

December 1st, 2024

First Sunday of Advent

Reaching Out in Christian Love to All

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First Sunday of Advent
The Word Made Flesh: The Bread of Life
Sunday, December 1, 2024

In this first service in The Word Made Flesh series for Advent, we celebrate that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, to nourish and strengthen us in our faith and feed us with his Word of truth to fill our lives.

*=Stand as you are able **Bold Print** = congregation responds
ELW=Red Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Prelude

Ringling of the Bell

GATHERING *The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.*

Greeting

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
the love of Christ that guards our hearts and minds,
and the joy and consolation of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Week One: Breathing

Introduction

- The Hebrew word *ruach* means spirit, breath, and wind. The interconnectedness of these images is clear throughout scripture. In Genesis the Spirit/wind of God blows over the waters at creation, and God breathes into the created human to give life/spirit. Who we are created to be is centered in our breathing, which connects us to the one who created us.
- Research is clear that deep, slow breathing contributes significantly to a sense of calm and a reduction of stress. The effectiveness of this seems to be even more pronounced when we practice breathing with a brief pause after both inhaling and exhaling. This space can provide a sense of deep connection with God as everything else is momentarily paused.

Psalm 40:3-7 - ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. ⁴Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. ⁵You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. ⁶Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. ⁷Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

Opening Prayer

O God—sweeping Wind, life-giving Breath, cleansing and guiding Spirit—you are the source of all we are and all we can become. Your power roars and skips among the galaxies and flows delicately within our every cell, sustaining all life. You breathe mercy over us and teach us with truth and wisdom. Be with us and all your people in this season and guide us so that we find comfort and confidence in your coming promise. In the name of the Holy One who was, is, and is to come.

Amen.

Light Candle One – Abiding Spirit Candle

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

verse 1 ELW 257

Text: *Psalterium Cantionum Catholicarum*, Köln, 1710; tr. Composite; Music: French processional, 15th cent.; Text © 1997 Augsburg Fortress; Reprinted under OneLicense.net 1-708142 All rights reserved.

- 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.**

*Confession and Absolution

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord asks us, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?”. We turn away from God’s will to things that can never satisfy us. Let us confess our sins to God and ask his forgiveness.

Almighty God, we have turned away from your Word and your will for our lives. We try to satisfy our needs by following the temptations of the devil, the world around us and our own sinful desires. Have mercy on us and forgive our sins.

God has had mercy on us. He sent his Son into the world to be our Savior and, for his sake, forgives our sins. God tells us, “Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus, Bread of heaven, feed us now and forever!

*GATHERING SONG “Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers” ELW 244

Text: Laurentius Laurenti, 1660-1722; tr. Sarah B. Findlater, 1823-1907; Music: Swedish folk tune; public domain.



1 Re - joice, re - joice, be - liev - ers, and let your lights ap - pear;
2 The watch - ers on the moun - tain pro - claim the bride - groom near;
3 The saints, who here in pa - tience their cross and suf - f'ings bore,
4 Our hope and ex - pec - ta - tion, O Je - sus, now ap - pear;



the eve - ning is ad - vanc - ing, and dark - er night is near.
go forth as he ap - proach - es with al - le - lu - ias clear.
shall live and reign for - ev - er when sor - row is no more.
a - rise, O Sun so longed for, o'er this be - night - ed sphere.



The bride - groom is a - ris - ing and soon is draw - ing nigh.
The mar - riage feast is wait - ing; the gates wide o - pen stand.
A - round the throne of glo - ry the Lamb they shall be - hold;
With hearts and hands up - lift - ed, we plead, O Lord, to see



Up, pray and watch and wres - tle; at mid - night comes the cry.
A - rise, O heirs of glo - ry; the bride - groom is at hand.
in tri - umph cast be - fore him their di - a - dems of gold.
the day of earth's re - demp - tion that sets your peo - ple free!

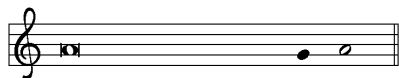
*PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

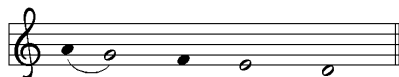
Almighty God, with mighty acts of power, you set your people free from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness to the promised land. Even though they complained against you, you graciously fed them with manna, bread from heaven. In grace and mercy, you sent your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to set us free from our slavery to sin. Jesus is the true and living Bread from heaven, who came to give himself for the life of the world. In him, we have forgiveness and peace. By faith, we feed on this heavenly Bread through the study of your Word and through the gift of Jesus' body and blood in his holy Supper. Bread of Heaven, feed us now and forever! Amen.

*KYRIE

setting 4 page 147



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



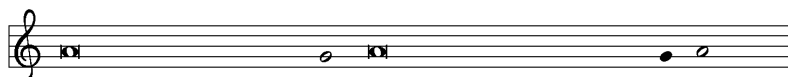
Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from a-bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mer - cy.

