

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FOURTH SUNDAY of ADVENT**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH: The Candle of Love**

One: *"Come, thou long-expected Jesus ... born to reign in us forever  
... by thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne."  
(“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, Glory to God,” #82)*

One: Children of God, what are we waiting for?

**All: We wait for love that casts out fear,  
love that heals what hatred has torn,  
love that binds neighbor to neighbor  
and stranger to friend.  
We wait for love embodied in Christ,  
a love fierce, tender and eternal.**

One: Today we light four candles,  
their brightness stretches across shadows.  
Hope, peace and joy blaze together,  
and now love joins the dance of light.  
This love is not shallow or fleeting,  
but deep enough to embrace all creation.

**All: We call this candle Hope.**  
*(Light the first candle.)*  
**We call this candle Peace.**  
*(Light the second candle.)*  
**We call this candle Joy.**  
*(Light the third candle.)*  
**We call this candle Love.**  
*(Light the fourth candle.)*

*(continued...)*

One: O God of steadfast love,  
 you came to us in a manger,  
 not with force but in vulnerability.  
 You call us to love as you love ...  
 boldly, sacrificially, without condition.  
 Teach us to embody your love in word and deed,  
 until the world knows we belong to you.

Hear the testimony of Scripture:  
 “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;  
 everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.  
 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8)

All: **We thank you for your endless, boundless love.  
 Make us vessels of compassion,  
 bearers of mercy, protectors of grace.  
 Come, Lord Jesus, and make love our witness.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” GtG 104

1. **O Lord, how shall I meet you,  
 how welcome you aright?  
 Your people long to greet you,  
 my hope, my heart’s delight!  
 O kindle, Lord most holy,  
 a lamp within my breast,  
 to do in spirit lowly  
 all that may please you best.**
2. **Love caused your incarnation;  
 love brought you down to me;  
 your thirst for my salvation  
 procured my liberty.  
 O love beyond all telling,  
 that led you to embrace  
 in love, all loves excelling,  
 our lost and fallen race.**
3. **You come, O Lord, with gladness,  
 in mercy and goodwill,  
 to bring an end to sadness  
 and bid our fears be still.**

*(continued...)*

**In patient expectation  
we live for that great day  
when your renewed creation  
your glory shall display.**

Words: Paul Gerhardt, 1653; trans. Catherine Winkworth and others, 1863, alt.  
Music: VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN, Melchior Teschner, 1614; harm. William Henry Monk, 1861  
*Public Domain.*

### **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Great God, as we welcome the birth of Jesus again,  
we are mindful of how we have failed to receive the fullness of that gift.  
The story points us to your glory.  
Yet, we struggle to join in the song of praise and thanksgiving.  
We are distracted and confused,  
so focused on things that matter little  
that we overlook the good news of great joy that you have prepared.  
Tell us again that the Savior is born.  
Tell us again that we are forgiven.  
Tell us again that our lives can be abundant in faith, hope and love  
because of what you have given us in Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### **SILENT CONFESSION**

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from John 3 and Luke 2)*

**One:** In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ  
to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.  
**All:** **The Good News is this: “God loved the world so much  
that God gave God’s only Son.” This is indeed  
“good news of great joy for all the people.”**  
**One:** So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved,  
in Jesus Christ we are embraced, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.  
**All:** **“Glory to God in the highest heaven!”**

### **THE PEACE**

**One:** The peace of Christ be with you all.  
**All:** **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## THE WORD

### SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 7:10–16

ISAIAH 7:10-16 (Common English Bible+)

<sup>10</sup> *Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup> “Ask a sign from the Lord your God. Make it as deep as the grave or as high as heaven.”*

<sup>12</sup> *But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.”*

<sup>13</sup> *Then Isaiah said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to be tiresome for people that you are also tiresome before my God? <sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> He will eat butter and honey, and learn to reject evil and choose good. <sup>16</sup> Before the child learns to reject evil and choose good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned.”*

### HYMN “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” GtG 129 (Verses 1-2)

**1. Lo, how a rose e’er blooming  
from tender stem hath sprung,  
of Jesse’s lineage coming,  
by faithful prophets sung.  
It came, a floweret bright,  
amid the cold of winter,  
when half spent was the night.**

**2. Isaiah `twas foretold it,  
the rose I have in mind;  
with Mary we behold it,  
the virgin mother kind.  
To show God’s love aright  
she bore for us a Savior,  
when half spent was the night.**

Words: German carol; stanzas 1, 2 trans. Theodore Baker, 1894, alt.  
Music: ES IST EIN’ ROS’, *Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesang*,  
1599; arr. Michael Praetorius, 1609  
*Public Domain*

### SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 1:18–25

MATTHEW 1:18-25 (Common English Bible+)

<sup>18</sup> *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph was a righteous man. Because he did not want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this,*

*an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:*

*<sup>23</sup> Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
And they will call him, Emmanuel.  
(which means, “God is with us.”)*

*<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did just as the angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife, <sup>25</sup> but had no marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And Joseph named him Jesus.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON “Love...and Love!” by Pastor Bill Vincent**

It may be the one thing we want the most, not only for Christmas, but for life: to know that we are loved.

