

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, December 13, 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"

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



***The flowers on the altar are dedicated to the
Glory of God in loving memory of Karen Blesse,
who passed away from cancer this September.***

***The flowers are also dedicated in celebration
of the birth of Karen's granddaughter, McKayla Jude
Weiland, who was born on December 4, 2020.
May McKayla be blessed with health and happiness and
find comfort in the knowledge that she has the best
guardian angel that anyone could ask for
The Hampton Family***

Prelude

In the Bleak Mid-Winter

Ariel Karas (OPUS 216), violin; Ben Malkevitch, cello and piano
(a remote collaboration)

Lighting of the Third 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.
We affirm that our candles mean
we claim the power to call this season Advent,
when God's light comes into the world
and nothing can overcome it.
We light the candles of hope and peace.

Second Leader:

We now light the candle of joy in spite of missing so many
things we thought were essential to a merry Christmas.
We recognize that joy can enter in among us in a new
way this year.

Leader:

God's joy ignites embers under loss and sorrow and
brightens the path to love.

Second Leader:

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come, lighting
hope, peace and joy on the wick of our lives so that we
may shine on our world with a simple smile, an unexpected
laughter. Amen

Advent Candle Lighting Song by Ben Malkevitch

Sung by Avery and Penny Spahr; Evelyn, Amos, and Suzie
d'Agostino

I want to read you a poem by an Episcopal Priest, the Rev. Dr.
Alla Renee Bozarth. She wrote this poem aligning Mary's
experience in childbirth with Jesus' experience in his death.

Before Jesus
Was his mother.

Before supper
In the upper room,
Breakfast in the barn.

Before the Passover Feast,
A feeding trough.
And here, the altar
Of earth, fair linens
Of hay and seed.
Before his cry,
Her cry.
Before his sweat
Of blood,
Her bleeding
And tears.
Before his offering,
Hers.

Before the breaking
Of bread in death,
The breaking of her
Body in birth.
Before the offering
Of the cup,
The offering of her
Breast.
Before his blood,
Her blood.
And by her body and blood
Alone, his body and blood
And whole human being.

The wise ones knelt
To hear the woman's word
In wonder.
Holding up her sacred child,
Her God in the form of a babe,
She said: 'Receive and let
Your hearts be healed
And your lives be filled
With Love, for
This is my body,
This is my blood.'

Hymn *Blessed Be the God of Israel*

LCC Virtual Choir
Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto, Michael
Komperda and Ben Liu, tenors; Noah Hamrick and Robert Wenz,
basses

Unison

1. Blessed be the God of Is - rael, who comes to set us free,
 2. Now from the house of Da - vid a child of grace has come,
 3. On all by death im - pris - oned the sun be - gins to rise,

who vis - its and re - deems us, and grants us lib - er - ty.
 a Sav - ior who will lead us to our e - ter - nal home.
 the dawn - ing of for - give - ness up - on the sin - ner's eyes,

The proph - ets spoke of mer - cy, of free - dom and re - lease;
 Be - fore him goes the her - ald, fore - run - ner in the way,
 to guide the feet of pil - grims a - long the paths of peace;

God shall ful - fill the prom - ise to bring our peo - ple peace.
 the proph - et of sal - va - tion, the har - bin - ger of day,
 O bless our God and Sav - ior with songs that nev - er cease!

Invitation to the Offering

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.
 We bring forth our offerings - our tithes, our treasures, our least 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.

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace, give us the gift of open hearts and imagination, that we might be open to the wonder of a new world being born, that we might feel within us the promise of hope that Mary carried in her womb, that we might imagine ourselves as capable of bearing Christ to the world. Help us to leap with joy at the promise.
 Dear Lord, though you've asked us not to worry, we still worry about our world. We pray for peace and liberation for those impacted by violence in any way, for governments and systems that oppress those within their borders, for all who face the impact of the Coronavirus whether impacted directly by the disease, or whose income and livelihood is impacted by the shutdowns and stay-at-home advisories, or impacted by the isolation. All of it reminds us of how desperately your perfect Love is needed.

We pray for family and friends trying to meet the challenges of daily life, especially now—worried about children, fighting illness, overwhelmed by depression, struggling with relationships, grieving the death of a loved one. Break into those lives with at least a glimmer of light. Show us how we can help. Use the challenges in all of our lives, our worries and fears, the roadblocks

in our way, to draw us even more closely to you, because in the deepest places of our souls somehow we know you are here.

