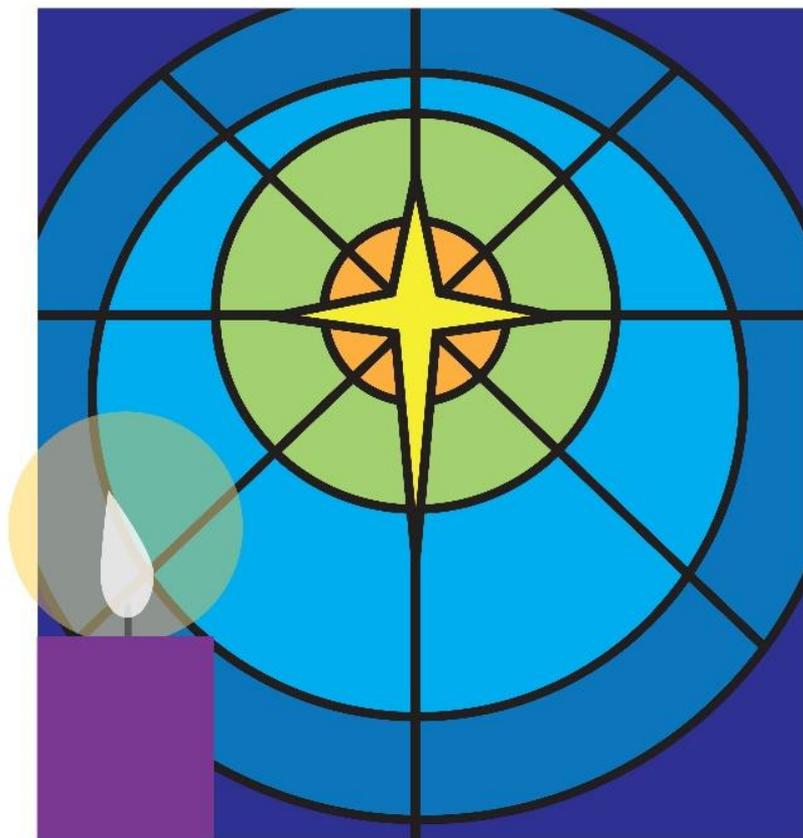


# *Faith Presbyterian Church*

*Christians growing in Faith by caring,  
connecting, & serving community*



**FIRST SUNDAY**  
OF  
*Advent*

**CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE ON THE FIRST  
SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
NOVEMBER 29, 2020  
GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER**

INTROIT

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

Today is the beginning of Advent – the preparation time for celebrating Christ's birth. We are here because God's promises to our ancestors came true when Jesus was born. God's promise is kept each time we worship because, wherever we are Christ is there with us. God will keep the promise to come again in glory.

A reading from Isaiah 60:2

*For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.*

We light this candle to proclaim the coming of the light of God into the world. With the coming of this light there is hope. Because of Christ we not only have hope, but we believe that good is stronger than evil. God wants us to work for good in this world.

*Light one purple candle in the wreath.*

Let us pray...

**O God, we thank you that Jesus brought hope into our world. By the good news of the Bible you are still bringing hope to people. Help us to be ready to**

**welcome Jesus Christ so that we may think good thoughts and do good deeds and so that we may be a people of hope in our world. Amen.**

### **ADVENT SONG**

*Light the Advent candle, one: Now the waiting has begun; we have started on our way, time to think of Christmas day.*

*Refrain: Candle, candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night; candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.*

### **CALL TO CONFESSION**

#### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Dear God, we confess today that our vision is dim and our spirits are weary. Your promised new heaven seems a long way off and the new earth is a long time coming. We are tired of waiting for the pandemic to be over. And we are anxious, yet quietly hopeful, about the promised vaccine. We confess we often have tunnel vision. We narrow our focus to our own concerns and neglect the needs of others. We have, at times, given in to discouragement and let go of hope. Forgive us, loving God. Restore our hope. Lift our eyes that we might clearly see You at work in our world and in our lives today. Amen.**

### **A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION**

### **ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PARDON**

\*RESPONSE #5      “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”  
(Verse 1)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand; Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in His hand, Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

### PASSING THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you!

**And also with you.**

Please share a sign of God’s peace- a nod of greeting, a wave of hello, a bow wishing your neighbors God’s peace, God’s Shalom.

