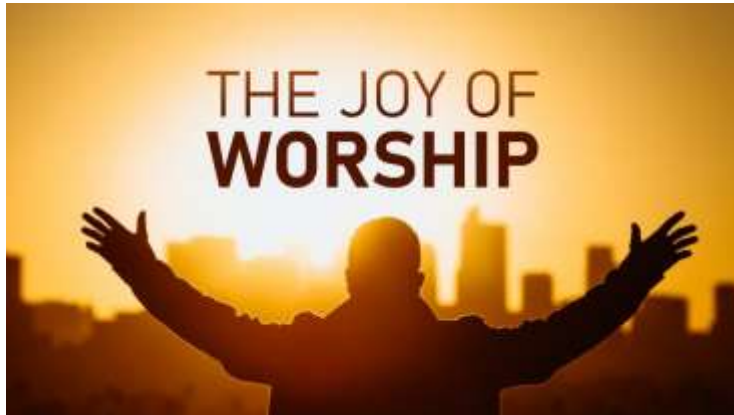


SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1 2024
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13
“FOR ALL THE JOY”



ST. JOHN
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Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.
Respond with words in bold print

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”
Carol Tournquist

PENNIES FOR MISSION: UCC Christmas Fund

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: In the midst of night’s shadows and anguish,

Many: We pray earnestly to experience your presence.

One: As dawn slips into the horizon and relieves night of its reign,

Many: We pray earnestly to sense your presence.

One: As daylight grows into noontime, filled with the glow of sun’s light,

Many: We pray earnestly to know your presence.

***INVOCATION:**

Lover God, Creator of Our Hearts,

Through your Spirit, our love grows for our neighbors.

Our hearts are drawn to your expanding light as we see through the faces of our neighbors. May the joy of your Divine Love spill into each corner of your Realm as we anticipate your love and light in this season of longer nights and bleak days. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 84 “This is the Day”**

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

God of the Possible and Probable,
Gloom often encapsulates us when life is confusing and conflict is great. Our faith is rattled, and we are swallowed by shadows of fear. The world often feels like the end is near even when a new beginning is around the corner. We forget that even when shadows have lengthened, there remains a crack in the surface. Light begins to stream into our space, and warmth dances upon our hearts. When fear unnerves us, may we cling to the hope of God's love and the possibilities of joy once again. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Take comfort, dear friends, that God's grace will fill our hearts with joy as we know that light grows ahead. May we cling to the crumbs of hope as we step into the nighttime with faith, knowing Divine Bliss accompanies us in each step.

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: FIRST TESTAMENT

From the Message Jeremiah 33:14-16

A Fresh and True Shoot from the David-Tree

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ "'Watch for this: The time is coming' — God's Decree— 'when I will keep the promise I made to the families of Israel and Judah. When that time comes, I will make a fresh and true shoot sprout from the David-Tree. He will run this country honestly and fairly. He will set things right. That's when Judah will be secure and Jerusalem live in safety. The motto for the city will be, "God Has Set Things Right for Us." God has made it clear that there will always be a descendant of David ruling the people of Israel and that there will always be Levitical priests on hand to offer burnt offerings, present grain offerings, and carry on the sacrificial worship in my honor.'"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 25:1-10 Page 635

SECOND TESTAMENT: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God? ¹⁰ Night and day, we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith. ¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus guide us on our way back to you. ¹² May the Lord cause you to increase and enrich your love for each other and for everyone in the same way as we also love you. ¹³ May the love cause your hearts to be strengthened, to be blameless in holiness before our

God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his people. Amen.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 21:25-36**

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. ²⁶ The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. ²⁷ Then they will see the Human One^[a] coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.”

A lesson from the fig tree

²⁹ Jesus told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that God’s kingdom is near. ³² I assure you that this generation won’t pass away until everything has happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.

³⁴ “Take care that your hearts aren’t dulled by drinking parties, drunkenness, and the anxieties of day-to-day life. Don’t let that day fall upon you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. It will come upon everyone who lives on the face

of the whole earth. ³⁶ Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand before the Human One.”^[b]
³⁷ Every day Jesus was teaching in the temple, but he spent each night on the Mount of Olives. ³⁸ All the people rose early in the morning to hear him in the temple area.

**These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.
Thanks be to God. Amen**

MESSAGE: “Yay and Nay”

Can you imagine a more appropriate way to begin the Advent Season than to focus on texts that announce God’s fulfilling the promise to bring justice, righteousness, and redemption. And all this will happen through a righteous branch of David as we read in Jeremiah; the coming of our Lord Jesus as we read by Paul in 1 Thessalonians; and the Son of man coming in a cloud as we read in the Gospel of Luke. Isn’t it great when it all comes together?

However, the message is not all “Yay”. What may seem less appropriate, is the Gospel lection that proclaims the apocalyptic end of all things and the coming of the Kingdom of God. There is nothing here of virgin and child, of shepherds and heavenly choirs, but rather the shaking of heaven and earth in perplexity, fear, and

foreboding. Nay! What happened? Did we read the story three weeks too early?