For those who yearn for the wonder of Christmas to well up again, show yourself this week—in the voice of a loved one on the phone or a beautifully written book, or a lovely new recipe. In the twinkling of lights, in the music in our homes, show yourself this week and help everything within us leap for joy. For the labor is beginning and soon the earth will be in the throes of birth. Let the Coming One come forth. And let us, the siblings of this Child of Joy. We pray this in the name of Emmanuel, saying, Our Father . . .

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.

Scripture Reading, read by Patti Komperda

Luke 1:39-55 Mary Visits Elizabeth

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Mary's Song of Praise

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

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. A few weeks ago my daughter Suzie and I were on a bike ride. She has one of those seats that attaches to my bike, and when the weather is nicer we ride together. We came up to a patch in the sidewalk where they were pouring new cement. It had caution tape around the perimeter, so I said to her, "Oh no. What will we do?" and she recounted to me the children's song many of us probably know: "We can't go over it. We can't go under it. We have to go through it." It's the going on a bear hunt song, or the going on a

squeegee hunt song... where each time we reach an obstacle on our journey, we go right through it in pursuit of the hunt-- through the water, through the mud, through the tall, tall grass, through the dark cave.

- A. I laughed and told Suzie that we wouldn't go through the wet cement; we went around it. But I thought to myself, that children's song sure would preach right about now. As we look at the obstacle the world has given us, is there anything more true than: "Can't go over it. Can't go under it. We have to go through it."?
 - B. I would love nothing more than to go under, or over, or around this pandemic...to find a different way through. A way that didn't require us to maintain a state of physical separation; a way that didn't put our loved ones at risk; a way that didn't stretch our healthcare professionals to exhaustion; a way that didn't destroy our small businesses and dishearten our children and teachers, a way that didn't cause so much tragedy. But indeed as much as we've tried and wished we could-- we simply can't go over it. Can't go under it. We have to go through it.
 - C. One of the realities that has gotten me through this particularly difficult landscape up to this point, is the fact that we are on this journey in solidarity with each other. There is no one who hasn't been touched by this pandemic in some way. Nobody has found a way under, over, or around it. We are all going through it.
- II. The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is such an important one because it shares an example of solidarity. When Gabriel came to Mary to tell her of the child in her womb, and Elizabeth knew of her own unexpected pregnancy after years of infertility, they may have said, "Can't go over this, can't go around this, we gotta go

through it." So Mary went with haste to a Judean town to enter the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, so that she might know this isn't a road she has to travel alone.

- A. Mary and Elizabeth sought each other out in solidarity because they share a feeling with one another that is very unique. They know what it feels like to find out about a child in their womb who they never expected. They know what it feels like to be disregarded in their communities, whether it was Elizabeth in her married infertility or Mary in her unwed pregnancy. They know what it feels like to be lifted up when they are the lowly. They know what it feels like to be called Holy by God, but held in skepticism by society. They know what it feels like to have a child leap in their wombs. And so they seek each other out.
- III. Seeking each other out in solidarity is a thing we humans are inclined to do. The message that is being conveyed by Luke here in this passage doesn't have to be about literal pregnancies and literal births. It is about the ways in which, when we are facing a transformative moment, we are inclined to go with haste to the people who can resonate with us in our experience.
- A. Let me give you a few examples.
 - 1. We flock to grief support groups, dementia support groups, adoption or foster parenting support groups, divorce support groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, or other groups to help us process our own addictions or the codependency of people we love.
 - 2. We have La Leche League, PFLAG, career-based cohort groups.
 - 3. Sometimes our running with haste to be in solidarity happens in performing arts groups- - bands, choirs, theatre, dance, art.

