

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, November 29, 2020



An Order of Worship to be followed in your home, along with our
worship video on your own
Preferably at 10:00am

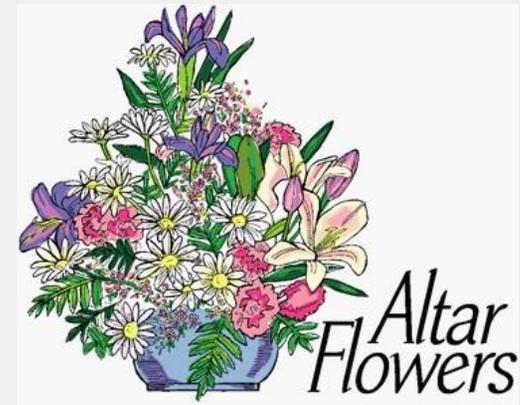
Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship on this Sunday.

We are glad you're worshipping with us today. Welcome to our
Virtch service today!

At Lakewood Congregational Church, we strive to be people of
extravagant welcome. Whether you are young or old, gay or
straight, single or partnered, happy or sad, confused or inspired,
street smart or college-educated, whether you can't pay your
bills or you have more than enough to share—no matter who you
are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here in
this place, to worship the God who welcomes us all.

Say, "May the Peace of Christ be with you"



*The flowers on the altar
are dedicated to the Glory of God
in loving memory of Donald Shultzaberger
from Robert Paraska*

Allan Boesak

Advent Credo

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

From *Walking on Thorns*, by Allan Boesak, Eerdmans, 2004.

Prelude

When God Is a Child by Brian Wren and Joan Fogg

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwen Delaney, alto; Ben Liu, tenor;

Noah Hamrick, bass; Ben Malkevitch, piano

(a remote collaboration)

Lighting of the First Advent Candle

Leader:

In our homes,
we gather around wreaths
to pray our lost hopes,
broken peace, limited joys,
and love so hard to find and share,
in this stay-at-home season.
Our candles show that
we claim the power to call this season Advent:
when God's light comes into the world
and nothing can overcome it.

Second Leader:

We light the candle of hope in the face of all we have
lost, all we fear we'll lose, and all we are missing.

Leader:

God's hope shines on hopelessness,
and brightens the path toward peace.

Second Leader:

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come, lighting
hope on the wick of our lives so that we may shine on our
world. Amen

Advent Candle Lighting Song

Written and sung by Ben Malkevitch

Hymn

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

LCC Virtual Choir

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwen Delaney, alto;

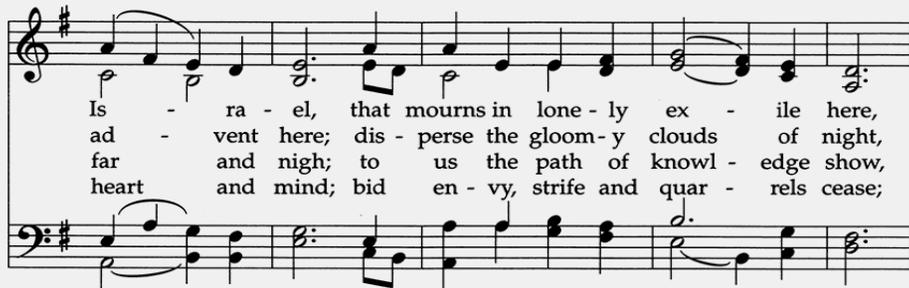
Michael Komperda, tenor; Tim Hampton and Robert Wenz, bass;

Ben Malkevitch, organ

Unison

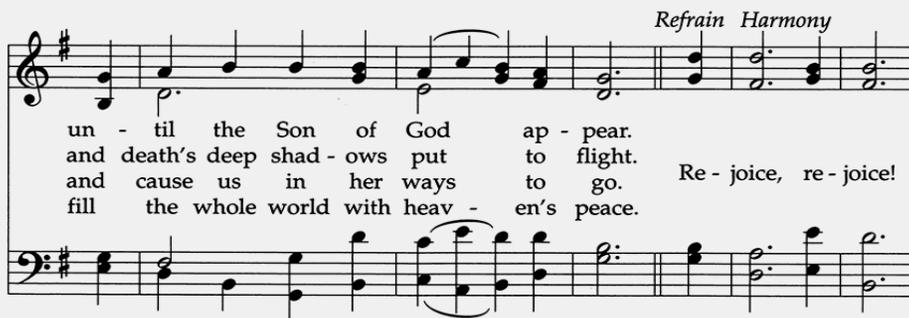


1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, thou Day - spring, come and cheer our spir - its by thine
3. O come, thou Wis - dom from on high, and or - der all things,
4. O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind all peo - ples in one