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor-ship and praise,

let us pray to the Lord. Lord have mer - cy.

Help, save, comfort, and de-fend us, gra-cious Lord. A - men.

WORD *God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.*

FIRST READING: Exodus 16: 1-17

A food crisis becomes a faith crisis for the Israelites in the wilderness. The hungry people forget God's saving work in the exodus, and they wish for the food they had in Egypt. Nevertheless, God miraculously meets their needs, with manna for bread and quail for meat.

¹The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my

instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him — what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" ¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 25:1-10

- ¹ To you, O LORD,
I lift up my soul.
- ² My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- ³ Let none who look to you be put to shame;
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.
- ⁴ Show me your ways, O LORD,
and teach me your paths.
- ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.
- ⁶ Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.
- ⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your steadfast love and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
- ⁸ You are gracious and upright, O LORD;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.
- ⁹ You lead the lowly in justice
and teach the lowly your way.
- ¹⁰ All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Upon Timothy's report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct

our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

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GOSPEL: John 6:27-35

The Holy Gospel according to John the 6th chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The day after he multiplies bread to feed five thousand people, Jesus is pursued by the crowds clamoring for more bread. Recalling the image of manna in the wilderness, Jesus promises to provide the true bread from heaven that will never fail. Jesus himself is that bread of life.

²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is

written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

No children's church today due to Thanksgiving holiday

HYMN OF THE MONTH:

"Emmanuel"

W&P 36

AUTHORS Bob McGee; **CCLI SONG #12949**; **COPYRIGHTS** 1976 C.A. Music (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.); Reprinted under CCLI #2551458

Em - man - u - el, Em - man - u - el,

his name is called Em - man - u - el;

God with us, re - vealed in us;

his name is called Em - man - u - el.

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: "I Am the Bread of Life"

ELW 485

Text: Suzanne Toolan, rsm, b. 1927, based on John 6; Music: Suzanne Toolan, RSM; Text and music
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- 1 "I am the Bread of life.
You who come to me shall not hunger,
and who believe in me shall not thirst.
No one can come to me unless the Father beckons."

Refrain

**"And I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up,
and I will raise you up on the last day."**

- 2 "The bread that I will give
is my flesh for the life of the world,
and if you eat of this bread,
you shall live forever, you shall live forever." ***Refrain***

- 3 "Unless you eat
of the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink of his blood,
and drink of his blood,
you shall not have life within you." ***Refrain***

- 4 "I am the resurrection,
I am the life.
If you believe in me,
even though you die, you shall live forever." ***Refrain***

APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

As we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us, let us pray for all people and places that long for God's presence.

A brief silence.

Response: Lord, in your mercy,
receive our prayer.

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

***PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL *God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.*

OFFERING

*OFFERING PRAYER

Let us pray.

**God of abundance, we bring before you the precious
fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives.
Teach us patience and hope as we care for all those in
need until the coming of your Son, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.**

GREAT THANKSGIVING

*DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

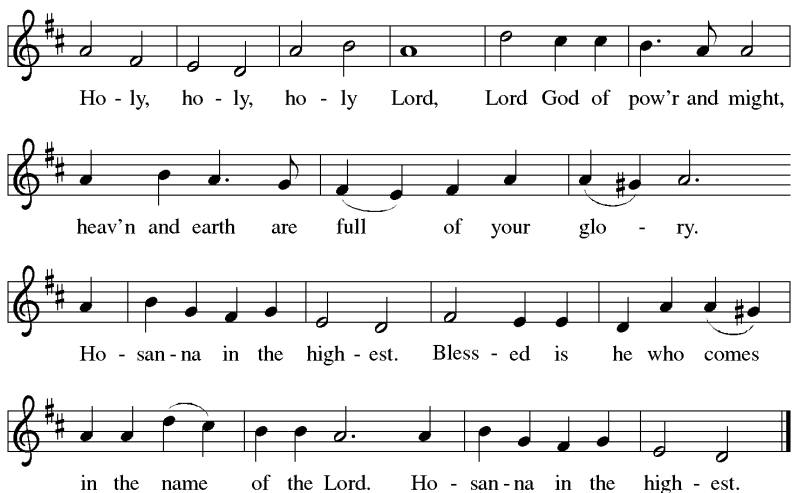
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

*PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.
You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer,
through whom you will also make all things new
in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn: Page 153



***THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:

Blessed are you for the birth of creation.

Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.

Blessed are you for your promise to your people.

Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams.

Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.

Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,

the Word made flesh.

In the night in which he was betrayed,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

With this bread and cup
we remember your Word dwelling among us,
full of grace and truth.