### WE HEAR GOD’S WORD

READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH 64:1-9

### SPECIAL MUSIC

“SERMON              “A Prayer for Hope” (Isaiah 64:1-9)

Last week I went to the eye doctor for a check-up. Six years ago I had a detached retina. Fixing it wasn’t too bad. The most disappointing part of it all was that we had tickets to fly to FL that fall. But you’re not supposed to fly for a few months after having a detached retina. It has to do with the air pressure in the cabin. So, long story short, it’s very common to develop a cataract 5 years after having a detached retina. So now I have a cataract, but the doctor’s not sure it’s bad enough to have it taken out yet. I know many of you have dealt with cataracts recently. So

I'll share with you what the doctor said to me. He said, "life's too short to wait to see better. If it can be done this year, I'd say get it done."

"Life's too short." That comment kind of took me by surprise coming from my eye doctor. But it's true. Life here on this earth is too short to wait to do certain things we really want to do. And life's too short to be living it without some hope for better days ahead. We need that now, don't we? We are looking towards better days ahead, but we're also called to give thanks for today. Last Thursday was all about giving thanks, but really every day is a day to give thanks. So I will say right now that I am thankful for all of you. I'm thankful for Faith Church and for being called as your pastor. You all make my job a joy, even when we can't be together for worship. I wish we could worship in person, but that's what hope is all about. Last March, who would have thought we'd still be wearing masks and staying home in Advent? And yet despite this pandemic, we give thanks today for the candle of hope shining brightly on our Advent wreath.

There are different kinds of hope. The first kind is the kind you can hold in your hand, like for example, a vaccine. We have hope that soon the vaccine for Covid-19 will be available to all of us and we can take off our masks and breathe a sigh of relief. We can see those vials of the vaccine coming off the assembly line on the news and know that they will soon be here in Ohio. Thank you to the scientists who have worked hard to make that vaccine a reality so quickly.

But today is about a different kind of hope. It's not tangible and it's not visible. You can't see it on the news, and you can't hold it in your hand. But it has been around a whole lot longer than vaccines and modern medicine have. I would say it has been around since creation, but especially since God made the first covenant promise with a human being and that would be Abraham. Do you remember that promise? God said to Abraham, "I will be your God and you will be my people for many generations, and there will be lots of you, as many as the sand on the seashore or the stars in the sky, and I won't leave you no matter what." That last part is important because God doesn't break promises.

I won't leave you no matter what, says God. But that doesn't mean that God's people are going to remember that promise 24/7 and build their lives based on that promise. The words from Isaiah 64 were written at a really hard time in the life of the Israelite people. And when hard times hit, it's easy to lose our focus and forget who we are and who we belong to. In one sense it should have been a happy time because the Israelite people had just been allowed to go back to their homeland after being forced to live in exile for so long. But when they were finally allowed to go back, they went back to a country that wasn't the same as when they'd left. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and much of the country was in ruins. And because their faith in God was so connected to that promised land, they were lost and they didn't know how to get that relationship with God back on track.

You know what this reminds me of? It reminds me of what often happens at church camp. I was never a camper at church camp, but I was a counselor and a dean at a wonderful church camp called Silver Lake Conference Center. So you go off to camp and you're a little nervous, but then you meet everybody and you make friends and you sing church camp songs around the campfire and you hear people talk about their faith and maybe you recommit yourself to Jesus and your faith goes up a couple of notches and you're really on a roll. And then you go home and it's just not the same. You try to keep the same camp spirit, but there are no campfire songs and your friends are far away. And you don't have that beautiful view of the lake where you watched the sunset. It's easy to get discouraged.

When the people went back to their country, they wanted it to be like they remembered. But it wasn't. And so they came to the conclusion that God wasn't with them anymore. And they began to plead with God to come down from the heavens like in the old days. Come down God and set those twigs on fire. Do something miraculous! Make those mountains tremble! Sounds like a good case of nostalgia to me. I don't know about you, but I can get caught up in nostalgia really easily. The people get caught up in how they imagine things were in the old days and then they decide they've done something wrong because God isn't there with them like he was in ancient times. God must be angry with them and so God has gone into hiding. So far things don't look too good.