As opposed to what we think, Advent is begun with a Gospel reading from the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus. That was several Sundays ago as we read in Mark 13:1-8 when Jesus tells the disciples “Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished.” This type of literature is called apocalyptic because it is an “unveiling” or “revelation” of things to come.

These words from Mark 13 tell us that the coming of the Lord includes much more than the Christmas story; that Advent is God’s doing, apart from any way humans try to calculate or design the season; and that Advent is of such significance that the entire cosmos reverberates with the signs and circumstances of these events.

God comes to us in certain, however uncertain the when and how. It is that certainty, not the uncertainties, which moves us to repentance in our waiting. Is that Yay or Nay? I would think anytime we have the opportunity for repentance is a good thing.

As surely as one can discern the approach of summer by the leafing of the fig tree, so these signs will announce that the kingdom of God is near. And when? Within this generation, says, Luke. With this statement as to the time, Luke joins many other early Christians in the belief that they were living in the period between

God’s punishment of Jerusalem by the Gentiles (nations) and God’s judgment of the nations by the Son of man whose appearing will bring redemption to the faithful.

That’s a lot to think about! Don’t believe you are too busy to find ways to redemp ourselves for a year of sinning. Forget about what color of sweater to buy Aunt Tilly this year and spend time with God talking about forgiveness. That’s always a Yay! Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: “In the Bleak Midwinter” Video

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

God continues to increase love in our hearts for our neighbors within our congregation, community, and world. Through our various gifts, we are able to strengthen our connections and grow with our God, Holy Crafter of Gifts.

OFFERTORY: “There’s Something About That Name” William Gaither

***DOXOLOGY: 785 “We Give You but your Own”
We give you but your own, whate’er the gift may be;
All that we have is your alone, we give it gratefully.**

***PRAYER OF INVITATION:**

First Reader (at pulpit): God of our hopes and dreams, we yearn for your presence this Advent season – We are empty and long to be filled;

we are hungry and long to be fed;
we are lost and long to be found.

Second Reader (at lecturn): In this time of waiting, we feel scattered and torn, as we struggle to answer to the many demands on our time and attention.

Third Reader (left of Table): Just as Jesus gathered up the fragments that remained after feeding the crowds, gather up our Advent hopes and dreams, that nothing may be lost in your mercy.

Fourth Reader (right of table): Call us anew to eat our fill at Christ's table, that we may await the hope of the ages with our faith and confidence undimmed. Amen.

PASTOR: The Lord be with you.

ALL: and also with you.

PASTOR: Lift up your hearts.

ALL: We lift them up to the Lord.

PASTOR: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

ALL: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

First Reader (at pulpit): It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Almighty God, our Comforter and Sustainer. You made us in your image and filled us with longing, that our hearts might remain restless until they find their rest in you.

When our love failed, your love remained steadfast. In our longing for freedom through the ages, you perceived our yearning to be your covenant people.

Second Reader (at lecturn): In the lineage of Abraham and Sarah, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Mary and Joseph, we come to this season of holy mystery, awaiting the promise of your redeeming love. And so, with your people on earth, and all that company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending proclamation,

ALL: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Third Reader (left of table);

In this holy season of Advent, you awaken us to your Presence, and call us to be your compassion in the world, as we speak the truth of your love.

Even when the song of the angels had stilled, and Jesus faced denial, betrayed and death, he gave thanks and blessed the fruit of this, your good earth, offering not only bread and wine, but the bread that always satisfies and the life that never ends.

Fourth Reader (right of table):

And we remember that night when Jesus shared table with disciples, taking and breaking bread, blessing it, and giving it to his disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is my body."

We remember also that Jesus took the cup, blessing it, and giving it to his disciples, saying "This is my cup of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Do this, as often as you do, in remembrance of me."

This bread and this cup bring life and love to all – for they are God's love living in us, they are the Spirit's blessings flowing through us.

PASTOR: And so, in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Christ Jesus, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, as holy and living gifts to you and to your world. In union with Christ's gift of love for us, we proclaim the mystery of faith.

ALL: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

First Reader: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, that this season of Advent may be a season of yearning for connection – a season of waiting with patience and hope.

Second Reader: Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and wine, that they may bring your Advent

miracle to a world that longs to believe in miracles once more.

Third Reader: As we experience your Presence in the eating of this bread and the drinking of this wine, help us lay claim to the hope and promise of the season.

Fourth Reader: Through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forevermore. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

THE 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. 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: 102 "O How Shall I Receive You"**

*BENEDICTION:

As we open the doors to the dawn of this season,
May the Creator of Our Hearts fill us with Joy,
May the Light of Christ fill our hearts with Hope,

And may the Spirit of Tranquility assure our souls with Strength. Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: “Let There be Peace on Earth”

THE BELL IS RUNG

POSTLUDE: “Praise” Stephen Otis

CONCOLENCES TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF Ray Bopp.

PRAYER LIST: