

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, December 6, 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

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but still nothing is as shining as it should be for you. Under the sink, for example, is an uproar of mice – it is the season of their many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves and through the walls the squirrels have gnawed their ragged entrances – but it is the season when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow; what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox, the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know that really I am speaking to you whenever I say, as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

- Mary Oliver

Prelude

Let There Be Peace on Earth by Jill Jackson-Miller and Sy Miller
Noah Hamrick, bass; Ben Malkevitch, piano (a remote collaboration)

Words are included in the video if you would like to sing along!

Invitation to the Offering

We are a people of peace,
living in the light of God's promises.
In this spirit may we so give.

Dedication Prayer

God of hope and wonder, even surrounded by confusion and trouble we look for you. Take these gifts and use them for acts of

justice, peace, mercy, and hope. Receive also the gifts of our time and our actions that are just as precious to you as silver and gold. Amen.

Lighting of the Second 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
nothing can overcome it.

We light the candle of hope.

Second Leader:

We now light the candle of peace
in the face of violence and destruction.

Leader:

God's peace illuminates the possibility
of reconciliation and healing
and brightens the path to joy.

Second Leader:

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

Advent Candle Lighting Song by Ben Malkevitch

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

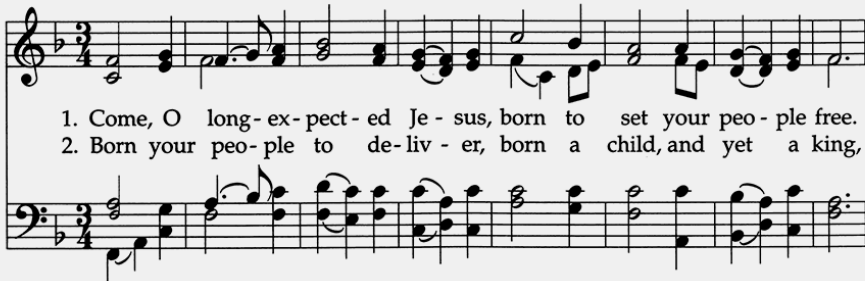
Hymn *Come, O Long-expected Jesus*

LCC Virtual Choir

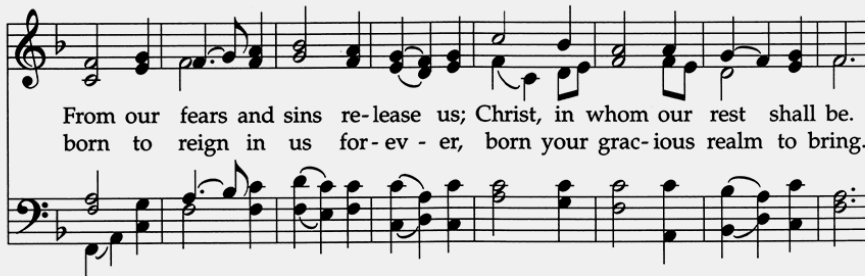
Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwen Delaney, alto;

Michael Komperda and Ben Liu, tenors; Noah Hamrick, Peter

Hampton, and Tim Hampton, basses; Ben Malkevitch, organ



1. Come, O long-ex-pect-ed Je-sus, born to set your peo-ple free.
2. Born your peo-ple to de-liv-er, born a child, and yet a king,



From our fears and sins re-lease us; Christ, in whom our rest shall be.
born to reign in us for-ev-er, born your grac-ious realm to bring.



You, our strength and con-so-la-tion, come sal-va-tion to im-part;
By your own e-ter-nal Spir-it rule in all our hearts a-lone;



dear de-sire of man-y a na-tion, joy of man-y a long-ing heart.
by your all-suf-fi-cient mer-it raise us to your glo-rious throne.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God,

We place ourselves in your presence.

Our minds and our spirits are cluttered.

Help us make space for you.

Help us to be fully present here, now.

We release to you all that we have done this week-
whether for good or for ill.

We release all that we feel like we should have done this
week, but did not do.

We release all of the people
who weigh on our hearts and minds this morning.

We release our fears.

We release our anxiety.

We release our impatience.

We release our pride.

All of the thoughts,
all of the feelings that pull us away from you, O God,
we release.

[silence]

And now with open hearts
we receive what you offer us now:

We receive the gift of this space and this time.

We receive the gift of being with each person here.

