

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2024**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 "PRAYING WITH JOY"**



**ST. JOHN**  
**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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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: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" Lani Smith**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: UCC Christmas fund**

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE: (insert)**

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Underneath life's expanding shadows,

**Many: We call out "Pave the way for our God!"**

One: On the dusty roads of life's wilderness

**Many: We call out "Pave the way for our God!"**

One: As we near the top of mountains, rejoicing under the sunlight,

**Many: We call out "Pave the way for our God!"**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Holy Fountain of Compassion,

Deep in the heart of this journey, we search for peace-filled moments of contemplation. We crave the joy that is found in the stillness of prayer. As we share this time with you, may we experience your beloved joy, knowing that our petitions bring us closer to you and our neighbors. Amen.

**\*OPENING HYMN: 120 “There’s a Voice in the Wilderness”**

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW**

**LIFE: God of Blissful Serenity,**

**As you move about your Realm on Earth, you desire our prayers to come alive. Knowing the hopes of our hearts, you call us to create action that will help our neighbors.**

**Yet, there are times we continue to pray in mind only, never fulfilling our calling to care for our neighbors.**

**What we forget is that joy abounds when we can transform a prayer from thoughts to concrete actions, blessing our siblings across our world. Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

When we bring alive our prayers, we experience Christ in our midst. May we embrace the grace of God and initiate opportunities to care for God’s children with open hearts.

**\*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 Malachi 3:1-4**

**From the Message**

**The Master You’ve Been Looking For**

3 “Look! I’m sending my messenger on ahead to clear the way for me. Suddenly, out of the blue, the Leader you’ve been looking for will enter his Temple—yes, the Messenger of the Covenant, the one you’ve been waiting for. Look! He’s on his way!” A Message from the mouth of God-of-the-Angel-Armies. <sup>2-4</sup> But who will be able to stand up to that coming? Who can survive his appearance? He’ll be like white-hot fire from the smelter’s furnace. He’ll be like the strongest lye soap at the laundry. He’ll take his place as a refiner of silver, as a cleanser of dirty clothes. He’ll scrub the Levite priests clean, refine them like gold and silver, until they’re fit for God, fit to present offerings of righteousness. Then, and only then, will Judah and Jerusalem be fit and pleasing to God, as they used to be in the years long ago.

**ADDITIONAL LUKE READING: Luke 1:68-79**

<sup>68</sup> “Bless the Lord God of Israel

because he has come to help and has delivered his people.

<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David’s house,

<sup>70</sup> just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago.

<sup>71</sup> He has brought salvation from our enemies

and from the power of all those who hate us.  
<sup>72</sup> He has shown the mercy promised to our  
ancestors,  
and remembered his holy covenant,  
<sup>73</sup> the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor  
Abraham.  
He has granted <sup>74</sup> that we would be rescued  
from the power of our enemies  
so that we could serve him without fear,  
<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes,  
for as long as we live.  
<sup>76</sup> You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most  
High,  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.  
<sup>77</sup> You will tell his people how to be saved  
through the forgiveness of their sins.  
<sup>78</sup> Because of our God's deep compassion,  
the dawn from heaven will break upon us,  
<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who are sitting in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide us on the path of peace."

## **SECOND TESTAMENT: Philippians 1:3-11**

### **Thanksgiving and prayer**

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I mention you in my  
prayers. <sup>4</sup> I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and  
it's always a prayer full of joy. <sup>5</sup> I'm glad because of the

way you have been my partners in the ministry of the  
gospel from the time you first believed it until now. <sup>6</sup> I'm  
sure about this: the one who started a good work in you  
will stay with you to complete the job by the day of  
Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup> I have good reason to think this way about  
all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my  
partners in God's grace, both during my time in prison  
and in the defense and support of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> God is my  
witness that I feel affection for all of you with the  
compassion of Christ Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> This is my prayer: that your love might become even  
more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of  
insight. <sup>10</sup> I pray this so that you will be able to decide  
what really matters and so you will be sincere and  
blameless on the day of Christ. <sup>11</sup> I pray that you will then  
be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes  
from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to  
God.

### **\*GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 3:1-3**

#### **John the Baptist's message**

3 In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor  
Tiberius—when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea  
and Herod was ruler<sup>[a]</sup> over Galilee, his brother Philip  
was ruler<sup>[b]</sup> over Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias  
was ruler<sup>[c]</sup> over Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of  
Annas and Caiaphas—God's word came to John son of

Zechariah in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts.

