

November 29, 2020  
First Sunday in the Advent Journey<sup>1</sup>  
Clothed in Christ Light: The Growing Edge

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**PRELUDE**

*An Advent Prayer* (Little)

**GREETING** (Based on Romans 13:11-12)

Pastor: Do this! Understand the present time: the hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber; for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. Let us take off the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

*My Lord, What a Morning* Penn Central Conference Virtual Choir<sup>2</sup>  
*The Growing Edge* (Howard Thurman, 1956) Read by Rev. Tony Fields

**OPENING PRAYER<sup>3</sup>**

*All people: My Lord, “what a morning” indeed! What a few months and years of mornings! In this season when every heart should be happy and light, many of us are struggling with the heaviness of life—burdens that steal the joy right out of our stockings! We too, like the choir sang, feel like the stars have fallen from the sky - life is dark. Tragedy arrives as innocent victims suffer, and an inner voice whispers, “Be afraid!” We wonder and marvel at the everlasting joy, peace, love, and hope promised at your coming. And yet, life is still “blue.” We confess that our hearts are also, too often filled with wonder of a different kind: we wonder when the bills will be paid, when the terror will stop, when rest will come. Will it ever? Is the Advent message still true? In a world where worry, not peace, joy, love, and hope prevail, stir up the good news in us again.*

*This season take us to the “growing edge” and be birthed in us anew. Change US from the inside out and clothe us in the pure light and life of Baby Jesus. Let the light of his joy, peace, love, and hope illuminate our every word and deed - for never has the world...never have WE...needed these holy gifts more than right now. We need YOU, O God – your very Presence to live in us and with us. Emmanuel, you’ve promised rest for the weary, victory for the battle-scarred, peace for the anxious, and acceptance for the broken hearted—not just at Advent, but every day of every year. Come, O Come Emmanuel. Come, O Come, to us, again. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Advent means “coming.” Constance Cherry, Professor Emeritus of Christian Worship at Indiana Wesleyan University and author of *The Worship Architect*, points out that there are three comings of Jesus that we focus on in the Advent Season: “Christ *has come* in the incarnation, Christ *is come* in that his presence lives in and among us even now, and Christ *will come* at the end of the age.” (page 213) For this 2020 Advent season, we, at Starview UCC, will draw upon multiple liturgical resources, but most upon a worship resource called *Worship in the Waiting*, which I hope will help us develop a “spirituality of holy waiting” for Jesus’ Second Coming, even as we remain faithful to his first coming. It is uniquely designed too, for both in person and virtual worship experiences – an important to consider when worship experiences may have to alternate periodically, due to the pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Thank you, Gloria & Larry Moyer, for sharing your time and talent by singing in the PCC virtual choir. The African-American spiritual, “My Lord, What a Morning,” contains apocalyptic or “end time” images as well scriptural references to the hope we have in the Second Coming of Jesus. The quote by Howard Thurman, pushes us to also consider, when life is filled with endings and death, what hope we have for new life, like that witnessed in the birth of a baby – particularly that of Jesus’.

<sup>3</sup> Pastor Laura was inspired by a poem called, “A Prayer for Peace and Joy at Christmas” by Rebecca Barlow Jordan. She used it as a jumping off point, adapted it for today’s Opening Prayer.

ADVENT HYMN

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel  
O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night,  
and turn our darkness into light.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel –  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

GOSPEL – FIG TREE ACTIVE READING – Mark 13:24-37 & Luke 21:29-33

SERMON

*Clothed in Christ Light*

Rev. Laura C. Bair

ALTERNATIVE ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING PRAYER<sup>4</sup>

Pastor: We light our first candle  
a single light that the deepest darkness cannot conquer –  
small, insignificant –  
but a sign of hope.

*All people: Let it speak to us of the tiny flame of hope buried within us –  
the stubborn little light that refuses to be extinguished  
by all that life has thrown at it.*

Pastor: We light our second candle  
a companion to the first –  
equally small, equally insignificant –  
but witnessing to hope that another light brings.

*All people: Let it speak to us of the lights of companionship –  
of our families and our friends – of strangers  
and kindnesses found in unexpected places  
that restored our hope in human nature.*

Pastor: We light our third candle  
recalling nights of watching and waiting –  
sleepless, anxious –  
when dawn seemed to ebb further from the horizon  
and hope seemed forlorn.

*All people: Let it speak to us of the sureness of morning –  
of the passing of darkness  
of suffering –  
and the promise of an eternal sunrise  
dawning for those we have loved and lost  
and dawning too for us –  
though we may yet be in that darkest hour before the dawn.*

Pastor: We light our fourth candle –  
marking the start of a darkening journey through the Advent season  
towards the in-breaking of Christmas light –  
a time of peace and joy we may not yet feel able to welcome –  
as our spirits still dwell in dark and wintriness.

