

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2023



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
COVINGTON, GA



How does a
weary world
rejoice?

✠ *You are invited to stand in body or spirit*



Gathering As God's Beloved People

Gathering Music

What Child Is This?

Michael Burkhardt

On Christmas Day All Christians Sing

Michael Bedford

In December Bleak and Cold

Catalonian Carol

Prelude

Joy to the World

ANTIOCH

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements

✠ **Call to Worship**

How does a weary world rejoice?

We sing songs of hope.

We allow hope to change us, to strengthen us.

We tell the stories of what could be.

We listen for God's word.

We resist the temptation to give up or give in. We remember Mary's song.

We gather for worship.

We hope.

We hope.

Against all odds, we hope.

Friends, this is the day that the Lord is still making. Let us worship the holy God.

✠ **Hymn of Praise 105**

People Look East

BESANÇON

✠ **Call to Confession**

✠ **Community Confession**

Holy God,

More days than not, hope feels like the rain.

We try to hold onto it with cupped hands,

but eventually, it slips right on through.

Forgive us for holding hope so loosely.

Forgive us for allowing the realities of today to define tomorrow.

**We know that this world needs people of hope, so today we pray:
turn us into those people.**

Teach us how to sing Mary's song of hope for the world.

With open hearts we pray, amen.

✠ **Assurance of God's Love and Forgiveness**

Body of Christ, no matter how many times we let hope slip through our fingers, we still belong to God. So hear and repeat these words after me:

I am God's beloved.

I am God's beloved.

I am blessed and sent to serve.

I am blessed and sent to serve.

This is the good news of the Gospel. This is a hope we can hang our hats on.

Thanks be to God for God's unending love.

Church, we are forgiven!

We are free to try again.

✠ **Response to God's Grace 88** *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* VENI EMMANUEL

***O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.***

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

✠ **Passing of the Peace**

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you!

Lighting of the Advent Wreath *Candle of Love* The Hooten Family

How does a weary world practice love?

By sending cards, and picking up the phone.

By practicing empathy, and assuming the best in others.

By learning people's stories and finding common ground.

By advocating for justice, and saving a place at the table.

There are a million ways to practice love.

So today we light the candle of love as a reminder and a charge.

With God's help, may we bring love into a weary world. Amen.



Proclaiming the Word

Wondering with God's Children

Anthem

Light of the World

Lauren Daigle

Ansley Stewart

Prayer for God's Wisdom and Understanding

**Loving God,
the grass withers and the flowers fade,
but your Word stands forever.**

**So today we pray—
help us to truly hear it.**

Allow your words to sink deep into the marrow of our bones. Allow your words to lift our hearts in hope, that we might feel one day closer to your promised day. With hopeful and grateful hearts we pray, amen.

Scripture Reading

Luke 1:46-55

Pew Bible page 56

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Message

We sing stories of hope

Rev. Neeley Rentz Lane



Responding to the Word

✦ **Response 100** *My Soul Cries Out with a Joyful Shout* STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN

✦ **Affirmation of Faith**

We believe that hope can change the world.

**We believe that God uses ordinary people,
like an unwed teenage mother,
for extraordinary good.**

And we believe that each of these ordinary people can make a difference.

We know that grief, fear, and suffering abound.

We know that suffering quells joy and makes it harder to hope.

**But we choose hope anyway.
In the face of hardship, we hope together.
We hope with God.
We hope for a better world.
This is our song.
We believe; help our unbelief.
In Christ's name we pray, amen.**

Prayers of the People and 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.

Offering Our Gifts: An Invitation to Generosity

You are invited to "Text to Give" your offering!

Text FPCCOV followed by your donation amount to: 73256 and follow the link to give online! Or scan the QR Code to visit the giving page!*



Offertory

Angels We Have Heard on High
Ansley Stewart

GLORIA

✠Hymn of Response 132

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

IN DULCI JUBILO

***Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is Born today!***

***Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ is born for this!
He has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!***

Poetry Prayers

The Sounds of Hope

by Rev. Sarah Speed

You are invited to share one word prayers of how you feel God's LOVE today.



