Woodwind Postlude**

David: Carol Response #87, 1 verse Joy to the World! The Lord is Come [vs 1]