

Asbury United Methodist Church

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DECEMBER 17, 2023

Worship Leader: Carl Bishop Jr.

Chancel: Kerri Dorsey

* Please rise in body or in spirit

Advent Three: Being Present with Joy

We Celebrate Our Presence Together: Gathering

Gathering Song “*Silent Night, Holy Night*”

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

Carl Bishop Jr: Today we will read the words of Isaiah offering a prophetic vision that Jesus then claims for his ministry. Likewise, we are called to claim the gift of being fully present with all people — those who mourn, those who grieve, those who have suffered indignity and oppression. Mary’s Magnificat is prophetic as well. She claims the overturning of injustice even before it has come to pass. In the difficulty of her situation, she “sings” with joy about the very real presence of God growing within her.

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.

Deb Rose: We unwrap a present on this third Sunday of Advent with great anticipation for the gift that God will reveal.

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

Deb Rose: The promise of Joy is the Divine Gift we receive.

***People:* And what will we do with it?**

Deb Rose: The gift of joy is not the equivalent of happiness, but rather the deep conviction that we are called to be present in the work of bringing about “great things” — a better world for those who need it most.

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

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.

Prayer of Presence

Let us pray:

**Holy Living Light of God,
you are our Joyful Presence.
Let this joy grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Joy to others.
Unwrap and open our hearts.**

Announcements

1. The SPR Committee has started collecting donations for our Asbury staff. Please give generously to demonstrate your appreciation of the fine work done by Hanna, Lori, Gary and of course Pastor Yohan. Your donations may be cash or checks written out to Asbury UMC with the notation Staff Gifts on the memo line and can be given to Diane Newman-Goins or to any member of SPRC. The last day for giving is Sunday, 12/17.
2. 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

17th Stephen Blanche, 19th Deb Marshall, 20th Zach Diffley,
23rd Carter Harrell, Jacob Harrell, Dawson David Whitham

Flowers

The flowers on the altar this week are given to the glory of God and in honor of the work of UMCOR disaster relief by Tim & Cami.

**May it be so.
Amen.**

Opening Hymn

UMH 89 "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" vs 1,2,4

The Peace

☐ **The Word Present Among Us: Proclaiming** ☐

First Readings

Isaiah 61: 1-4; 10 and Psalm 126: 1-3

Carl Bishop Jr. The prophet Isaiah declares in this morning's excerpt from chapter 61 that there is great joy when we know, and do, what is right. This scripture was powerful in the time when the Babylonian exile was over and the Hebrew people needed the words to express their praise and thanks. And it was powerful when Jesus used these same words to refer to the heart of the purpose of his ministry. Salvation from oppression and the joy of God continue to proceed through the ages to hand-in-hand. Let us read responsively:

*God has sent me to bring good news to those who are poor;
to heal broken hearts;
to proclaim release to those held captive
and liberation to those in prison;*

*to announce a year of favor from YHWH, and the day of God's vindication;
to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion —
to give them a wreath of flowers instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of tears, a cloak of praise instead of despair.*

They will be known as trees of integrity, planted by YHWH to display God's glory.

***They will restore the ancient ruins,
and rebuild sites long devastated;
they will repair the ruined cities,
neglected for generations...***

They will be known as trees of integrity,

planted by YHWH to display God's glory.

***I will joyfully exult in YHWH,
who is the joy of my soul!***

The Psalms are also written in the same time period — some poems of lament from exile and some written in the style of praise after the exile is over. Psalm 126 refers to the almost-unbelievable joy of returning to the homeland.

*When YHWH brought us captives back to Zion, we thought we were dreaming!
Our mouths were filled with laughter then, our tongues with songs of joy.
And from the nations we heard, "Their God has done great things for them."
Yes — YHWH has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

Witness to the Word "The Blessing of Christmas"

Gospel Reading

Luke 1: 41-55

Deb Rose: Luke is the Gospel author we draw from this week. The account of Mary visiting Elizabeth is the context for a description of joy that resides even in the midst of uncertainty and possible harm to Mary, the young pregnant woman at the margins of society. She believes with her whole heart that the child in her womb is just as the angel has declared... a gift from God, of God, the holiest of matter.

*As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished!" Mary said:
"My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.*

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 Joy that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.

Amen.

Postlude "Go Tell Him on the Mountain" Hanna Noh

Interlude “Marvel Not Joseph” by Ned and Alice

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 Carol

Carl Bishop Jr: We close our service with a Christmas carol as a way of remembering that Christ is born into our hearts every day. “Hark” is an old word that is a strong version of the phrase “Listen up!” Charles Wesley wrote over 6500 hymns in his lifetime in the 18th century. This was his way of inviting people to discover the presence of God resonating in their hearts, minds, and bodies through the music. We have recalled Isaiah’s prediction that we are the heirs to cloaks of joy instead of despair, we have heard the sound of the Psalmist’s laughter and joy, and we have experienced the prophetic Song of Mary. Now, along with composer Charles Wesley, we also give a thank you nod to the angels of the birth narrative for filling the skies with joyful praise at God present in the flesh with us.

UMH 240 “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” vs 1,2,3

Benediction

“No matter how busy one’s day is with chores or service, or even religious duties,
we must stop and become aware, in the present moment,
of God right here, right now.

Throughout the week, pause just for a moment
to ‘practice the presence of God,’
so as to be filled with joy.”

[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

*For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,
and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.
For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
and holy is your Name.
Your mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear you.
You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,
mindful of your mercy —
the promise you made to our ancestors —
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever.”*

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 Joy”

Rev. Yohan Go

Fully Present in the Moment: Praying

Prayers of the People
“Right Here, Right Now”

Sung slowly

*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.*

Leader: As we have done for the last two weeks, we will begin our prayers by taking time to stay fully present in this moment as we approach the holy mystery of Christmas. Too often we are afraid to allow joy to creep in, buoyed by small, ordinary things. How can we have joy when there is so much suffering? Being present with joy in the world is a subversive act as we proclaim that despair is dispelled when we make a connection with another. And in that connection, is connection to the ever-present God.

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 Joy 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.***

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.

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.

***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