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<sup>4</sup> This is from the *Blue Christmas Service* on the [Wellsprings](http://www.wellsprings.org.uk) website. To see the entire service, click:  
[http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/blue\\_christmas.htm](http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/blue_christmas.htm)

*All people: Let the light speak to us of hope –  
of being together in this place of healing and wholeness –  
of our companionship through this season of growing darkness  
towards the turning of a new year –  
of faith that we and all who grieve, mourn, and groan under their burdens,  
are held eternally in the hand of the One who brought light into being –  
and who knows each one of us by name.  
In the spirit of the Light of the World, we pray, saying:*

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*All people: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom comes. Thy 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 thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

#### **SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION**

Pastor: The Lord be with you.  
**Congregation: And also with you.**  
Pastor: Lift up your hearts.  
**Congregation: We lift them to the Lord.**  
Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.  
**Congregation: It is right to give God thanks and praise.**  
Pastor: O, God if you would only tear open the heavens and come down!  
Come and shake us out of our apathy.  
Come and unite us with your compassion.  
Come and heal us with your presence.  
**Congregation: Like our ancient forefathers and foremothers, we cry out:  
We have had enough of our rubble!  
You hear. You listen. You act.  
You sent prophets and kings to help them sort through the mess and then, rebuild.**  
Pastor: Our rubble is not made of fragmented stones from fallen city walls and a devastated Temple. Our rubble is more subtle but is just as real. It is the rubble of a world turned in upon itself.  
**Congregation: Like the early followers of Jesus who longed for salvation:  
We have had enough of our rubble!  
You hear. You listen. You act.  
You, yourself, O God, came in the form of a helpless baby, named Jesus.  
Emmanuel, you came to live among your beloved children.  
But they crucified him.  
Those who loved and followed him wondered if evil and darkness had won.  
But you fulfilled your promise of salvation with a resurrection from the dead!  
We have hope!  
When we encounter death in its many forms, we do not have to be afraid!  
We have peace and rest in the promise of new life –  
in the present and eternally.**  
Pastor: Bend your ear to hear our cries once more, Emmanuel.  
Come and save us, again.

**Congregation:** We are tired.  
We are tired of being at war with our neighbor.  
We are tired of tyrants who turn citizens into desperate refugees.  
We are tired of fearing the stranger.  
We are tired of the continual threat of destruction.  
We are tired of people misusing their positions of power against others.  
We are tired of acts of terror – and tired of our failure to imagine any other way to respond than the creation of terror in return.  
We are tired of how our lusts and the distortion of our desires erode every relationship and destroy the lives of our children.  
We are tired of greed and the way it forms systems that benefit the few on the backs of the many.  
We are tired of our bluster, pride, and arrogance. Our divisive political rhetoric is pushing us to the point of exhaustion.  
We are tired of keeping up appearances and expending all our energy for things that will not last.  
We are tired of the idols of amusement that sedate us into apathy.  
We are tired of drowning in information while starving for wisdom.  
We are tired of floods, quakes, and winds. We cannot take any more death, and destruction. And we are tired of that deep inner sense of fear.  
We sit in the rubble and confess of our sinfulness that has helped create the mess...  
We are morally, emotionally, spiritually and physically exhausted to the point of despair...  
We are at the edge...

**Pastor:** And yet, every edge is a growing edge...  
Like a fig tree that is able to sprout new leaves after a harsh winter...  
Our seasons of darkness and death are not the end for us either.  
Growth that leads to new life is always possible.

**Congregation:** **You, O God, are our God.**  
**You are still the Creator and Gifter of Possibility and Potential.**  
**So, we dare to ask: Come again, Christ, and be born in us anew.**  
**You are our Savior. Amen.**

**Pastor:** So, we gather around this table reminded that God in Christ, is present in our suffering.  
But more than that, we gather around this table - not in fear of darkness and scarcity but clothed in Christ and filled with the abundance of Advent hope that...

**Congregation:** **The light of Jesus living in us, will penetrate the darkness of our despair...**  
**His light and goodness will overcome the chaos of our evil...**  
**His light and amazing grace will transform the rubble of our sin...**  
**that His light and life living in us, will make all things new.**

**Pastor:** Bless O God, our simple elements of bread and cup, spread upon our tables.  
Bless all who us, whether gathered or scattered.  
Bless all who hunger and thirst, who stand on the edge, who yearn for salvation.  
Send your Spirit, so that feasting on you, we may embrace the birthing pains that come with spiritual growth, rise to new life clothed in Christ's likeness, and go forth to transform the world, by shining the Light of peace, joy, love, and hope into your beloved world.

**Congregation:** **Amen.**

**Pastor:** This is the body of Christ, broken for you. Take and eat.  
This is the blood of Christ, shed for you. Take and drink.

*All people: Saving God, thank you for coming to us again – and again – and again. Thank you for filling us with your good gifts. In our gratitude, we offer the gift of ourselves – our time, talent, and money. We have heard the cries of the hurting. We have listened. We now act. May anyone who is hurting and afraid in our church and community now know the reality of your advent and promised salvation – the gift of your light and new life. Amen.*

## **CHRISTMAS CAROL**

### ***O Holy Night*** (Verse 1)

*O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining.  
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and e'er pining,  
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
Fall on your knees - O hear the angels voices.  
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.  
O night divine! O night, O night divine.*

## **BENEDICTION<sup>5</sup>**

Pastor: What time is it?

*All people: The hour has come to wake from our slumber!*

Pastor: What time is it?

*All people: The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.*

Pastor: What time is it?

*All people: Time to put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*

Pastor: What time is it?

*All people: Time to go out, clothed in Christ.*

*Amen.*

## **POSTLUDE**

*The Light Will Soon Shine on Bethlehem* (Martin)

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<sup>5</sup> Hargraves, Sara and Sam. "Benediction" (Adapted). This 2020 advent material, *Worship in the Waiting: Advent 1: Holy Suspense*, was purchased by Pastor Laura and is shared from her library of resources. The Hargraves wrote this material specifically for **engageworship** - a ministry of Music and Worship Foundation CIO.