4. Sometimes running with haste to be in solidarity happens in sports and athletics.
 5. I think that for many of us, it happens with church. We do this when we don't know if we can carry a weight alone and so we run with haste to someone who will get it, carry it with us, and be the village that helps us through.
- B. This is a beautiful inclination that God created us to have-- the inclination towards community. The deep, genuine pull within our hearts that tells us we shouldn't be alone.
 - C. I think Mary knew that as soon as she heard the news from the Angel Gabriel. I think she felt that deep, genuine pull within her heart to run with haste to her Beloved Elizabeth. That in order to gain the fortitude for this journey, she needed to be in community.
- IV. So of course it is painful that right now the obstacle that we can't go over, that we can't go under, that we have to go through, is one that includes a constant refrain about staying away from all of the people we long to run with haste towards. What does it mean to be in solidarity with and also physically separate from our community?
- A. I continue to invite you to open your hearts to the promise that if Jesus was born in an unexpected and less-than-ideal place 2050 years ago, Jesus can be born in an unexpected and less-than-ideal place today too. Open your hearts to the possibility that this tumultuous landscape might allow for solidarity, connection, and birth in a way that you never expected or believed to be possible, even as you "gotta go through it."
- V. Since the year I discovered I was pregnant for the first time on December 23rd, the image of Mary as "Theotokos," the God-Bearer, has been an important one to me. It is a Holy

and Powerful thing to bring any child into the world, but to carry Emmanuel in the womb? While Mary was the Mother of God in a very specific way, Theotokos also speaks to us, because we are all meant to be mothers of God. Meister Eckhart, the German Dominican monk wrote to us about that in the 13th century. He wrote:

- A. "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us."
- B. The question Meister Eckhart invokes in us, beloved, is "how are we giving birth to God in this world today?" Where is our "let it be with me according to your word" response to the call? How are our souls magnifying the Glory of God? How are we mirroring the grace of Mary and delivering God into the world in the fullness of God's timing for us? For Mary is not a passive tool in God's plan, and neither are we. Indeed we, like Mary, have an active role to play in the unfolding of God's Kingdom among us.
- C. Typically we would seek solidarity in this calling: find ourselves gathered with others who are looking to give birth to God in the world, to participate in the unfolding of the Kingdom. And it is deeply painful for us that in our moment of traveling through this calling, we are separate.

VI. When Mary comes into the presence of her Beloved Elizabeth, she sings. The Magnificat is a song. I don't know that she would have found the joy to sing this revolutionary song if it weren't for the solidarity of her cousin, the

leaping and the joy of that unborn nephew, the “blessed are you among women” compliment of her kinswoman.

A. This revolutionary song is indeed an act of resistance. You see, the name Mary means Rebellion. We don’t note that very often. We see her as so gentle and calm, but the name Mary means Rebellion, and she sings a rebellious song... a song of resistance. She sings a song of God’s preference for the last, the lost, the least, the marginalized and the oppressed, the poor and the hungry, under an empire that is doing everything in their power to build and maintain a structure of hierarchy for those who already have power. In this moment in Luke’s gospel, he unites two strong women in divine community, and in the strength they have gained from each other Mary sings about God’s passion for justice in ways her son would later repeat in his teachings. “God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” We cannot imagine the strength it took to hold within her a life she never knew she’d be called to hold, in a society that stoned to death women like her, and then sing aloud a song of resistance and rebellion. But in this Holy Solidarity with her Beloved Elizabeth, how could she keep from singing?

VII. Again I come back to that question, “How do we seek Holy Solidarity, empowerment, joy, passion while being physically apart?” Most of us don’t have a lot of practice with this question. And it seems to me that the best answer we have is the one we teach our children in song: “If you can’t go over it, and you can’t go under it, then you gotta go through it.”

- A. This year just as much as every year, we are Theotokos, we are Mothers of God, we are people who bring about the wonder and mystery of God’s Kingdom of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love here on earth.
- B. Meister Eckhart asks this question: “What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture?” What good is it to us for God to give birth to God’s son if we do not also seize the opportunity to give birth to him in this unexpected and less-than-ideal landscape along our journey. This child knows how to be born; are we willing to participate in that birth this year too? Beloved we remain in solidarity because while we are apart, we are in it together. Use that solidarity as empowerment, as joy, as passion, because we gotta go through it.

Thanks be to God. Let it be with each of us according to Your Word. Amen.

Alternative Gift Market by Vicki Smigelski

Benediction

Beloved go forth from this place in joy, knowing that we are all called to be mothers of God, bearing Christ into the world in whatever way you are called and reaching out to those in solidarity to those who are on the journey with you. We pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Advent Joy

Improvised by Ben Malkevitch on organ

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.*

