

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023



Ministers

Rector

Deacon

Senior Warden

Junior Warden

Minister of Music

Cantor

Administrative Assistant

The People of the Parish

The Rev. Christy Laborda Harris

The Rev. Kate Sefton

Jean Farmer

Meg Nalley

Miles McKenzie

Kristina Ibarra

Jun Kim

Advent is a season of expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (adventus) of Christ in his incarnation, and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies not only direct us towards Christ's birth, they also challenge the modern reluctance to confront the theme of divine judgement. Church decorations are simple and spare. Purple or blue are the traditional liturgical colors. In the northern hemisphere, the Advent season falls at the darkest time of the year, and the natural symbols of darkness and light are powerfully at work throughout Advent and Christmas. The lighting of candles on an Advent wreath was imported into Britain from northern Europe in the nineteenth century and is now a common practice. (Taken from the Church of England's "Common Worship")

The Gathering of the Community

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

Let All the Hills be Leveled

please stand

Let all the hills be leveled, the high-ways be made straight!

6
See, our God comes; make ready every heart. Ready your

10
heart! The glory of our God shall be revealed.

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In the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Thanks be to God.

Blessed are you, holy and living One.

You come to your people and set them free.

Loving Jesus: Protect and sustain us with your hand. Open the door of your love that, sealed with your wisdom, we may be free to serve you with joy. **Amen.** (*A prayer of St. Gertrude*)

KYRIE

Lord, have mer-cy, Lord, have mer-cy, Christ, have
mer - cy, Christ, have_ mer - cy, Lord, have_
mer - cy, Lord, have_ mer - cy,

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The Liturgy of the Word

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

God of impossible love, you needed Mary to give consent, to bear the scandal, to carry your word within herself: may her courage give hope to women and men who yearn to sing new songs of justice and find the world a dwelling place for God; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come. **Amen.**

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL (7:1-11, 16)

please be seated

When the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People **Thanks be to God.**

CANTICLE 15

The Song of Mary - *Magnificat*



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**My soul proclaims your greatness, O God; my spirit rejoices in you, my *Savior*, *
for you have looked with favor on your lowly *servant*.**

**From this day all generations will call me *blessed*; *
you, the Almighty, have done great things for me, and holy is your *Name*.**

**You have mercy on those who *fear you* *
from generation to *gene-ration*.**

You, O God, have shown strength with your *arm*, *
And scattered the proud in their con-*ceit*,

Casting down the mighty from their *thrones* *
And lifting up the *lowly*.

You have filled the hungry with good *things* *
And sent the rich away *empty*.

You have come to the help of your servant *Israel*, *
For you have remembered your promise of *mercy*,

The promise made to our *forebears*, *
To Abraham, Sarah and their children for *ever*.

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one *God*, *
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. *A-men*.

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A READING FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS (16:25-27)

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING

Luke 1:26-38

please stand

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But

she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

SERMON

The Rev. Christy Laborda Harris

please be seated

A period of silent reflection follows the sermon

HYMN

Come, Lord Jesus

please stand



Come, Lord Je - sus, come, Lord Je - sus, come, and do not de - lay.

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE—Common Worship from the Church of England

* *“Maranatha” [mar-uh-**nath**-uh]—Aramaic for “come, our lord”*

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus.

Come to your Church as Lord and judge.
Help us to live in the light of your coming
and give us a longing for your kingdom.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations.
Before you rulers will stand in silence.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

We pray especially for the people of Israel and Palestine.
May the killing cease and peace be known in the land called holy by three faiths.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter.
We pray especially for those we now name...
Break into our lives,
where we struggle with sickness and distress,
and set us free to serve you for ever.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls.
We especially remember those we now name...
Give us with all the faithful departed
a share in your victory over evil and death.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory.
Lift us up to meet you,
that with Stephen and all your saints and angels
we may live and reign with you in your new creation.
Maranatha: **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;
give new courage to your people,
who trust in your love.
By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom
on earth as in heaven,
where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

CONFESSION

A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' So let us listen and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

O promised Christ:

We are a world at war.

