

First Christian Church of Decatur
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Resolve to Love • Agree to Differ • Unite to Serve • Break Bread Together



Sunday, December 29th, 2024 at 10:25am

We Gather to Connect with God and One Another

Prelude

Adam Cole

Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Daniel Brower

Opening Hymn

Angels We Have Heard On High

155

Call to Worship

One: Spirit of Love, we welcome you.

Many: **We celebrate your coming to abide with us and we remember the ways you have been faithfully companionship us since the beginning.**

One: It was you who wove all life together.

Many: **Your glory is painted across all of creation.**

One: Throughout history, over and over again, you have taken on flesh, in the ordinary and the extraordinary,

Many: **in the vulnerability of infants, the fierce proclamations of prophets, the enduring hope of those who persevere under evil's threats.**

One: Where there is grief, where there is holy rage, where there is fear or sacred imagination growing,

Many: **You abide across the ages.**

Unison Prayer of Invocation & the Lord's Prayer

Holy God, bless our time together, as we remember again the still-unfolding story of your love: A love that comes to dwell among us. A love that surprises and disrupts. A love that reveals the way of liberation. May it be so among us. Amen.

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 trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Song of Praise

One Candle is Lit (v. 5)

128

First Lesson

“i don’t pay attention to the
world ending.
it has ended for me
many times
and began again in the morning.”

- *Nayyira Waheed*

The hope of God is honest. It names forthrightly the struggles of our shared lives – the evils and suffering that make hope both difficult and necessary. It reaches to us in the places bare, vulnerable, tender, and tired. And hope says hang on. Keep on. Press on with purpose. What feels impossible can become possible with God. As we light this candle, we reflect on all the small ways hope has taken on flesh around us this year. (*The Hope Candle is lit.*)

First Reading

Luke 4:16-21

Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been nurtured, and went, according to his practice on the day of the sabbath, to the synagogue. And he stood up to read. Then was given him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Most High is upon me, because God has anointed me to proclaim good news to those who are poor. God has sent me to preach liberation to those who are captives and recovery of sight to those who are blind, to liberate those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Most High's favor.” Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down and every eye of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. Then he began to speak to them, saying, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

First Hymn

O Come O Come Emmanuel

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Second Lesson

“Call upon the help of those who love you.
These helpers take many forms: animal, element, bird, angel, saint, stone, or ancestor.
Call your spirit back.
It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse.
You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return.
Speak to it as you would to a beloved child.
Welcome your spirit back from its wandering.
It may return in pieces, in tatters. Gather them together.
They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long.
Your spirit will need to sleep awhile after it is bathed and given clean clothes.
Now you can have a party.
Invite everyone you know who loves and supports you.
Keep room for those who have no place else to go.
Make a giveaway, and remember, keep the speeches short.
Then, you must do this: help the next person find their way through the dark.”

- *Joy Harjo*

Peace is the gift of God that follows practicing care for each other and living with moral integrity. Prophets bear testimony to the barriers of to peace among us. They chant faithfully in response to histories and present realities of racist violence, “no justice, no peace!” They echo the scriptures calling for justice and peace to rise and kiss. As we light this candle, we take a moment to reflect on an injustice that keeps people and communities from resting into the peace of God and calls us to deepen our engagement in the coming year. (*The Peace candle is lit.*)

Second Reading

Isaiah 11:6-9

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and 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.

Second Hymn

Come, O Long-Expected Jesus

125

Third Lesson

“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don’t hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that’s often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don’t be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.” - *Mary Oliver*

Joy does not keep us from grief or hide the world’s pain away. It brings its own offerings of delight, beauty, laughter, and sits them beside sorrows. Joy is the eternal abundance of small miracles that tether us to God’s aliveness even when death surrounds. As we light this candle of joy, we reflect on the sources of plenty in our lives – the feasts of holy abundance that sustain our spirits. (*The Joy candle is lit.*)

Third Reading

Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out in those days and went to the hill country with haste, to a Judean town. There she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. Now when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. From where does this visit come to me? That the mother of my Sovereign comes to me? Look! As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting in my ear, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Now blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of those things spoken to her by the Holy One.”

Third Hymn

Joy to the World

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Fourth Lesson

“most importantly love
like it’s the only thing you know how
at the end of the day all this
means nothing
this page
where you’re sitting

your degree
your job
the money
nothing even matters
except love and human connection
who you loved
and how deeply you loved them
how you touched the people around you
and how much you gave them”
- *Rupi Kaur*

The greatest commandment – the one through which everything else must be interpreted: Love invites us, challenges us, changes us. Love is intimate and love is collective – it seeks a world of flourishing, within and without, for all life. As we light this candle, we reflect on the barriers that keep us from living out our full capacity to love and celebrate the freedom God has given us to break down those barriers together. (*The Love candle is lit.*)

Fourth Reading

Luke 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Holy One, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's own handmaid. Surely, from now on all generations will call be blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. God's loving-kindness is for those who fear God from generation to generation. God had shown the strength of God's own arm; God has scattered the arrogant in the intent of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped God's own child, Israel, a memorial to God's mercy, just as God said to our mothers and fathers, to Hagar and Sarah and Abraham, to their descendants forever.”

Fourth Hymn

My Soul Gives Glory to My God

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Fifth Lesson

“And I said to him
Are there questions to all of this?
And he said
The answer is in a story
and the story is being told.
And I said
But there is so much pain
And she answered, plainly,
Pain will happen.
Then I said
Will I ever find meaning?
And they said
You will find meaning
Where you give meaning.
The answer is in the story
And the story isn't finished.
- *Padraig O' Tuama*

The incarnation of God comes to us in the most surprising of ways and places. Unsettling the expectations of the powerful and breaking wide open the hopes of the weary, salvation is born among us.

As we light the Christ candle, we reflect on our presumptions about God, the world, ourselves and each other, and open to the mysterious and scandalous way of Love enfleshed. (*The Christ candle is lit.*)

Fifth Reading

John 1:1-14

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 not one thing came into being that came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the bleakness, and the bleakness did not overtake it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created through him; yet the world did not know him. To his own he came and his own did not receive him. But all who did accept him, who believed in his name, he empowered to become children of God—that is, those who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of a human person, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of a parent's only child, full of grace and truth.

Fifth Hymn

Silent Night

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Invitation to Faithful Stewardship Holy Communion

Rev. Daniel Brower

Prayers for the Bread and Cup

Rev. Phil Foster

(Christ invites you to partake of Holy Communion. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us. After the Words of Institution are proclaimed, you are invited to partake of the Bread and the Cup.)

Words of Institution

Rev. Daniel Brower

One: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said,
Many: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
One: In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
Many: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
One: For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Unison Prayer of Commission

Rev. Phil Foster

God our help: We thank you for this supper, shared in the spirit with your son Jesus, who makes us new and strong, who brings us life eternal. We praise you for giving us all good gifts in Him and pledge ourselves to serve you, even as in Christ you have served us.

Closing Hymn

Go, Tell It On The Mountain

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Postlude

Adam Cole

Benediction

Rev. Daniel Brower