Until we get to verse 8. *“Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand... Look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.”* Okay, now we’re getting somewhere! Have you ever worked with clay? First of all, it’s messy. One Christmas, Santa brought me a potter’s wheel and we put it down in the basement where it didn’t matter if the clay splattered a bit on the walls. I’d get some clay off the big hunk and roll it into a ball, turn on the wheel, and then the trick was to throw the clay right into the center of the wheel. If it was off-center, even just a little bit, it didn’t work because the bowl would be lop-sided. So you’ve got that hunk of clay spinning on the wheel, and then you put your thumbs on top of it and let them slowly carve out the sides of the bowl. And then you put your hands around it and shape it just so.

I like to imagine God throwing each of us on the potter’s wheel and we always land right in the center. And then God’s hands lovingly mold us into who we turn out to be. That’s the essence of our hope. And then the culmination of that hope is the reason this passage made it onto the list of Bible passages for Advent. The word Advent means “coming” in Latin. During Advent we look for the coming of Christ into our world, into our lives and into our hearts. We need Jesus to come down once more and be with us here. And so how did this passage from Isaiah begin? It began with asking God to come down to earth once more. In fact, the words “come down” are used 3 times in those first three verses. “Tear open the heavens

and come down God! Come down and make your name known! Come down and make those mountains tremble again! Come down and put an end to this virus! Come down and mend our country's wounds. Come down and help us to listen to each other and care for one another." Those are all prayers of hope. What is your prayer of hope today?

Let's finish with this image. God doesn't just throw us on the potter's wheel once in our lives and then lay us out to dry. I don't think we ever completely dry out like my little clay bowls did. I think God can throw us back on that wheel anytime God wants to. And so if we're feeling those cracks in our lives and in our world, let's offer up a prayer of hope. Let's reclaim God's Advent promise to come down and be with us. The good news today is that God renews and keeps promises. The promise of the Christ Child has the power to mold us and shape us in ways we never dreamed possible. I hope you're up for it. I hope I am too. So keep an eye out and an ear open and let's see if we can feel God's hands around us, like that potter with his clay. For God won't let us go. We belong to God and we are God's people. Amen



MOMENT OF REFLECTION

## WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

HYMN #2

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

*Come Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest  
in Thee Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth  
Thou art Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart*

*Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever; Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
by Thine all sufficient merit Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

## OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Call to the Offering

\*Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;***

***Praise Christ, all people here below;***

***Praise Holy Spirit evermore;***

***Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen***

## \*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**O God, we dedicate these gifts to you in hope -- a hope which begins here and now yet stretches further than we can see. Show us, we pray, how our own behavior day by day may give flesh and body to your caring love. May our divided minds be more and more absorbed in**

**your single purpose, so that we may cease to live for ourselves and live for him who for our sake died and was raised to life -- Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**\*HYMN #8      “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”**

*Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates; behold, the King of glory waits; the King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here!*

*Fling wide the portals of your heart; make it a temple, set apart from earthly use for heaven's employ, adorned with prayer and love and joy.*

*Redeemer, come, with us abide; our hearts to thee we open wide; let us thy inner presence feel; thy grace and love in us reveal.*

**\*BENEDICTION**

**RESPONSE \*#603 (v. 1) Song of Simeon**  
***Lord, bid your servant go in peace,***  
***Your word is now fulfilled.***  
***These eyes have seen salvation's dawn,***  
***This child so long foretold.***

**POSTLUDE**

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Popcorn with the Pastor continues! Join us Tuesday's @ 6:30 pm. Contact Pastor Julia or Don Niece to receive the link to join on Zoom.

You are invited to join us over Zoom for our Advent Study on *A Weary World: Reflections for a Blue Christmas*. We will meet Mondays, Nov 30, Dec 7, 14, 21 from 5-6 PM over Zoom. Copies of the book are available for \$8. To order your copy, contact Sarah in the office, or Pastor Julia.

**PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH FAMILY**

*Maria Beimly*

*Rick Latimer*

*Jan Schroeder*

*Bob & Emily*

*Norma Leshar*

*Mary Swartzel*

*Christian*

*Betsy Morris*

*Beth Griffin*

*May you be blessed on the*



*Pastor Julia Williamson*

*Music Director John Derrickson*

*5555 Chambersburg Rd. Huber Heights, Ohio 45424*

Regular Office Hours

T- Th 9 AM- 12 PM