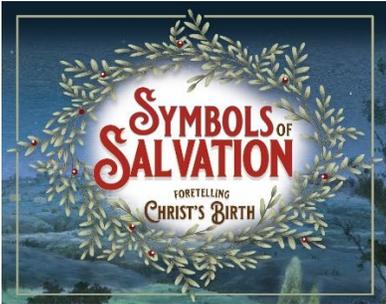


*As we unite in worship today, we extend a warm welcome to each one present.
May we together experience the presence of God*

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We Gather to Prepare Our Hearts to Meet Our Lord



Prelude

Welcome

Announcements/Joys & Concerns

YOU SHALL DEFEAT THEM AS ONE MAN

God's power is a hidden image. He comes as man, born of woman, and yet He is the mighty Redeemer. He has no army, but His kingdom shall endure forever. He becomes the victim and offers Himself in sacrifice upon the cross, yet His triumph brings salvation to the whole world. We complain that we are alone, we have no might, and our enemies are great; but in Christ, we see that we are not alone, His power is beyond all power, and His might has done what is impossible for us. Now let us stand as one in Christ, clothed in the garments of righteousness He gives us in Baptism.

FIRST READING Judges 6:11–24 (7:2–9)

A reading from Judges, the sixth (and seventh) chapter(s).

The Call of Gideon

11 Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior." 13 Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has cast us off and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." 15 He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." 16 The Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them." 17 Then he said to him, "If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay until you return."

19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot and brought them to him under the oak and presented them. 20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour out the broth."

And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes, and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes, and the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the Lord, and Gideon said, "Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." 23 But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you; do not fear; you shall not die." 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, "The Lord is peace." To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

2 The Lord said to Gideon, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me.' 3 Now, therefore, proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.' " Thus Gideon sifted them out;[a] twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained.

4 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "The troops are still too many; take them down to the water, and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you, and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So he brought the troops down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths,[b] you shall put to the other side." 6 The number of those who lapped was three hundred, but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. 7 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred who lapped I will deliver you and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." 8 So the people took provisions in their hands and their trumpets, and he sent all the rest of Israel back to their own tents but retained the three hundred. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

9 That same night the Lord said to him, "Get up; attack the camp, for I have given it into your hand.

Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing . . . A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray . . . And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:1-2, 8, 10 NRSV).

The prophet Isaiah tells us about the joy of ascending to God's house. The prophet tells us to imagine being set free, being unburdened, being released to live, to fully live in the grace and wonder of life itself, surrounded by those who love us like no one else. And then he tells us that the journey to get there is just as much a joy.

The Psalmist says "Happy are these whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord . . . who made heaven and earth . . . who keeps faith . . . who executes justice . . . gives food . . . sets prisoners free . . . opens eyes . . . lifts up . . . watches over . . . upholds . . . The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 146 NRSV)

We light these candles, the candle of joyous hope, of proclaimed peace, and of deep and everlasting joy, as a sign that we are those who walk with a skip in our step because we can see the destination, and it is pure joy. We are ascending to God's promise.

Light three candles on the Advent wreath.

If using a rose or pink-colored candle in the wreath, this is the time to light that one.

Opening Prayer

We praise you, O God, for being not only the God of history but the God of our story. You have gathered us here today to remind us that although you are the one to whom all power belongs, yet you care for the weak and powerless. You care for us. We praise you for joining your story to ours in such a special way through Jesus, our Lord. He proved his great love for you and for each person in the way he lived—releasing what was captive, lifting up the burdened, empowering the powerless.

God, source of lovingkindness and strength, we worship you.

Jesus, foundation of our faith, we worship you.

Holy Spirit, ground of our very being, we worship you. Amen

***HYMN OF PRAISE UMH#224 “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”**

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**1 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ was born today.
Ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!**

**2 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!**

**3 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all
to gain his everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!**

We Hear God's Word

Gospel Reading.....Luke 1:46b-55

New Revised Standard Version

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶ And Mary^[a] said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Word of God for the People of God, **Thanks be to God!**

Children's Sermon

FAITH HYMN UMH #218

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

Author: Edmund H. Sears (1849)

Copyright: Public Domain

**1 It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.**

**2 Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;**

**above its sad and lowly plains,
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.**

**3 And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!**

**4 For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.**

“Message”

Pastoral Prayer

Lord of time and hope, we are rushing headlong into the holidays to come. We look at our calendars and our day planners and wonder how we will get everything done in the time allotted to us before the "big Day" arrives. We begin to panic at the thought of projects still to be finished, contacts that need to be made, preparations for festivities that have only just begun. And the darkness of obsessive holiday planning overtakes us and clouds our minds and spirits.

But you are a God of time and Light. You bring hope to us, as you always have through the voices of the great prophets, and now through the One who is to come, Jesus Christ. Remind us again what this season is truly about.....love, hope, peace and joy. Calm us down. Slow us down. Help us remember that it is in loving relationship that you gave your Son to us and it is in loving relationship that your Word is carried into the hearts of the people. No tinsel, ribbons, tape, cards and convey the eternal message adequately. You have given us the Light, to shine in our path and cut through our darkness.

Shine in the hearts of your people today. Bless those dear ones whom we have named before you today with your healing, reconciling, comforting presence and love. Give strength to all who face difficult situations and let your compassionate light shine on them guiding their decisions and their steps. Bring us at last to your presence, where the light of hope and love continually pour out on us.

These prayers and hopes we offer in confidence and gratitude for your love and presence. As we unite in the prayer of all prayers, Our Father...

Offertory & Doxology (UM Hymnal 95)

(Wykoff only)

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, as we bring our gifts to you this day, we acknowledge that we have been given so much by your goodness, but we have been tight-fisted and slow in giving to help others. In this Advent season of preparation, we ask you to help us live in a new way, to walk a new highway, to set ourselves on the path that leads to a closer walk with Jesus, our example and redeemer. May this be the season when he finds the highways to our hearts prepared for his coming. In the name that is above all others. Amen. (Isaiah 35:1-10)

***Departing Hymn #251 "Go, Tell It on the Mountain"**

Adapter: John W. Work

Copyright: Public Domain

Refrain:

**Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills, and ev'rywhere;
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]**

**1 While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light. [Refrain]**

**3 Down in a lowly manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn. [Refrain]**

A Joyful Benediction

Be people of joy.

Let joy live in your heart and share the joy of Christ with all you meet.

Share joy by seeing the good in each other.

Share joy by remembering good times and hoping for good times to come.

Share joy by praying for our world.

In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share joy.

As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share joy, peace, and hope with those you meet. Amen.

***POSTLUDE**