

Asbury United Methodist Church

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DECEMBER 24, 2023

Worship Leader: Joan White

Chancel: Michelle Dorsey, Rowe, Pace

* Please rise in body or in spirit

Advent Four: Being Present with Love

We Celebrate Our Presence Together: Gathering

Gathering Song "What Child" Trumpet, Warren Cole

Welcome and Asbury Mission Statement

We are Asbury! Abundantly thankful to God; Saved by Christ's resurrection; Blessed by God; United by Christ's love for each of us; Reaching out to our church family and our community; Yearning to tell the Good News to all by being Christ's voice, hands, and feet in the world.

Announcements

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

"What Can I Give Him" arranged by Mark Hayes

See Music Notes document about obtaining this music

Together

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Joan White: The faith narrative is careful to show us a lineage from King David to Jesus. It is no ordinary lineage; it is one that began in the shepherding of sheep, of leading and delivering the people in search of a home. Mary's womb becomes part of that lineage of love, offering the world the gift of God's presence "in the flesh." As we enter the story of the birth of Love Among Us, we are invited to be present with love. We may think the perfect gift is outside our reach to give, but in reality we have all that we need... the heart's love and presence.

Together

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Kerri Dorsey: We unwrap a present on this last Sunday of Advent with great anticipation for the gift that God will reveal.

People: We open our hearts as we open the gift!

Kerri Dorsey: The promise of Love is the Divine Gift we receive.

People: And what will we do with it?

Kerri Dorsey: The gift of love is the essence of the birth of Christ. The Holy One wanted to be so present to us that God's Spirit became flesh in order to inhabit the gifts of touching, healing, comforting, and challenging.

Love is the clarion call to us as Jesus' disciples.

The more love we put into the world, the better the world will be.

People: We light this Candle of Love as a sign that we will be Present with Love in the world.

Together

Announcements

1. Christmas Eve joint worship service will be on Dec. 24 at 5 p.m. at the church.

Tau Cross

The cross hanging above the altar for the Advent season is called the Tau Cross. It is so named because it resembles the Greek letter of that name. It is also called the Old Testament Cross because, according to tradition, the pole on which Moses lifted up the brazen serpent was a Tau Cross. This is the original form of a cross. The cross was made many years ago by Robert Baldwin Sr.

Birthdays

24th Janice Anderson, 28th Michelle Dorsey, 28th Allison McGovern

29th Joann Mancini, 30th Jordan Jones

Flowers

The flowers on the altar this week are given to the glory of God and in loving memory of Family and friends spending Christmas Day in heaven by Carol Pace, Alice Pace, Diana Redmond, and Donna Rowe.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Unison Prayer of Presence

Let us pray:

**Holy Living Light of God,
you are our Loving Presence.
Let this love grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Love to others.
Unwrap and open our hearts.
May it be so.
Amen.**

Opening Hymn

UMH 384 "Love Divine, All Love's Excelling" vs 1,2,4

The Peace

□ The Word Present Among Us: Proclaiming □

First Readings

2 Samuel 7: 1-11 and Psalm 89: 1-4

Joan White: King David didn't start out a king. He started out as a caretaker of sheep. God's anointed ones — whether that is a King like David or the "Christ," which means "anointed one" — come time and again in our faith narrative from humble beginnings, from those who tend carefully to those in their care. Hear this excerpt from the Book of Second Samuel:

When David finally settled into the palace, and YHWH gave him rest from enemies on every side, he said to the prophet Nathan, "Here I am living in this house of cedar while the Ark of God sits in a tent!" Nathan replied to David, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for YHWH is with you." That night the word of YHWH came to Nathan, and said, "Go and tell my servant David that this is what YHWH wants: 'Are you the one to build me a Temple? I have been without a Temple from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a Tent as my dwelling place. Wherever I traveled with the people of Israel, did I ever say to the governors whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a Temple made out of cedar?" "Now then, tell my servant, David, "This is what YHWH Omnipotent says: I took you from the pastures and from following sheep to be the ruler of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and destroyed all your enemies in your path. I will give you fame like the fame of the great ones on the earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel. I will plant them where they will have a home of their own — a place where they will never be disturbed. Never again will the sinners oppress them as they did in the past ever since the time I appointed judges to lead my people Israel. I will give you security from all your enemies. . . . Furthermore, I alone will establish your house."'"