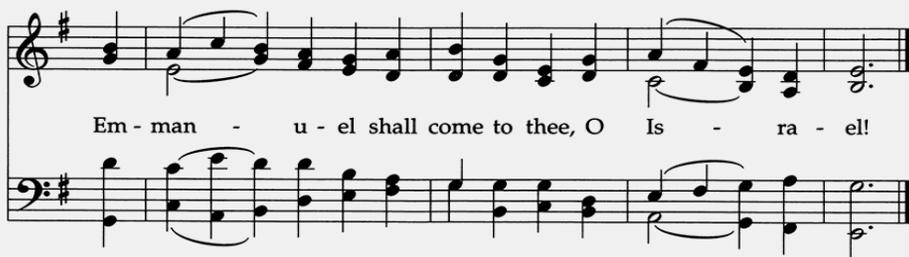


Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here,
ad - vent here; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night,
far and nigh; to us the path of knowl - edge show,
heart and mind; bid en - vy, strife and quar - rels cease;

Refrain Harmony



un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
and death's deep shad - ows put to flight.
and cause us in her ways to go. Re - joice, re - joice!
fill the whole world with heav - en's peace.



Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

Pastoral Prayer

God of this Advent season,
we come to you knowing that the world needs your mercy now
more than ever.

As we celebrate joyfully in anticipation of your coming son,
we know that joy does not come easily to everyone's heart.
So many of us are crying out for healing in a broken world.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray this day especially for children in places of neglect,
who struggle to find happiness and fulfillment,
who hunger for love and compassion.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for victims and survivors of domestic violence,
who endure pain and physical abuse,
who long for peace and healing.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for people who suffer from addiction in its many forms,
who seek an escape and look to the wrong places,
who despair at seeing no way out.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for worshiping communities of all faiths that seek to
heal the world,
who preach love in the face of hate and welcome the stranger
as a friend,
who work to better themselves and share their blessings with
others.

We pray for those worshiping communities especially this year,
as we seek creative connection and worship in our physical
distancing.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for those dear to us who struggle with cancer and other
illnesses,
who desire comfort in the face of constant pain,

who wait for healing and peace.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for those without shelter,
who shiver in the cold and fear the unknown,
who search for people to acknowledge their humanity.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones recently,
who grieve the loss of children and parents and other family and
friends,

who find the holidays a difficult time where joy is hard to find.

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We pray for those who we lift up to you in silence or out loud...

(personal petitions may be made here)

Gracious God, shine forth your mercy.

We trust that you are a God of righteousness, mercy, and
steadfast love.

We hope for the day when we are united together again, and
that in the midst of our current moment we might recognize
your Spirit and movement among us.

We pray this together in the prayer Jesus taught us, saying...

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, and lead us not into temptation but deliver
us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the
Glory forever. Amen.**

Invitation to the Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.

We bring forth our offerings - our tithes, our treasures, our last
coins - to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

Dedication Prayer

O Faithful One, accept these gifts of our hearts and hands. May
they be multiplied and magnified as the living presence of Christ
in the world. Amen.

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise God all creatures here below.

Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts:

Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Stephanie Fries

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity for ever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Message

***We've included this transcript for the benefit of people who do not have audio access on their computer. Please keep in mind that it is written in a way it's spoken, so the grammar/sentence structure may feel a bit awkward to read. Even so, this feels like the best way to communicate to as many people as possible.