Being the Church in the World

✦ Sending Hymn 110

Love Has Come

BRING A TORCH

✦ Charge and Benediction

First Presbyterian Church Covington is a Christian community existing to glorify God by welcoming all of God's children. We celebrate through serving, teaching, praying, eating, crying, singing, and dancing with the Holy Spirit. As works in progress, we seek to respond to God's presence in our church, lives, and community.

✦ Postlude

Angels, from the Realms of Glory

Samuel Matzger



Advent

How does a weary world rejoice?—When our world is hard, when days are long and cumbersome, when our bodies and spirits are weary, it proves challenging to see JOY, be JOY, experience JOY. Thus, we need one another to remember the joy! So this Advent season we will join in the rituals of our faith – telling the story of God with us – and in doing so explore the question – How does a weary world rejoice?

Worship Art—This week's worship guide cover art is a piece by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity titled *Freedom Lullaby*. The artist's statement is as follows:

Mary sings in the language of liberation. God choosing her, a low-status, unmarried, Nazarene girl, as the vessel for this revolution is a sign to her that the angel's news is about so much more than just her holy child. This birth indicates all that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do to liberate the oppressed, to bring down the powerful from their thrones, and to feed the hungry with good things. Mary is not only mother of Jesus; she is also a mother of this God movement. She joins the long tradition of women in the bible whose poetry points to God's power turning the world upside down.

When I read through the Magnificat once again, I imagined Mary cradling her growing belly and singing her song as a lullaby to her unborn son. With each gentle word and sway, she foretells the promise of freedom he will soon fulfil.

—Lisle Gwynn Garrity



Worship Practices

Sound System—We are excited to announce that the new sound system has been installed in the Sanctuary! The new system is designed to improve the sound in the space, not only in volume but in clarity and includes a Bluetooth hearing aid connectivity option. We are still testing and figuring out the

settings and we appreciate your patience during this adjustment period. Once we fully understand the settings and capabilities, we will hold lessons on how to connect with the Bluetooth.

Children in Worship—We have a “Children in Worship” guiding brochure available in the Narthex! This brochure is intended to serve as an aid to parents and other members of our congregation in welcoming our children to worship. Children are always welcome to wiggle and giggle in the pews at FPC! During worship children are invited to join us at the front of the Sanctuary for a time of Wondering with God’s Children. Afterwards, children planning to go to the nursery will be escorted downstairs by Pastor Neeley or Pastor Erin. This is to help you stay in worship and us get them to the nursery safely. If you need help finding the nursery, you are invited to ask an usher to point the way.

Friendship Registers—In each pew there is a pad with a black cover that we invite everyone to fill out. If the Friendship Register is nearest to you, please fill it out and pass it down the pew so it can reach everyone. When you pass it on, we invite you to introduce yourself to your pew friends! We encourage visitors and newcomers to connect with us by filling out the Friendship Register so we can be sure to send you a message to thank you for joining us.

Use—One License #A-728728 authorizes the use of music printed in our worship guide and streamed online. *Messages and data rates may apply when using Text to Give. Message frequency varies. Text HELP to 73256 for help. Text STOP to 73256 to cancel.

How Does a Weary World Rejoice | Poetry: “The Sounds of Hope” by Rev. Sarah Speed | Art: “Freedom Lullaby” by Lisle Gwynn Garrity | Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | Graphic Design by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org



Serving Today

Tech Team | Dan Walden, Kenny Compton, Jonny Atkins, Brad Hawley, Kraig Howell

Acolytes | Audrey Fullerton, Paisley Lane

Usher Chair | Doug Bolton



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1169 Clark Street SW, Covington, GA 30014