Our peace depends on your coming.

We are a sinful people.

Our pardon depends on your coming.

**We are full of good intentions but weak at keeping promises;
our only hope of doing God's will is that you should come and help us do it.**

Lord Christ, Word made flesh,

our world waits for your peace, for your pardon, and for your grace.

Even so: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God,
who in Jesus Christ has given us
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed,
forgive you your sins,
open your eyes to God's truth,
strengthen you to do God's will
and give you the joy of God's kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PEACE

His judgment is not vengeance, an eye for an eye; his peace is not false, a veil for injustice; he comes to break the spear, to silence the guns and still our warring souls. May the peace of Christ rule our world and heal our hearts. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

*You are invited to pass the peace
distanced and respectfully.*

The Holy Communion

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

Canticle of the Turning
Rory Cooney

please be seated

OFFERTORY RESPONSE

If in Your Heart

please stand

**If in your heart you make a manger for his birth,
Then God will once again become a child on earth.**

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EUCHARISTIC PRAYER—Steven Shakespeare

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

Mystery of winter skies, we thank you in the darkening hour for opening our eyes to see your starlit beauty; for parting the wide heavens to send your gentle light; for offering your word to take our mortal flesh.

He was promised by those who shared your dream of peace; John the Baptist cleared his way with words of desert fire; Mary and Joseph accepted his coming with tenderness and faith; we know that he draws near again, to show us who we really are with honesty and love.

Now we take up the song of hope that we might awaken to his coming among us and the world be touched by the footfall of his glory:




Ho-ly, ho-ly, ho-ly God, God of pow'r and might,

9



hea-ven and earth are full of your glo-ry, Ho - san-na in the high-est.

16



Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho - san -

21



-na, Ho - san - na, Ho - san - na in the high - est.

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We ask that your Holy Spirit will fall upon us and upon these gifts that these fragile, earthly things may be to us the body and blood of our lord and brother, Jesus Christ; who, on the night that he was betrayed, gathered with his faltering friends for a meal that tasted of freedom.

Calling them to his table, he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' In the same way after supper, he took the cup, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, to remember me.' As on that night, so here and now he offers himself in touch and taste beyond all words can hold.

Great is the mystery of faith
Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.

Therefore we come in memory and hope, responding to your call and the promise that echoes from the dawn of all time. May mind and heart be held by your self-giving love as we stand before the cross, approach the empty tomb, and praise the one whose name is lifted in your love.

Through him who was emptied to bear your fullness we make our prayer with all created life to the glory of the God who fills all in all now and forever. **Amen.**

As Jesus taught, we now pray.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.
The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Wherever you are on your journey of faith,
You are welcome at this table.

All are welcome at the Lord's table. You are invited to come forward when the ushers indicate. Please extend your hands together to receive the bread. If you are gluten free, please let us know. If you prefer a blessing, please cross your arms across your chest. If you would like your bread intincted (dipped in the chalice) please let the clergy person with the bread know before the bread is handed to you. It will be intincted for you and handed to you. We are no longer able to allow you to intinct the bread yourself nor are we able to place it in your mouth. Alternately, you may sip directly from the chalice or choose to receive the bread only.

COMMUNION HYMN 66 Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

COMMUNION HYMN 56 O come, O come Emmanuel (7-8)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

please stand

**Eternal God,
we thank you that in Christ
you give yourself
into our hands:
may we who have tasted life proclaim the coming feast when many will come
from east and west, from north and south
to greet the Lord of all;
we ask this in his name.
Amen.**

BLESSING

May the God who brings heaven close to earth
give truth to our judgment
and flame to our longing
that our hearts might be ready
to be born again in love;
and the blessing of God Almighty:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you forever. **Amen.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLOSING HYMN

Wait for the Lord

please stand

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Wait for the Lord'. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.' and 'Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!'. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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DISMISSAL

As we await our coming Savior, go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Silent Night

Isabelle Eichenseher

Franz Grüber, arr. Melody Bober