The gift of God's presence permeates the scriptures and finds its culmination in the presence of God among us, living and in the flesh. God's love is steadfast, from generation to generation. We are the heirs of the kin-dom, the family, of God. No matter what happens in this world, we are not alone. Let us read responsively:

*Forever I will sing the wonders of your love, YHWH,
proclaiming your faithfulness to all generations!*

***I'll tell them that your love stands firm forever,
your fidelity is fixed in the heavens.***

"I have made a covenant with my chosen;

Joan White: If you were here the first Sunday of Advent, you may remember that our theme song, "What Can I Give Him," is an adapted verse from a Christina Rossetti poem called "In the Bleak Midwinter." She wrote many things in her 19th century existence, but another one that got handed down from generation to generation is the song, "Love Came Down at Christmas." And so it is fitting that we bookend our Advent services with this carol by Rossetti.

UMH 242 "Love Came Down at Christmas" vs 1,2,4

Benediction

"Every day we seek to discern how to live faithfully as we surf the Internet choosing which sites get our attention, as we choose news sources that will shape our worldview, as we buy groceries and steward our resources. We are always making choices about how we love the world that God so loves, how our attention, our presence, participates in the mission of God — abundant life for all."
[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

So now go and be truly present
so you may be a gift of presence for others.
That's all that is expected —
that the gift that is YOU
is the best gift you can give.

In the name of the Holy Presence,
the Divine Gift,
and the Spirit of Love that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.

Amen.

Postlude "Joy to the World" Trumpet, Warren Cole

We give thanks this week for...
[continue with the prayers of gratitude of your community and the world]

In this prayerful, present moment we ask you, Christ Jesus, the Greatest Gift of All,
to help us savor our journey toward the celebration of Christmas.
Help us recognize and create moments of sweet presence rather than filling the voids with the things that do not last.
Help us to stop, notice what we are experiencing, and accept it with open hearts and minds.
In doing this, we allow you to meet us in the right here, right now, right where we are.
Amen.

Together
Right here and right now we open our senses to see and perceive the gifts we've been given, to know and believe that what we must do is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.

Offering

Interlude "Every Valley Shall Be Exalted" Tenor, Frank Rose

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Jesus Christ, our burdens know,
Praise Spirit through whom our hearts grow, Praise Three-in-One, from here below.

Offering Prayer

Present to the World: Sending

Closing Hymn: UMH 238 "Angels We Have Heard on High" vs. 1,3,4

*sworn an oath to David, my faithful one:
**'I will establish your line forever,
and make your throne firm throughout all generations.'***

Witness to the Word "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"

Gospel Reading

Luke 1: 26-38

Kerri Dorsey: And so it is that the Child of Love comes from the most humble of families, though we are sure to be informed by the gospel writer that Joseph was from the lineage of David. While David had built a house for God in his time, Mary's womb became a house of the holy in hers. She accepts the role she is given... to be Present with Love growing inside of her.

Six months later, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary; she was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!" Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel's greeting meant.

The angel went on to say to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You'll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus —

'Deliverance. His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end.'" Mary said to the angel,

"How can this be, since I have never been with a man?" The angel answered

her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you — hence the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God. Know too that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a child in her old age; she who was thought to be infertile is now in her sixth month. Nothing is

impossible with God.” Mary said, “I am the servant of God. Let it be done to me as you say.” With that, the angel left her.

Song of Illumination

UMH#454 Open My Eyes, That I May See vs1

Open my eyes that I may see / glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key / that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Sermon

“Being Present with Love”

Rev. Yohan Go

Fully Present in the Moment: Praying

Prayers of the People

“Right Here, Right Now”

Together

*Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we’ve been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.*

Pastor: There is a saying that says, “love hurts.” Indeed, when we open ourselves to the gift of love for others, we risk the chance that our compassionate hearts will break for the world we live in. But the alternative — isolation and apathy — carries a great cost. We ourselves become the lonely ones, we ourselves are left with an atrophy of the heart, rather than its expansion. Being the gift of presence can complicate life but in the end, it is the only way to survive this human life.

We will begin our prayers with three questions, each followed by a short silence. Focusing intentionally on thoughts and memories can be a kind of prayer,

bringing our lives into a conversation with the Holy. I invite you to take a deep breath and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing that.

The first question is this: Who was a gift of presence to you this week? Did you experience their attention in a way that felt like a special connection? Take a moment to recall this in your mind’s eye, seeing it emerge like opening a gift. If you cannot recall such a moment, it is OK... this week you will notice these moments more deeply.

The second question is this: How did you offer yourself as a gift of presence? What did it feel like to extend your attentiveness and availability beyond yourself? Did you notice how it made a difference to someone else for you to be truly present to them?

The third question is this: Is it possible that God’s presence is felt more acutely in these moments when we truly tend to one another? What could you do this coming week that would allow God’s gift of Love to flow through you to someone else? It may be as simple as finding opportunities to speak an encouraging word. Or as complex as actually lifting up someone’s circumstances through volunteering or donating.

Together

***Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we’ve been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

Sharing Joy and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on those who are in distress.

We pray this week for...

[continue with the prayer concerns of your community and the world]

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on thanksgiving and joy.