- I. This weekend I am excited to begin Decking the Halls of my home, like the Smigelskis have already so beautifully done with this sanctuary. We will pull out our Christmas boxes and our Nativity scenes and play music as we decorate. This year we're going to make our first attempt to put lights up on the outside of our house, which I'm excited about. I have a collection of Nativity scenes the kids are excited to see again, and we'll hang our stockings on the fireplace and place the tree skirt around the tree. In years past, our kids have always been in the question-asking stage on decorating day. This year, with our youngest at 4.5, we're starting to get to the point where they have at least some memory of the traditions of the year before... they have expectations. They know where things should go.
- II. I was laughing this week when I found a list of the questions my oldest daughter asked the day we decorated our house when she was about 3.5 years old. I'll share them with you, in corrected grammar:

- A. Why are there socks on the fireplace?
 - B. Why do we have a tree in the house?
 - C. Why are there lights on the tree?
 - D. Are we going to put lights on our trees outside?
 - E. Is our tree a girl?
 - F. Is this angel a boy or a girl?
 - G. Why are there sheep in the Nativity?
 - H. What is Mary doing? Why is Jesus naked? Where is their Christmas tree?
 - I. What's in that present? Is that my present?
- III. Questions, questions, questions. I have realized, after several years of decking the halls with small children, just how confusing so many of our traditions are. This season is so thick with nostalgia, so full of traditions, and I don't know if we can even really explain why we do the things we do. Why are there socks on the fireplace? I don't really know.
- A. The more people I've gotten to know and stories I've heard through ministry and friendships, and the more I think about the questions that come out of curious young minds, I've realized how much of a potpourri of traditions we've created together as a human community. We have here on one hand this excitement about gift-giving and receiving. Then we have on this hand these deep-seated traditions about decoration and the visual appeal of Christmas. We have over here this idea of the "Spirit of Christmas" which is supposed to fill our workplaces and our towns and say that during this season more than any other, we put effort into kindness, giving, and joy. Then we have over here this consumerism that, if not kept in check, can overcome all else. We have over here, Santa Claus and reindeer and elves, and over here: the Nativity. And, beloved, as all of the elements of this

potpourri are filling the air they are commingling with So. Many. Feelings. Feelings of excitement and joy and anticipation...feelings of grief, loss, envy, inadequacy, regret.

IV. I love the season of Advent. I think it's my favorite. Although I feel like I say that at the beginning of every Liturgical Season. I love the Liturgical arc. But I do love Advent. It recognizes a breaking through, a breaking forth, the anticipation of birth. It acknowledges the already and the not yet of the Kingdom of God: that God's Kingdom is already here on earth, and it is also still yearning to be born. Advent is about watching and noticing the hope, peace, joy, and love that are already present in our world, while at the same time waiting and anticipating for the breaking forth of that hope, peace, joy, and love in a new way.

A. It is a challenge to explain to children that the focus of this time of year is the birth of a baby, whom they will never literally see or hold, who fulfilled prophecies and brought about hope and humbled the powerful with non-violent resistance and touched the faces of the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and oppressed, so that we might recognize that all of God's children are worthy of love and belonging. This isn't a challenge just for small children; this is a challenge for all of us. How can a scene that is intentionally humble (point to nativity scene) become the focus and the highlight of a season that is intentionally flamboyant and extravagant?

V. The scripture from Isaiah is the one I wrote about in this year's LCC and Trinity Lutheran Advent Devotional. If you didn't receive that devotional in the mail, by the way, and you'd like it, please let us know. It is full of beautiful messages from our two church families.

A. This scripture represents one of the key sentiments of the Advent season. This big question: O God when will you come down here?? I wrote in the devotional, Isaiah is staring up at the Heavens, "WHEN WILL YOU COME DOWN HERE?!" but God is already right here, whole and Holy, just waiting for Isaiah to understand that there is nowhere we can go to escape from God's abiding presence.

B. God is not up there. Or at least not *only* up there. God is here: in the powerful wind and rushing river, in the gentle breeze and cup of water, at the hospital bedside of the patient who can't have visitors and the rowdy wrestling of small siblings who miss their friends. God is in the technology and the miracle of modern medicine. God is in the waiting and the transformation.

C. We live in this balance of recognizing the ways that God is working in and around and among us, yet still hoping and believing that a better world is possible. God is here— among us, with us, working through us, comforting us, and at the same time God has not yet brought about the Kingdom— there is still pain and brokenness, there are still wars and racism and hatred.

D. The season of Advent is about that balance of recognizing the peace that was brought to us through this humble birth and yet hoping and having faith that the humble birth will happen once again in order to bring about peace to the remaining brokenness of the world.