First Presbyterian Church Staff

Neeley Rentz Lane	<i>Senior Pastor</i>	<i>Nursery Staff</i>
Erin Morgan	<i>Associate Pastor</i>	Hattie Bellinger
Alice Walker	<i>CAGO, AAGO Organist</i>	Sierra BlackShear
Catherine Laseter	<i>Dir. of Communications & Operations</i>	Catrina Crowe
Peni Kehoe	<i>Finance Administrator</i>	Jahniyah Greene
Krista Firkus	<i>Interim Choir Director</i>	Laina Lalane

Officers

Curtis Watson	Reaching Out	<i>Witness (2024)</i>
Charles Ardis	Engaging	<i>Faith Formation (2025)</i>
Pat Harper		<i>Worship (2024)</i>
Nichole Howell		<i>Worship (2025)</i>
Mary Catherine Whisnant		<i>Faith Formation (2024)</i>
Doug Bolton	Belonging	<i>Welcome (2025)</i>
Louly Hay Kapp		<i>Marketing (2023)</i>
Bob Tabb		<i>Finance (2023)</i>
Tom Crews	Connecting (Deacons)	<i>Pastoral Care (2025)</i>
Dana Hall		<i>Faith & Fellowship (2025)</i>
Eleanor Scarborough		<i>Pastoral Care (2023)</i>
Darcel Tabb		<i>Faith & Fellowship (2024)</i>
Billy Fortson	More	<i>Personnel (2024)</i>
Stan Hall		<i>Facilities (2023)</i>
John McCarthy		<i>Clerk of Session</i>
Ed Perkinson		<i>Strategic Planning (2023)</i>

Advent Poinsettias

In memory of:

◇ Clayton W. Bailey Sr.

◇ Our father: Clayton W. Bailey Sr.

Betty Bailey, Clay Bailey, & family

◇ Blair Brown

Doug & Sherri Bolton

◇ Howard & Madelle Boteler,

Ray & Edy Moy

Gary & Susan Boteler

◇ JoAnn Crews

Tom Crews

◇ John Fish

Jo Anna Fish

◇ Our parents: Lois & S.A. Ginn,

Dot & Bill Fortson

Stephanie & Billy Fortson

◇ Anne Bouchillon

Bart & Ruth Frankena

◇ Our grandparents

Kraig & Nichole Howell

◇ Beverly Star Edmonds &

Samuel Burney Hay, Jr.

Louly & Steve Kapp

◇ Papa & Grammie

Robert & Neeley Lane

◇ A friend, Vickie Allen

Jeff & Julie MacKenzie

◇ Guy McGiboney, Jr.

Carol McGiboney

◇ Logan & Willena Powell,

Lucy Perkerson

Ed & Susanne Perkerson

◇ Mamie Lou & Wallace Scarborough,

Calvin & Georgia Floyd

The Scarborough Family

◇ Jim Stillerman

Pam Stillerman

◇ Arnold & Bonnie Tingler

Roger & Tootles Tingler

◇ Gene Ensminger, Jerry Walden,

Jackie & Howard Barton

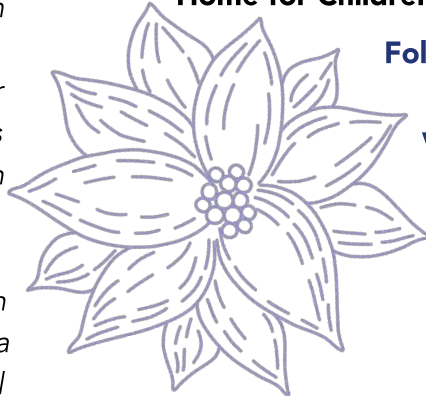
Dan & Perri Walden

Given by:

Bernice Bailey

The poinsettias that are decorating the Sanctuary this Advent season were provided through donations in memory and in honor of the following people.

Donations above the cost of flowers goes to support Thornwell Home for Children.



Following tonight's 6:00pm service we ask for those who gave to collect their poinsettias and enjoy them at home.

In honor of:

◇ Our mother: Bernice Bailey

Betty Bailey, Clay Bailey, & family

◇ Alice & Ken Walker

Doug & Sherri Bolton

◇ Our sisters

Stan & Dana Hall

◇ Louly Fowler Hay &

William Karl Kapp, Jr.