Not a syrupy, sappy love, where they all lived ‘happily ever after’, and everything was hunky-dory, and no one had any problems with anyone.

But real, meaningful, significant love; personal, enduring, true love...and true to life: your life and mine.

That’s what I was thinking as I turned my attention to these passages for today.  
And I began to wonder: What might we learn about this love from our passages?

We begin with birth – that makes sense.

Birth is a fairly common, somewhat ordinary occurrence in life.

And here was this woman – was she there intentionally? merely by accident or happenstance? – here was this woman that Isaiah was pointing to, using her as a sign of God’s wonder and God’s work, God’s power and God’s grace.

Now Mary’s, too, was a fairly common experience – well...aside from the whole “pregnant by the Holy Spirit” thing. Still, it was a pregnancy, and a birth, like pregnancies and births have happened hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of times.

Birth: a fairly common, somewhat ordinary occurrence in life.

Yet, whether knowing something special was going on – like Mary – or probably not – like the woman in Isaiah’s story – it seems safe to assume that there was an everyday, ordinary faithfulness to the process, to the person – to the people – involved.

A faithful ordinariness.

Like the sun coming up every morning. Or the turn of the seasons.

Like the person behind the counter who always says, “Hi! Hiya doing?” and really seems to mean it. Or like you calling to check up on a friend.

A faithfulness in the ordinary things of life that holds us and sustains us and shows someone cares.

There is a protective deliverance – a saving: *“You will call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

No, this does not mean we can “save” another, in the same way that Jesus, through the cross, saves us.

But note how Joseph himself demonstrates something of that protective saving, that deliverance.

To begin with, he obeys God’s call NOT to dismiss Mary quietly. It would have been the smart thing to do. It would have been the safer thing to do. But Joseph – a righteous man – chose, at God’s nudging, NOT to play it safe or smart, but to play it kind and caring, wanting the best for Mary, and the baby, seeking their welfare – even going against common-sense norms.

And then later – in an account not in our passage today – Joseph, again at the nudging of God, will pick up stakes and flee the country...to save the baby’s life – and probably his own and Mary’s too – when Herod, in his hot temper, sends his troops into the Bethlehem area to murder every child two and under. An inconvenience if ever there was one: to flee one’s country and become a refugee. Yet Joseph made that choice and took that option – again, yes, at the nudging of God – he took that opportunity to be inconvenienced and taken out of his comfort zone, and even out of his home country, in order to protect Mary and the baby.

How often would any of us do that? How often do we do that? Go to such lengths, in order to be kind and caring, to work for the best for and seek the welfare of another.

When someone stands up for us when we have been knocked down and out.

Or when we speak out for those in the world who are hounded – unmercifully, unjustly – simply because of who they are or where they’re from.

A protective deliverance – a saving.

Then there is the ever-present presence – ‘in the flesh’ presence – like Immanuel: God with us.

Like the itinerant preacher roaming the countryside, welcoming the outcasts, healing the broken, proclaiming – and embodying – God’s mercy for the people.

Sensing, knowing, experiencing God’s presence and God’s grace in the actions and words and choices of another.

And the way we can do the same for someone else.

Is this something of that love that we yearn for?

Now, it must be admitted that this love that we yearn for – the desire to be loved – comes with a cost.

NOT that God only loves us if we ‘pay up’.

But as anyone knows who has truly loved (or tried to love) another, such love of another costs us: costs us our time and our energy, our focus and attention, our heart, our life – for that is what we give in order to love. But this love – true, significant, enduring – we give it willingly,

we give it because we want to, almost as if we were compelled to. Maybe because that's what real love is: giving of oneself.

If so, then maybe this "God with us" as this infant is the crucial image of love.

Note how we tend to respond to an infant: we tend to be attracted to it, drawn to it. We want to care for it, respond tenderly. It brings out the best in us.

Is that why he came as an infant?

Not only to draw that out of us.

But to reflect – and embody – that very response for us.

So that love begets love begets love begets love, in an ever-deepening, ever-expanding spiral of energy, of growth, of life – and death – and life again, all of which reveals the very presence of God with us.

