



PANTHER VALLEY ECUMENICAL CHURCH
Advent 3
“I Believe in God: Ode to Joy”

December 13, 2020

*Connecting with the Community,
Growing Disciples, and Serving Jesus Christ*

*Our Worship can be viewed on our website
PantherValleyChurch.org*

FRIENDS ~ FAMILY ~ FAITH



PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

ONE: Make yourself ready!

ALL: Raise your voices, change your hearts,

ONE: get ready to be transformed, because now is the time.

ALL: Let us embrace joy that we can do what needs to be done to bring more light into the world.

LIGHTING THE CANDLE OF JOY

Reader One: When I look around, I see shadows of sadness, families who have lost loved ones, people in prison, people who are isolated and feel on their own...

Reader Two: When I look around, I see shadows of grief, people dreading the holidays because of painful memories, because they're recently divorced, because they don't want to spend another Christmas alone...

Reader One: In the face of sadness, we light a candle of joy...

Reader Two: In the face of grief, in the face of loss, we light a candle of joy... (Light the third candle in your Advent wreath.)

Reader One: May the light from this candle overwhelm the world.

Reader Two: May the light from this candle say to all that God's joy is coming, on earth as it already is in heaven.

Reader One: Brothers and sisters in Christ, be not afraid, God's joy is at hand!

OPENING PRAYER

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of the depths of joy.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we are not sure
of your presence,

ignite the flame of joy within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**
**I believe in God,
I believe in God,
even when... even when...
God is silent.**

Choral response

Help us face the silence of unknowing
and embrace it as the pregnant pause before joyful new beginnings.

SCRIPTURE READING: *Isaiah 57:14-19 New Revised Standard Version*

*It shall be said,
"Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people's way."
For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.
For I will not continually accuse,
nor will I always be angry;
for then the spirits would grow faint before me,
even the souls that I have made.
Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry;
I struck them, I hid and was angry;
but they kept turning back to their own ways.
I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;
I will lead them and repay them with comfort,
creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips.
Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord;
and I will heal them.*

The Gospel of Luke 1: 1-4; 26-56 (CEB)

Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us. Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus. I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received...

When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God."

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."

Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,

just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.

MESSAGE *Do You Hear What I Hear – 3rd movement - Joy*

SONG *Ode To Joy*

PRAYERS FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

One: I invite you to get in a comfortable position of rest. I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can. I invite you to a deep breath and a deep listening posture—perhaps eyes closed or fixed on a candle—as we prepare for a time of prayer. *[pause for a breath]*

ALL: The gentle pull of God is often lost amidst the rush of all the obligations which lay a claim on us. Yet just beyond the frantic pace our restless feet have trod lie deep still pools of quietness— the dwelling place of God. Meet me in the stillness, Lord Be the air I breathe Meet me in the stillness, Lord Free me to receive. O take me to that secret place where lost in wonder and in awe, the moment comes and I rejoice to be and be with God. Meet me in the stillness, Lord Be the air I breathe Meet me in the

stillness, Lord Free me to receive.

We invite you at this time to lift up Prayers for the World.

Today's flowers are given by Betty Schultheis in loving memory of Ron Reese.

LORD'S PRAYER

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

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Believe, with a loving heart! Believe, and shine your light!
Believe, because the song we sing is sung for all!
And now let the weak say, "I am strong;" let the poor say, "I am rich
because of what our God has done for us." Believe!**

BENEDICTION

We wait for justice but we do not wait to work for change;
We wait for restored health but we do not wait to work to heal;
We wait for wholeness but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;
We wait for peace but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.
And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news that God is ever-present with us, fill the night left by sadness with messages of joy.
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that joy alive in you and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.
Raise your voices and repeat after me... "do not be afraid!" Amen!

POSTLUDE

Credits: Today's Liturgy is adapted from: Worship Design Studio, Advent Candle liturgy is from SALT Project, *Opening Prayer, "Singers for "Crossing the Threshold"* Haylee Coburn, Jared Pugh, Katie Ledsinger, Ryan Rose; music by Mark A. Miller; mixed by Jared Pugh, Claremont UMC. Used with permission. www.worshipdesignstudio.com", I Heard the Bells Instrumental, ©2020 Chuck Bell, All Rights Reserved. Used with Permission. Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee, Public Domain. *I Believe* Handbell Benediction, Mark A. Miller/ arr. Stephanie Rhoades, used by permission. Played by the PVEC Handbell Choir.

Blue Christmas Open House

Friday December 18, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

People have undergone unprecedented loss this year. Family and friends have succumbed to death in this pandemic, millions have lost economic security through loss of jobs, some have lost businesses they built over a lifetime. Most of us have lost our beloved rhythms of life that felt familiar and gave our lives the richness of gatherings and adventure.

Throughout Advent we proclaim hope, love, joy, and peace. This is the church's gift to the world—that our faith story is grounded in the presence of God that came and dwelt among us, during hardship. But on this night we gather to acknowledge and remember what we have lost. It is important to name that sometimes hope, love, joy, and peace are distant feelings when we have encountered so much loss.

Come when you can and stay as long as you wish.

PANTHER VALLEY ECUMENICAL CHURCH

1490 Route 517 Hackettstown, NJ 07840

Pastor: Ninabeth Metcalf, Music Director: Diane Van Dongen

Church Secretary:

Office hours: Mon. – Fri. 9:00am – 2:00pm

Website: <http://www.panthervalleychurch.org>

Tel: 908-852-5444 Email: Panthervalleychurch@gmail.com