Louly & Steve Kapp

◇ Memama, Bamma &

Our Church Family

Robert & Neeley Lane

◇ Our siblings who recently turned 80:

Jeff's brother Dickie Knox-Dick

Julie's sister Betty Wolf

Jeff & Julie MacKenzie

◇ Lisa, Yvonne, Emily, Donna & Chris

Carol McGiboney

◇ Penelope Blakeney

Cynthia & Dave Noble

◇ Our children and grandchildren

Curtis & Carolyn Watson

Advent Symbols and Meanings

The Advent Wreath

The symbolism of the Advent wreath is beautiful. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, represents the *unending love of God*. Evergreens adorning the wreath symbolize the *hope of eternal life* that God's people share. Even more, the various parts of evergreens have special Christian symbolism: the prickly leaves of holly remind us of the *crown of thorns*; cedar represents *strength and healing*; ivy reminds us of God's continuing *support and love* for us; the red berries remind us of *Jesus' sacrifice for us*; and pine cones, berries, nuts or seed pods used also symbolize *the life and the resurrection*. Finally, the four candles, 3 blue and 1 pink, set in the wreath *represent the four weeks until Christmas Day, as well as the thousands of years people awaited the coming of the Messiah*. The lighting of an additional candle each week in Advent marks the growing anticipation for the Light who came into the world at Jesus' birth. On Christmas an additional white candle is added *for Jesus as the light of the world*. **All together the Advent wreath stands for the new, everlasting life promised to us through Jesus Christ, who truly is Emmanuel, "God with us."**



The Chrismon Tree

The word "Chrismon" is a combination of parts of two words: Christ and monogram...a monogram of Christ. They are made in white and gold. White refers to our Lord's purity and perfection; gold to his majesty and glory. The white lights on the tree point to Christ as the Light of the World.



The **crosses** symbolize our redemption through the crucifixion of our Lord. The two kinds of crosses we have used are the Latin cross and the Greek cross which has equal arms.



The **shepherd's crook** refers to the eternal one, "the Lord is my Shepherd."



The **five-pointed star** is symbolic of the divinity of Jesus, the **rose** in the center symbolizes his humanness.



The **crowns** are symbols of the kingship of our Lord; his victory over sin and death.



An **equilateral triangle**, or three-part figure symbolizes the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

The **fish** was used by early Christians as a password during times of persecution. A fish that carries a basket of bread evokes a recollection of Jesus' miracles when he fed the multitude.



The **manger** symbolizes the baby Jesus and God as protector. A cross inside a circle is a symbol of eternity.

A circle symbolizes eternity. **Three entwined circles** are a symbol for the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons.



A **cross over an orb** (a ball) symbolizes our Lord's dominion over the earth. Does it remind you of the song, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"?

IHS stands for the first three letters of Jesus in the Greek alphabet.



Alpha and Omega, are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. Since only God is before and after all things, it's a symbol of divinity.

- ✦ Katherine Carey, mother of Erin Stillerman - Emory Hospital
- ✦ Marissa Evans McMahan, friend of Donna Weesner - in ICU due to complications from leukemia
- ✦ Roudy Hughes - friend of church member
- ✦ Angelic Bellinger - health concerns
- ✦ Ken Fullerton, father of Scott Fullerton - settling into life at Westbury McDonough
- ✦ Patsy Freeman, sister of Judy Davis
- ✦ Grant Moss & Chris Mattice, family of Louly Fowler Hay - cancer and care
- ✦ Joyce, sister of Faye Kitchens
- ✦ Shelvie Belser, grandmother of Neeley Rentz Lane
- ✦ Carolyn Watson
- ✦ Bernice Bailey - cancer treatment
- ✦ Bob and Beverly Beasley, friends of Jean Elder - health concerns and care
- ✦ Brenda Buckelew, mother of Jennifer Buckelew
- ✦ Patrick Carmichael
- ✦ Larry Cox, brother-in-law of Randy Layton - cancer
- ✦ Bob Darby, friend of Jeff MacKenzie - leg amputated, kidney problems
- ✦ Karla Ensminger, sister of Perri Walden
- ✦ Randy Jones, nephew of Faye Kitchens - lung cancer
- ✦ Karen Lein Kaasa, sister-in-law of Julie MacKenzie - home health care
- ✦ Rosalia Meadors, friend of Tom Crews - three year old with bone marrow failure
- ✦ Meredith Nash, friend of Barbara Martin - four year old with stage IV kidney cancer