We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection.
We look with hope for his coming.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Holy God, we long for your Spirit.

Come among us.

Bless this meal.

May your Word take flesh in us.

Awaken your people.

Fill us with your light.

Bring the gift of peace on earth.

Come, Holy Spirit.

All praise and glory are yours,

Holy One of Israel,

Word of God incarnate,

Power of the Most High,

one God, now and forever.

Amen.

***LORD'S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

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 and ever.
Amen.

*INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

COMMUNION

—▶ *If you wish to kneel at the rail after accepting communion to pray, feel free to go up and then exit via the side aisles as normal.*

COMMUNION SONG

(Page 154)



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the




sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

COMMUNION HYMNS:


“Christ, Be Our Light”

ELW 715

Text: Bernadette Farrell, b. 1957; Music: Bernadette Farrell; Text and music © 1993 Bernadette Farrell, admin. OCP Publications. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Reprinted under OneLicense.net 1-708142 All rights reserved.



1 Long - ing for light, we wait in dark - ness. Long - ing for
 2 Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled. Long - ing for
 3 Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry. Long - ing for
 4 Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home - less. Long - ing for
 5 Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple, man - y the



truth, we turn to you. Make us your own,
 hope, man - y de - spair. Your word a - lone
 wa - ter, man - y still thirst. Make us your bread,
 warmth, man - y are cold. Make us your build - ing,
 hearts that yearn to be - long, Let us be ser - vants



your ho - ly peo - ple, light for the world to see.
 has pow'r to save us. Make us your liv - ing voice.
 bro - ken for oth - ers, shared un - til all are fed.
 shel - ter - ing oth - ers, walls made of liv - ing stone,
 to one an - oth - er, signs of your king - dom come.

Refrain



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the



dark - ness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your

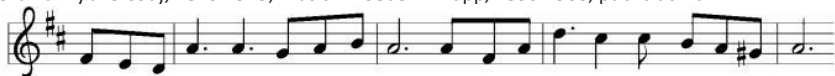


church gath - ered to - day.

“Blessed Assurance”

ELW 638

Text: Fanny J. Crosby, 1820-1915; Music: Phoebe P. Knapp, 1830-1908; public domain.



- 1 Bless-ed as-sur-ance, Je-sus is mine! Oh, what a fore-taste of glo-ry di-vine!
- 2 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, per-fect de-light, vi-sions of rap-ture now burst on my sight;
- 3 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, all is at rest; I in my Sav-ior am hap-py and blest,



Heir of sal-va-tion, pur-chase of God, born of his Spir-it, washed in his blood.
an-gels de-scend-ing bring from a-bove ech-oes of mer-cy, whis-pers of love.
watch-ing and wait-ing, look-ing a-bove, filled with his good-ness, lost in his love.

Refrain



This is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long:



this is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long.

*TABLE BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

Amen

*PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray.

God for whom we wait, in this meal you give us a foretaste of that day when the hungry will be fed with good things. Send us forth to make known your deeds and to proclaim the greatness of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

SENDING *God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

***Benediction**

Jesus said, "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Give us this bread always."

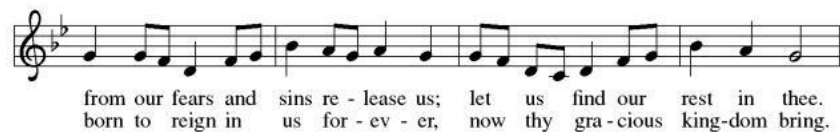
Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you all.

Amen.

*** SENDING SONG "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" ELW 254**

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Children are dismissed to go downstairs for:



CHILDREN'S MUSIC WITH NELS



ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Ring of the Bell

Postlude

For streaming and printing:

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Those Serving in Today's Service

Pastor: Eric Klimpel

Accompanist: Mindy DeVries

Youth Liaison: Nels Dovre

Lector: Doreen Blackmer

Acolytes: Noelle Hartsook, Drake Klingbeil

Technicians: Brent Emerson, Brayden DeVries, Owen Williams

This Week at Palestine

Today, December 1st, 2024 *First Sunday of Advent*

9:30 a.m. Worship; Holy Communion

Music with Nels

6:00 p.m. KICK Christmas program rehearsal

Tuesday, December 3rd, 2024

10:00 a.m. Rock Creek Worship (*Pastor*)

7:00 p.m. Bible Study via Zoom

Wednesday, December 4th, 2024

7:00 a.m. Men's Bible Study

Wednesday, December 4th, 2024 *continued*

1:00 p.m. Quilters

6:30 p.m. Confirmation

Saturday, December 7th, 2024

9:00 – noon Christmas Cookie Extravaganza

Sunday, December 8th, 2024 *Second Sunday of Advent*

8:00 a.m. Council Meeting

8:30 a.m. Choir

9:30 a.m. Worship

Music with Nels

New member orientation

Sr. Tea

5:30 p.m. Theology on Tap @ Fenceline Brewpub in Huxley

6:00 p.m. KICK Christmas program rehearsal

Lectionary texts: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11;
Mark 9:50

Thank you for your Gifts for Ministry:

Sunday, November 24, 2024:

General: \$3,301.00

Sound System: \$350.00

THANK YOU!!! We celebrate your generosity and thank you in
advance for your support.