Love as this giving of self.

Love that is ordinary, yet extraordinary; coming to us in the common and everyday, faithful every step of the way.

Love that is protective, kind and caring, working for the best for the other, seeking the welfare of the other.

Love that is always present, ever-present, 'in the flesh' present, here, now – that close.

And God comes to us in all those ways: to embrace us, to claim us, to give us life; to share that love with us so that we might share it with others.

And, Yes, I believe that is precisely what we most yearn for.

**\*HYMN** "Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine" StF 2099

[Women] 1. **Joseph dearest, Joseph mine,  
help me cradle the child divine;  
God reward thee and all that's thine  
in paradise,  
so prays the mother Mary.**

[All] *Refrain:*

**He came among us at Christmastime,  
at Christmas time, in Bethlehem;  
let us bring him from far and wide Love's diadem:  
Jesus, Jesus,  
lo, he comes, and loves, and saves, and frees us!**

*(continued...)*

[Men] 2. Gladly, dear one, lady mine,  
help I cradle this child of thine;  
God's own light on us both shall shine  
in paradise,  
as prays the mother Mary.  
(Refrain)

[All] 3. All shall come and bow the knee;  
wise and happy their souls shall be,  
loving such a divinity,  
as all may see  
in Jesus, Son of Mary.  
(Refrain)

Words: Trad. German

Music: JOSEPH LIEBER, JOSEPH MEIN, Trad. German

Public Domain

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

(from *The Confession of 1967* and *The Study Catechism: Full Version*)

**God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of the human mind.  
Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness.  
But God reveals divine love in Jesus Christ  
by showing power in the form of a servant,  
wisdom in the folly of the cross, and  
goodness in receiving sinful men and women.  
The power of God's love in Christ to transform the world  
discloses that the Redeemer is the Lord and Creator  
who made all things to serve the purpose of God's love.  
I love because God first loved me.  
God loves me in Christ with a love that never ends.  
Amazed by grace, I no longer live for myself.  
I live for the Lord who died and rose again, triumphant over death, for my sake.  
Therefore, I take those around me to heart,  
especially those in particular need,  
knowing that Christ died for them no less than for me.**

(*The Confession of 1967—Inclusive Language Version* © 2002  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation on behalf of the Office of  
Theology and Worship All rights reserved.)

(*The Study Catechism: Full Version*, Copyright ©1998 Presbyterian  
Church (U.S.A.).)



## INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

One: "There are varieties of gifts."  
All: **"But it is the same Spirit who gives them."**  
One: "There are varieties of service."  
All: **"But it is the same Lord who is served."**  
One: "There are varieties of working."  
All: **"But it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."**  
One: "Each one is given a gift by the Spirit..."  
All: **"...To use it for the common good."**  
One: "Together we are the body of Christ..."  
All: **"...And individually members of him."**

*(from I Corinthians 12)*

Constitutional Questions to Officers

Constitutional Questions to the Congregation

*Do we, the members of the church, accept these people as ruling elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?*

*Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?*

Prayer

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Come, Lord Jesus, come.  
All: **Come to us with love.**

## THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

**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.**

## OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**O God, with faith and hope, we offer these gifts.  
Use them, even as you use us,  
to accomplish your purposes in Jesus Christ,  
whose birth we celebrate and  
whose love we proclaim.  
Amen.**

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Love Has Come” GtG 110

**1. Love has come: a light in the darkness!  
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.  
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;  
hear how their song of joy arises:  
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!  
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.**

**2. Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.  
Love is God now asleep in the hay.  
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;  
what is the name her heart is saying?  
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers.  
Love! Love! Jesus, Emmanuel.**

**3. Love has come and never will leave us!  
Love is life everlasting and free.  
Love is Jesus within and among us.  
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.  
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.  
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!**

Words: Ken Bible, 1996 © 1996 LNWhymns.com (admin.  
Music Services), *All rights reserved.*  
Music: BRING A TORCH, French melody (*Public Domain*); arr.  
Eric T. Myers, 2012 © 2012 Eric T. Myers (admin. Presbyterian  
Publishing Corp.), *All rights reserved.*  
*Reprinted / Podcast / Streamed with permission under ONE  
LICENSE #A-739819/#A-739796. All rights reserved.*

**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...  
All: ...**Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

The Advent Candle Liturgy is written by Shardaé Henry and Shea Watts and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2025.)

The Prayer of Confession, Prayer for Illumination, Prayers of the People (adapted), and Prayer of Dedication are written by John Wurster and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2022 & 2025.

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2013.