

St Paul United Church of Christ
5312 Old Blue Rock Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247
Allen M. Fluent, Transitional Pastor
Order of Worship for the First Sunday of Christmas
December 27, 2020

(As our congregation returns to holding worship in our building, we are conscious of the many people who will not be able to be physically present. Therefore, we will be continuing the practice of sending a worship bulletin to all who are on our mailing lists for email or hard copy. Those who will be worshipping from home and who have computer access will also be receiving a recorded version of the service that will be sent out on Sunday afternoon. We welcome your participation in any way that is convenient for you, and we encourage you to share our worship service with any person you know who may appreciate receiving it.)

Morning Announcements and Prayer Requests

Prelude (recording begins)

Morning Praise: Psalm 148

Praise the Holy One our God!
We praise you from the heavens; we praise you from the heights!
Praise God, all God's messengers; praise God, all God's powers!
Praise God, sun and moon; and all you shining stars!
Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!
Let them praise the name of the Holy One, who commanded and they were created, and who established them forever and ever, and fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
Praise the Holy One from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,
Fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling God's command!
Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!
Monarchs of the earth and all peoples, presidents, prime ministers and rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike, old and young together!
Let us praise the name of our God, for your name alone is exalted;
Your glory is above earth and heaven.
You have raised up a horn for your people, praise for all who are faithful,
For all who are close to you.
Praise the Holy One our God!

Hymn

"Joy to the World"

#179

**Joy to the world, the Lord is come; let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

***Joy to the earth! The savior reigns; let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.***

***No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.***

***God rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness, and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.***

Epistle Lesson:

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Hymn

"Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"

#198

***Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today;
ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!***

***Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss; Jesus Christ was born for this;
he has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forever more.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!***

Gospel Lesson:

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord") and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and

when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul also."

Sermon

The song of Simeon, the old man in the temple who finds consolation when he sees Jesus, has provided a comforting word to Christians throughout the ages. It is known in church liturgies as the "Nunc Dimittis" (now dismiss, in Latin), and is often quoted in Christian memorial services, where it implies that the person being remembered has reached a completeness in her/his life and is ready to go home to God.

It is not necessary for Simeon to see all the problems of the world resolved in his lifetime. That is clear by the other words he speaks directly to Jesus' mother. "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many...a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." Simeon sees these things as well. He feels sorrow for the trauma that the world will still experience, and that Jesus and his mother will endure. But the issues of the world are never resolved within a single lifetime. Simeon understands that, and, like Moses, the great liberator of God's people many years before, he knows it is enough to be allowed to stand upon the crest of the mountain and see the community of grace that God is still making to redeem the world.

Musical Interlude

Jake Rizer, Musical Director

Our Time of Prayer

Gracious God, so much has happened in the course of this year. There has been much to worry us. We've felt sorrow and grief for those who have been lost during the pandemic that has afflicted our world. We've also felt the loneliness and confinement that have come as we have taken care to guard the health of friends and family. The political polarization of our nation, the unrest in our cities, and the intolerance within our society trouble us.

Today, we pause in the midst of this turmoil to consider our blessings in this Christmas season. We remember your promises. We remember the gift of Jesus. We remember that we are a people called to hope and faith within times just like this.

Give us, we pray, the faith exemplified in Simeon, who waited confidently until that day, when he was very old, when he was able to see in a child brought into the temple a sign of your grace and the genuineness of your love.

May we also see the signs of hope that are emerging around us day by day. May we find them in the open wonder of our children. May we see them in the courageous voices of those who stand for justice in the public square. May we discover your benevolence in the fellowship of those who gather in our churches and share good news with one another, bringing ministry to the communities around us. May we learn to value the gifts we have to offer – our voluntary efforts, our financial support for community ministries of help for those in need, our advocacy and our prayers.

May the story of the Christ child speak to us about the birth of hopefulness and grace within our world, and may we celebrate the confidence of our faith, to say, Behold, all things are made new.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

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 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.

Closing Hymn

"Two thousand Years Since Bethlehem"

#540

*Two thousand years since Bethlehem first welcomed Jesus' birth
the startling truth began to dawn that God had come to earth.
And as he grew and lived and taught a different way unfurled:
a way of joy and love and peace, a new start for the world.*

*Two thousand years since Galilee where Jesus preached and healed
in words of truth and works of power God's kingdom was revealed.
As young and old and rich and poor responded to his call,
they found what we may find today: a new start for us all.*

*Two thousand years since Calvary, the hill where Jesus died,
the Lamb of God, the sinless one, for me was crucified.
But soon he rose up from the grave to reign in victory;
good news I scarcely can believe: a new start won for me!*

*Two thousand years since Pentecost: the Holy Spirit came
in sound of mighty, rushing wind and tongues of living flame;
a gift to all who will believe and live the Jesus way;
the power of God we may receive, a new start from today!*

*Two thousand years of Christian faith have changed our history,
for Jesus is the Lord of time and of eternity.
For all who seek a better way, than failure, sin and pain,
Still Jesus Christ makes all things new: a chance to start again!*

Benediction

*Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.*

Postlude