

Welcome to First Congregational Church United Church of Christ
Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 22, 2024

*** Some rise to their feet, some rise in their hearts—please rise as you are able.*

GATHERING BELL

At the sound of the bell, please silence yourselves and prepare for worship.

PRELUDE

Ave Maria (Schubert), arr Inman

Shannon Jones

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. Paul Ashby

INVITATION TO WORSHIP

**Whoever you are...and wherever you are on life's journey...
you are welcome here!**

OPENING REFLECTION

Paul

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jean McArthur

God's mercy is ever-present, from generation to generation.

God has refuted the arrogant who are so proud they never admit they are wrong or in error.

God has brought down tyrants and lifted up the humble.

God inspires us to serve the hungry and the poor.

Where is there any truth spoken by the rich who proclaim they are self-sufficient?

God remembers how fragile we are in the times of struggle, God places people in our life who share mercy and acceptance.

****HYMN NCH 109**

With Joy Draw Water

All

With joy draw water from the spring; salvation's living well.

The Holy One is in your midst; glad praises sing and tell!

A shoot has sprung from Jesse's tree; of God the chosen One.

A branch of knowledge and of truth; a gift of love has come!

With love the poor will be received; the proud will turn aside;
and faithfulness will be a path, and righteousness the guide!

The wolf shall lie down with the lamb; the calf and lion play.

God's peace shall dwell within the land; a child shall show the way!

With joy draw water from the spring; salvation's living well.

The Holy One is in your midst; glad praises sing and tell!

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Jean & friends

We will light four candles
and we will be willing to light
every taper in our lives,
for love asks for all that is needed
and then ... for everything else,
for this is how incarnation happens,
how God comes.

**We light four candles
or a hundred or a thousand more**

**whatever it takes
to remind ourselves to live in love.**

As ordinary and gentle as the holy welcome
that turns the world upside down,
comes hope, peace, joy, and love
to illuminate our Advent.

We will light Candles this Christmas,
**Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.**

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Paul

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Respond to each shared prayer request with "Peace, Shalom, Salaam."

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

Jean

OFFERTORY

Ev'ry Child, Natalie Sleeth

Choir

****DOXOLOGY** (tune: *Veni, Emmanuel*)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel!
Shall come to you, O Israel.**

****PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

Jean

God of New Beginnings, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Remind us that Christmas is about more than trees and toys. Keep us aware, alert and open to the music of the season proclaiming love, joy, peace and hope. AMEN

****HYMN NCH 119**

My Soul Gives Glory to My God

All

My soul gives glory to my God. My heart pours out its praise.
God lifted up my lowliness in many marvelous ways.

My God has done great things for me: yes, holy is God's name.
All people will declare me blessed, and blessings they shall claim.

From age to age, to all who fear, such mercy love imparts,
dispensing justice far and near, dismissing selfish hearts.

Love casts the mighty from their thrones, promotes the insecure,
leaves hungry spirits satisfied, the rich seem suddenly poor.

Praise God, whose loving covenant supports those in distress,
remembering past promises with present faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46-55

Jean

And Mary said,

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

MESSAGE

“Mary’s Song of Joyful Justice”

Paul

**HYMN NCH 106

My Heart Sings out with Joyful Praise

All

My heart sings out with joyful praise to God who raises me,
who came to me when I was low and changed my destiny.
The Holy One, the Living God, is always full of grace
to those who seek their Maker’s will in every time and place.

The arm of God is strong and just to scatter all the proud.
The tyrants tumble from their thrones and vanish like a cloud.
The hungry all are satisfied; the rich are sent away.
The poor of earth who suffer long will welcome God’s new day.

The promise made in ages past at last has come to be,
for God has come in power to save, to set all people free.
Remembering those who wait to see salvation’s dawning day,
our Savior comes to all who weep to wipe their tears away.

**BENEDICTION

Paul

** SUNG BENEDICTION (*Veni Emmanuel* – rephrasing by Gretta Vosper)

All

O come, light’s wisdom, be our certain guide as arrogance and greed we set aside.
O come, ignite our passion to see the beauty born in all humanity.
Rejoice! Rejoice! To privilege bid farewell that joy may come within our hearts to dwell.

GREETING ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

RECESSIONAL

People Look East, arr DeJong

Shannon

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The Advent candle litany was adapted from Maren Tirabassi, with gratitude to Howard Thurman for the poem, *I Will Light Candles This Christmas*.

Today's Worship Leaders

preacher
liturgist
musicians

Rev. Dr. Paul Ashby
Jean McArthur
Shannon Jones