✦ Donald Vining, brother of Danny Vining - vision loss

✦ Joyce Williams, sister of Danny Vining - Alzheimer's

Condolences

✦ Our thoughts and prayers are with Lonnie Lamb and his loved ones as they mourn the passing of his mother, Arnetta Prichard. A service will be held out of state on December 29.

Celebrations and Thank You!

✦ We are excited to announce that we have hired a new Director of Music & Worship Arts! Mark Fiddie will begin his call in the position on January 8th!

✦ Thank you to the Search Committee and the Personnel Team for their work during this search and hiring process!

✦ Thank you to everyone who helped keep our music ministry thriving during the interim!

Military Service

✦ Billy Scarborough - Marines

✦ Koen Ardis - Navy

✦ Clint Williams - Army

✦ Daryl Williams - Army

Independent and Assisted Living

✦ Penny Blakeney - Oaks Assisted Living

✦ Homer Borders - Presbyterian Village

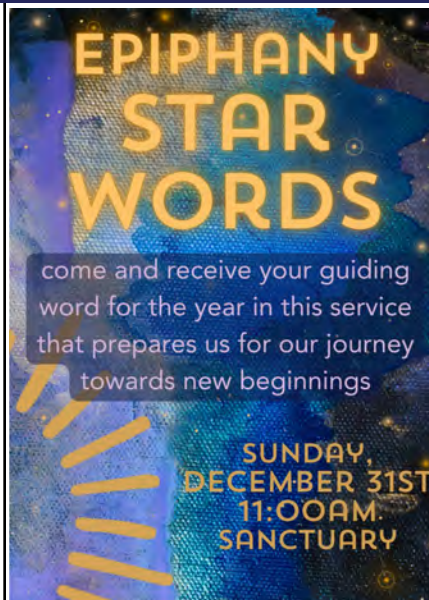
✦ Jean Elder - Florida with her daughter

✦ Dot Fincher - Merryvale

✦ Louly Hay - Presbyterian Village Athens

✦ Travis Moss - Westbury, Conyers

✦ Louise White - Merryvale



You are invited to "Text to Give" your offering! Find more details in the worship guide under "Offering Our Gifts: An Invitation to Generosity."

Sunday, December 24 Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Eve

- 9:45am Sunday School
- 11:00am Worship—Fourth Sunday of Advent
- 6:00pm Worship—Christmas Eve

Monday, December 25

Office CLOSED for Christmas Day

Tuesday, December 26 — Thursday, December 28

Office OPEN with Limited Staff

Friday, December 29

Office CLOSED

Saturday, December 30

- 9:00am Meals on Wheels Delivery

Sunday, December 31 Epiphany

- 11:00am Worship—STAR WORDS

Monday, January 1

Office CLOSED for New Year's Day

End-of-Year Giving for 2023

As we approach the end of the fiscal year, some of you may be planning to make donations to the church for the **2023 tax year** or to fulfill your pledge and giving for the year. If you wish your donations to be credited for this year they must reach the church or be postmarked **no later than December 31st**.

Peni Kehoe: (770)786-7321, ext. 1011 | peni@fpccov.org

A Congregational Meeting will be held on January 14th immediately following worship to vote on the nominating committee's candidate for the open spot in the Session's incoming Class of 2026.

All **prayer requests** should be sent to: catherine@fpccov.org
Requests may be removed after three weeks if not updated.