Attendance: 95

Benevolence: \$41.00



Christmas Extravaganza

Saturday, December 7th

9 a.m. - noon

**The R.O.C.K. Group is hosting their
annual Christmas Extravaganza!**

A sign up to donate goodies is in fellowship hall!



***Senior Tea Sunday, December 8th
Following worship***

***Invitations were mailed and
RSVP's requested.***

Advent Wreath Blessing - Holy Disruption – Advent carries two simultaneous visions of our expectations: we await yet again the birth of the babe in the manger, and we also await Christ’s coming again to fulfill all things. We often prepare for Advent by “getting ready”: planning, organizing, and ordering supplies for various gatherings and worship services. Yet preparing for the coming of Christ is not a matter of having everything under control. Christ’s arrival disrupts—disrupts injustice, sin, and brokenness in a society in which we are deeply embedded. A prayer for Christ to come to us is a prayer for a holy disruption of our lives that we cannot control and that we might struggle to accept.

This candle blessing is built around four steps to help us recognize our resistance to God’s inbreaking and prepare for God’s holy disruption: breathing, releasing, receiving, and rejoicing. Each week’s liturgy will focus on one step. Although worshipers can benefit from each service individually, each step builds upon the ones preceding. Together they form a spiritual discipline that reminds us that discipleship is always a process requiring intentional practice. Advent, the first season of the church year, reminds us to return to our sense of longing for and expectation of God’s coming into our world. In this worship series we pay attention to opening ourselves to the holy disruption of God’s inbreaking promise.





K.I.C.K. UPCOMING EVENTS

All 3rd-6th graders are invited to participate in this group.

- **Christmas Program Practice Schedule:**

- Sunday, December 1st: 6 p.m. Snack provided
- Sunday, December 8th: 6 p.m. Snack provided
- Wednesday, December 11th: 5:30 p.m. meal, 6 p.m. practice
- Sunday, December 15th: after worship until 12:15

- **Sunday, December 15th: Christmas Program**

4:30 p.m. Special music – *if you would like to sing, play an instrument or the piano, let one of the KICK Advisors know!*

5:00 p.m. Program

Meal to follow – *free-will offering*

→ *All program participants are asked to bring one dozen cookies or treats to share for the meal.*

Contact a K.I.C.K. Advisor with any questions:

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THEOLOGY ON TAP

Question freely. Think deeply. Drink a little.

**You are invited to Theology on Tap
at Fenceline Brewpub in Huxley
Sunday, December 8th at 5:30 p.m.**

Welcome to Worship! We're glad you're here (physically or virtually), guests and members alike, and pray that you will find in our worship an opportunity to praise God and hear God's Word.

All baptized Christians who believe that Christ Jesus is truly present in the sacrament to forgive, strengthen and bless us, are welcome to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Real Worries, Real Hope (based on Luke 21)

"Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." With these words, often invoked at the table of holy communion, the church proclaims "the mystery of faith" (*ELW*, p. 110). At communion, we remember the good story of Jesus' death and resurrection. But there is more! We also look forward to a time yet to be.

Thoughts of the future can inspire hopefulness for the promise of good things to come. Yet looking ahead can also conjure worries about what we do not know, or a sense of foreboding about what is out of our control. It's hard not to hear in Jesus' references to nature a warning about the dramatic effects of climate change. We inhabit a world in which ordinary signs that used to reliably mark the change of seasons are shifting. So when he talks about the trees sprouting leaves as a sure sign that summer is near, the image may leave us unsettled. In recent times, trees in some places have started budding when meteorological spring and summer are still months away. How will the trees respond when frost comes again? How is the church to respond in times such as these? Will the fig tree bloom on time this year?

Jesus' parable of the fig tree comes smack-dab in the middle of some very disturbing news. Jesus offers an image of hope amid circumstances that seem all but hopeless. He talks of new growth even while what is old and familiar is passing away. Much like Jesus' parable, the season of Advent invites the church to hold together these multiple, seemingly contradictory realities. We are called to rise up with courage and hope as we anticipate Jesus coming to us, without ignoring the weight of the world or neglecting our very real concerns. Jesus gathers us to the table where we remember his death but also his resurrection, where we pray for the world and also anticipate God's redemption of all things.