We receive the Holy Spirit's presence within us
for guidance and healing.

We receive the silence.
We receive the music.

Fill us now with the peace of your deep, abiding presence.
We offer all of ourselves to you,
our One God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Amen

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 Nicky Wills

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the
LORD,

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,

and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Here is your God!"

See, the Lord GOD comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead the mother sheep.

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.

Before I begin I'd like to read another scripture lesson from the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The word of God for the People of God.

Please pray with me. God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

- I. This week's snowfall was magnificent in so many ways. The sheer amount of snow that we received for our first snowfall of the year was just such a magical shock to my kids and even to me, and I suspect for so many of you. We didn't even have our winter gear out and ready to wear, when the kids were bursting at the door to go out and play

in it. Big snowfalls are always so disruptive, because before anything can be done, driveways and pathways must be shoveled. We can't move forward with our day until we prepare a way.

- A. The scripture passages today are about preparing the way; about opening up a route for the Messiah to arrive. When Isaiah describes this route, he is describing it to a group of people who have been in exile, who have been wandering often very hopelessly through the wilderness. To them, this idea of a route that is easily traveled— a route unburdened by obstacles— a route that is straight and flat and accessible— is the best promise they can imagine in the moment. It's an image that would speak volumes to God's people who had recently wandered across all terrains.
- II. When John the Baptizer reflects on the passage, he speaks to a world desperately in need of a Messiah. Before baptism took on the definition that we as Christians have given it, there was a tradition in Israel for observant Jews called the Mikveh. The Mikveh was full immersion in water before entering the temple to worship. It was a ritual cleansing. But as often happens with traditions, this one evolved into a status symbol. Those who had a lot of wealth and power participated in Mikveh's much like a private jacuzzi. The water was fresh and warm, and infused with incense. A towel awaited them when they got out. Those who did not have a lot of wealth and power took their Mikveh in something more like a crowded public swimming pool— bathing in whatever had washed off those who had arrived before. The water was whatever temperature it happened to be. And then there were those who had no money at all; they were excluded. They could not bathe and they could not enter the temple to worship God. This ritual had become a statement of power and status, and therefore

turned faith in God into an exclusive practice. John came along, here in this passage we read today, and he created a space where all people could come to be bathed; where all people could prepare to enter the temple. People from the whole Judean countryside and ALL the people of Jerusalem came to him...John created a place where faith could be available and accessible to all.

- III. Advent is about opening doors; about creating ways for the Messiah to arrive. Advent is about preparing for Christ to come— preparing for God to be revealed, and born anew.
 - A. In many ways I am grieving all that we are missing this year, from school concerts to Christmas parties to church traditions. But a shift in perspective reminds me that we have been gifted with a beautiful spiritual challenge-- the challenge to open new doors and create ways for the Messiah to arrive even in the midst of our unprecedented reality. Jesus was born in an unexpected and less-than-ideal place 2050 years ago, and Jesus will be born in an unexpected and less-than-ideal place this year too.
 - B. During this season of Advent in 2020, how will we prepare the way? How will we create ways for the Messiah to be born, to arrive in our homes and in our hearts? Every time we reach out with kindness to make a phone call or send a note...every time we listen to music and decorate a little...when we read our Advent devotionals...when we give gifts to loved ones and make financial contributions to the organizations and causes that are most important to us...we are preparing the way.
 - C. The Spiritual challenge we have is to consider what needs to be shoveled away, cleaned up, cleared away, in order for us to recognize this birth this season.

- D. Can you hear the voice of John the Baptizer asking you what roadblock you need to tear down, what brokenness you need to let go of? Can you sense the need for the spiritual cleansing that washes away any dirt and grime that may have built up over time? What valleys need to be raised? The valleys of grief, despair, over-function, addiction. What hills need to be made low? The hills of greed, elitism, pride.

- IV. In a broader picture, my friends, we look at the weary brokenness of our world and we see the mountains of injustice. Around the world we see the bumpy and dangerous roads that prevent God's children from accessing basic needs. We see valleys of poverty and mountains of violence. What would happen, my friends, if we embraced this season to take steps towards preparing the way? If we worked together to clear the ice-covered driveway of injustice? If we poured salt down to melt the stigma of mental illness, addiction, and trauma? If we created bridges and pathways for reconciliation and equality; bridges strong and firm, pathways clear and dry? How then, might the Glory of God be revealed?
- V. On a morning when the task of shoveling must be completed before the rest of the day can begin, I often think about the mail carrier. Ours comes pretty early in the day, so when I wake up to snow I'm mindful that we want to get the driveway cleared so that he'll be able to safely approach our house. We do that because we want to make it more accessible to him, not because he won't come if we don't do it. You know, on the front of the Postal building in New York city is the inscription: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." The mail carrier will bring our mail whether we shovel or not; but I'd like to clear a way for him. It's much more hospitable and courteous if we help to clear the way.