*These are the ancient words revealed to us anew:*

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**MESSAGE: “Expectations”**

I’m going to hazard a guess here, even though I’m not an expert and I haven’t done any scientific experimentation but I believe that on December 24, children in our country have the highest expectations of any other day in the year. Celebrating a birthday is probably up there, too. Why, you say? Because of the gifts and surprises. That’s what children expect on Christmas.

The people in the days of Jesus didn’t really know about Christmas gifts and birthday parties. What were their expectations? Let’s look at our readings again. We must remember, the ancient people only had their writings, what the rabbis taught them, and the stories they had heard from their ancestors. They didn’t have the Bible, or paintings of what artists believed scenes from the past looked like. No picture books. No movies. So whatever their expectations were, it did not include toys (for children and adults).

The first reading from Malachi actually came from the story of Zechariah’s prophecy hints at things to come,

while reflecting refrains from long before. Zechariah’s contribution was praise to the God who is, who has been, and who always will be working among God’s people. The prophecy previews several claims of this Gospel:

- God remains faithful to God’s promises
- God’s way is salvation
- God’s path is peace.

Zechariah was the father of John the Baptizer. Perhaps the people were expecting someone like him.

It continues by pointing backward, to God’s long-established covenant with God’s people. This is the “Lord God of Israel” (Luke 1:68), who has raised up a savior “in the house of his servant David” (1:69). God’s promises have come “from of old” through the prophets (1:70), given first to “our ancestors” (1:72) in an oath sworn to “our ancestor Abraham.” Whatever else might be happening that day at the Temple—or later, through the life of this child—it is in line with God’s holy covenant with the people (1:72).

So it sounds like the ancient people were expecting a messenger, a Messiah, and most of all, they wanted peace. I’m sure we would all love to have world peace. Do we ever get tired of praying for that, but maybe we don’t expect it. Do you remember the pony we requested every Christmas? Yeah, me neither. Maybe

we should change our expectations. What's on your list?  
Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC: "Angels from the Realms of Glory"**

Video

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

Creator God, thank you for continuing your activity in creation, maintaining and sustaining the forces that keep our physical world in balance. Redeemer God, You have entered our sphere of life in Jesus of Nazareth, to complete your saving work in our world, repairing the ravages of human disobedience and conflict so that peace may be more than a cessation of war, bombings, plots and counterplots, so that a perfect humanity finally will be regained.

Timeless Father, Eternal Brother, Mothering Spirit: you have set the units of families and seek to teach us to love others as we love ourselves, honestly and graciously. May we be teachable in every generation from the oldest to the youngest knowing how great your wisdom is and how fallible we can be. Grant us the spirit of forgiveness that, confessing our faults to one another, we may forgive and be forgiven.

God of the past and of the future, hear our prayers for the people of your world in which you live, and in which

there are also powers of evil and of death. Overcome evil in and through us.

Call the nations of the world to new experiments in cooperation so that all the gifts of the earth's people may be put to good use for the common good. Guide the leaders of both management and labor to new ways of achieving economic justice in the sharing of profit and in serving fairly the needs of consumers.

Gracious God, give continuing wisdom and skill to all in the medical community who look for new ways of healing and helping us to live longer. Bless as well all who are involved in hospice and others also dedicated to helping us through the final valley of the shadow of death. Bring comfort to all who are sick, lonely, depressed, and oppressed. May the birth of your son, Jesus, be a bright light into their hearts.

We pray all these things in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ. . .

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**PRAYER RESPONSE:**

**Hear our prayer oh God,  
Hear our prayer Oh God.  
Incline your ear to us and  
grant us your peace.**

**\*INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

As we share in God's grace, we seek ways to share our

gratitude with God and our neighbors. Through prayer and pondering, we discover new ways to give of ourselves to others.

**OFFERTORY: “ Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”**  
**John M. Rasley**

**\*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 THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

**\*CLOSING HYMN: 121 “All Earth is Waiting”**

**\*BENEDICTION:.**

**BENEDICTION RESPONSE: “Let There Be Peace on Earth”**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**POSTLUDE: “Prepare the Way of the Lord”**  
**Stephen Schwartz**