VI. My favorite Advent devotional book is written by Quinn Caldwell. I want to share with you a bit of it which touches on the theology of Here and Not Yet:

A. "There's waiting, and then there's waiting. Sometimes it's the oh-God-when-will-this-pain-end

kind of waiting. Sometimes it's just annoying, like waiting for your turn at the restroom. Sometimes it's worse, like waiting out the period after a gnarly divorce. But there's another kind of waiting, too, a delicious shivery kind: There's smelling the almost-done pie in the oven. There's sitting in the theater listening to the opening theme of a movie you've been waiting year to see. There's feeling the baby kick you in the bladder a week before due date. Advent— those weeks leading up to Christmas— is about both kinds of waiting. On the one hand, it's about looking around at the state of the world, at the wars and the climate and the corporations and the seasonal allergies, and longing for God to end the wait and show up already. It's about choosing to see God's absence. On the other, it's about choosing to see God's almost-presence. It's about looking around at the state of the world, at the struggling schoolteachers and rich philanthropists doing the right thing, at the babies being born and the love being made and the ancient stars shining bright as hope in the cold night sky. It's about looking around at all of this, reading the signs, and knowing that everything is about to change. Advent is about standing in the slop and calling "How long, Lord?" But just as surely, it's about standing in the shining, shivering with delight and singing, "Come, Lord, Come."

VII. Brokenness in the world is not new. When we read Isaiah's call to the Heavens, we are able to see the pain that he experienced as a prophet—the wishes and desires he had for the world were so much like ours. In Isaiah's world, there is so much violence. Justice doesn't always prevail. The weak get weaker and the strong get stronger. Then we look at the state of our world today. We feel the

brokenness of racism and greed. We see the unfathomable violence of extremism throughout the world. We see the way this terrible virus has invaded every area of our lives, and the way it's disproportionately impacting those who were already disproportionately impacted by so many areas of our society. We see diseases like cancer and dementia destroy the minds and the lives of those we love. While each and every one of us experiences our own internal battles with physical, mental, and emotional pain, regret, grief, despair. "Will you just come down here, O God??"

VIII. But this light of hope reminds us. God is already here.

IX. During the season of Advent, friends, we watch and we wait and we hope for the world to continue working its way towards the vision of Christ. Each and every year, when Jesus is born on Christmas day, we experience the promise that light outshines darkness. We experience the promise that violence can be overcome by the humility and reconciliation that Jesus brought to us.

A. Our children's questions are not much different from the rest of ours. I love the boldness and beauty of this season. I love the lights and the music and the extravagance of it all. I love the giving and receiving and the joy. But there is a challenge in that. The challenge for us, then, as people living in the potpourri of the season; as Christians living in the midst of the extravagance, is to pause and perceive and notice and imagine in the midst of it all, how God is being made known to us here and now. Notice the places where Jesus' vision is coming alive. Make real the ideas that he taught. Perceive the beauty of the earth and magnify the hope that the prophets proclaimed. Become aware of the places Christ needs to be born into, and in those places make reconciliation known. Celebrate this

season, my friends, but recognize that in the midst of it God is both here and not yet; Jesus is both resurrected and still in the womb. The world is both reconciled and broken. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

Beloved, let us go out into the world, or stay right where you are refreshed in hope,
Awake, alert,
attuned to your presence
ready to join your work of blessing for all. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Advent Hope

Improvised by Ben Malkevitch on organ

Offering and Contribution Collection

Please consider fulfilling your pledges during this time. Financial gifts are always welcome, and our church feels the call to respond to the needs around us as they arise. Financial stability allows us to do so more effectively. So, let us give generously of our time, talent, treasure to further the work of God in our community. You can do so in the following ways:

- Writing and mailing a check to Lakewood Congregational Church, 1375 W. Clifton Blvd., Lakewood, OH 44107
- Texting STEWARD to 44-321
- Sending a gift through your bank's online bill pay
- By using the donate button on the church's website www.lcc-church.org
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Our Mission Statement proclaims our common goal.

*We strive to be a welcoming,
worshipping community of faith,
helping people discover and deepen
their relationship with God, growing as
disciples of Christ, and reaching out in
faith and loving service.*

In keeping with the spirit of our Mission Statement,

*Lakewood Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ,
is an Open and Affirming congregation.
We welcome people of all sexual orientation,
ages, differing abilities, and ethnic, economic,
and racial backgrounds into
the full life and ministry of our church.
We declare this in the name of the Still Speaking God,
whose Son, Jesus Christ, welcomed
all people into God's circle of grace.*