VI. In a similar way, we are invited to help to prepare a way for Emmanuel, God-With-Us, Jesus Christ to come. Whether we shovel or not, this birth will still happen. God has a way of lowering the mountains and bringing up the valleys. God has a way of coming into the middle of the brokenness and despair regardless of how icy and thickly-covered the driveway is, and making God's light shine. Whether we shovel or not, this birth will still happen. But I'd like to clear a way. There's so much hospitality and grace, and spiritual growth, in the clearing.

VII. Last week, I talked about the theology of Here and Not Yet. I said that 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.

A. 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.

VIII. What might happen, beloved, if we each did one thing this Advent to occupy the overlap between Heaven and Earth? What if we used this bizarre season to clear the roadblocks in our lives and in our world with the same urgency in which we approach the need to shovel our driveways after a large snowfall? What if we couldn't even start our days, without first shoveling out a way for the birth of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love within and among us.

IX. The Messiah will come. The Messiah will come over bumpy roads and over straight roads; over frozen roads and over salted roads, over broken relationships and over reconciled

ones, over wars and over peace. The Messiah will come right over this pandemic and our physical separation. We cannot prevent him from coming. But it will be so much more powerful to receive him if we've cleared the way.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

Holy God, We give thanks for your creation: fragile, yet fruitful enough for all. We give thanks that you call us into community where love and justice may flourish, enough for all. We give thanks that you invite us on this Advent journey. Awake, curious, longing to meet you, we set out for your table of grace. You light our path one step at a time, beckoning us onto a Way that offers us new eyes to explore the vision of the Promised One; new senses to feel the heartbeat of the Vulnerable One new courage to share the urgency of the Ruler of Peace. One more step, one more stretch, one more challenge takes us deeper into the mystery of your abundant life: a world healed, renewed; all nature, all people at peace. Along the Way we join our voices with those of all created beings in Heaven, and on Earth saying:

Holy, Holy, Holy God of love and majesty. The whole universe speaks of your Glory, O God most high. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosannah in the Highest.

We give you thanks for sending us Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-Us, whose life, death and resurrection have become for us the Way to find you, to know you, to join with you in creating your new heaven and new earth.

We remember the night when Jesus gathered at table with his friends in a time of struggle and fear, took bread, blessed it and gave it to them saying
"Take and eat: for this is my body."

And after supper, as Jesus looked forward to your desired day of joy and power; he took the cup of wine, and again gave You thanks and praise and said

“Take this, all of you, and drink. This is the cup of the new covenant, my life poured out for you. I will drink this with you again in the reign of God. Share this bread and this cup in memory of me.”

Come now, Holy Spirit of God— As you were present at creation, be present now, and let these gifts of bread and cup become for us the bread of life and the cup of blessing. As you were sent by Jesus to accompany us on our journey of faith, be present now, and transform this community, sharing this bread and cup, into one body in Christ.

This is the bread of life.
And the cup of salvation.

God, we give you thanks that you have come to us - in the child of Bethlehem, in this bread and cup, and in your promise and your presence. Remind us always that your presence is abiding. Amen.

Benediction

Go forth from this place or stay right where you are preparing a way for the birth of this Christ child in your life, in this season, in our world. And may God, our shepherd, gather you in loving arms and may Christ Jesus reconcile justice and peace within you and may the Holy Spirit baptize you into the life of God to go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Prayer for Peace by Ben Malkevitch
Ben Malkevitch, cello and piano

From Ben:

“Peace is elusive in the world and in this life. Even when there is not outright strife, it is uncommon that we can truly say we are experiencing peace in a true sense, either externally or internally. There are always thoughts, feelings, worries, and other energies coursing through us, the busyness of our days. While listening to this postlude, I encourage you to enjoy a few minutes of repose and allow yourself to connect with the blessed peace that we find in Christ.”

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.*

