

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
COVINGTON, GA



How does a
weary world
rejoice?

Epiphany
December 31, 2023

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



Gathering As God's Beloved People

Gathering Music

We Three Kings of Orient Are
The March of the Wise Men
How Firm a Foundation

Mario Stallbaumer
Charles Black
American Folk Melody

Prelude

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Charles Callahan

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements

✠ **Call to Worship**

Every year we celebrate Christmas.
Every month we break bread.
Every week we gather for worship.
Every day we count our blessings.
Every minute God is near.

Yes, every minute God is near.

These are the rituals of our faith.

Let us worship the Holy God.

✠ **Hymn of Praise 133**

O Come, All Ye Faithful

ADESTE FIDELES

✠ **Call to Confession**

✠ **Community Confession**

God of rhythms, we confess:

our faith would not be what it is without rituals.

Unlike you, we depend on bread and water.

We have to return to this space again and again

to hear old, familiar stories.

For if we stopped,

we know it would not take long before we lost our way.

**Forgive us for our fragility,
and thank you for giving us ordinary rituals and rhythms to hold onto.
With grateful and humble hearts we pray,
amen.**

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

Friends, it is not enough to hear once a month or once a year that you are forgiven. We need to hear it every single week. Every single week we need to be reminded that we are held in God's loving embrace.

So hear this good news: no matter where you are on your journey of life, love, or faith, and no matter what you have done or left undone, you belong to God. You are claimed. You are known.

This is the good news of the gospel!

Church, we are forgiven!

We are free to try again.

✠ **Response to God's Grace 134**

Joy to the World

ANTIOCH

***Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.***

✠ **Passing of the Peace**

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

And also with you!



Proclaiming the Word

Wondering with God's Children

Prayer for God's Wisdom and Understanding

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:15-20

Pew Bible page 58

✠ **Hymn 123**

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

CAROL

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:21-38

Pew Bible page 59

✦ Hymn 145

What Child Is This

GREENSLEEVES

Scripture Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Pew Bible page 2

✦ Hymn 147

The First Nowell

THE FIRST NOWELL



Responding to the Word

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.

✦ Star Words

As music plays, we invite you to come forward and draw a star word from the Table.

Epiphany Prayer

**God of open horizons and open roads,
like the Magi so many years ago,
we are here, seeking you.**

**Step by step, we have wandered into this space
with the hope of feeling you in our midst.**

Step by step, you have seen us, claimed us, and called us beloved.

Today we have drawn star words.

For some, these words are full of meaning, challenge, and invitation already.

For others, these words are a blank canvas—inviting you into our lives.

**So as a new year dawns, we pray that just as you have spoken to the
generations before us, you would speak to us again.**

**Allow us to use these star words as a tool
that might help us hear you more clearly.**

May they guide us, as the star guided the Magi.

**And in a year, may we find ourselves here, together again,
with mouths full of praise for the ways
in which you have been present with us.
Together we pray, with joy in our hearts.
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/
Go Tell It On the Mountain
Alice Walker*

Jeffrey Bennett

✠ Hymn of Response 156

Sing of God Manifest

SALZBURG

***Sing of God made manifest in a child robust and blest,
to whose home in Bethlehem where a star had guided them,
magi came and gifts unbound, signs mysterious and profound:
myrrh and frankincense and gold grave and God and King foretold.***

Poetry Prayers

Muscle Memory

by Rev. Sarah Speed

You are invited to lift up your star word or a one word prayer for the new year.



Being the Church in the World

✠ Sending Hymn 136

Go Tell It on the Mountain

GO TELL IT

✠ 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

The Old Year Now Hath Passed Away

J.S. Bach



Worship Notes

Star Words—The use of star words, also called “star gifts,” is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in Protestant churches for nearly a decade now. The idea is that a list of intention words, or guiding words, are written or printed on paper. These star words are then arranged, most commonly face down, on the Lord’s Table. At some point during your Epiphany service, individuals are invited to draw a word off the Table, and to use that word as a guiding word throughout the year. Typically, participants are encouraged to trust the word they have drawn, and not to replace the word. Individuals are often encouraged to place their star word somewhere they will see it regularly throughout the year to allow consistent reflection on how God has moved through, around, or in connection to that word.

Worship Art—This week’s worship guide cover art is an image from the Hubble Space Telescope created with work from NASA, ESA, NSF's NOIRLab, Mark Garlick, and Mahdi Zamani depicting one of brightest explosions ever seen in space. Hubble’s description is as follows:

Called a Luminous Fast Blue Optical Transient (LFBOT), it shines intensely in blue light and evolves rapidly, reaching peak brightness and fading again in a matter of days, unlike supernovae which take weeks or months to dim. Only a handful of previous LFBOTs have been discovered since 2018. And they all happen inside galaxies where stars are being born. But this illustration shows that Hubble discovered the LFBOT flash seen in 2023 happened between galaxies. This only compounds the mystery of what these transient events are. Because astronomers don't know the underlying process behind LFBOTs, the explosion shown here is purely conjecture based on some known transient phenomenon.

Though this Heavenly body would not have lasted nearly as long as the Star of Bethlehem, witnessing this stunning light between our galaxy and the next reminds us of the beauty and expanse of God’s universe.



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: “Muscle Memory” by Rev. Sarah Speed | 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 | Amelia Evans, Holden Evans

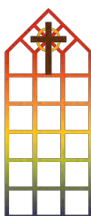
Usher Chair | Doug Bolton



Worship Notes & Doodles

We invite you to fill the space below with the thoughts, reminders, and doodles that you may be blessed with during and after worship.

A large grid of 10 columns and 15 rows of small grey dots, intended for writing notes or doodles.



**FIRST
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Finance Administrator
Interim Choir Director

Nursery Staff
Hattie Bellinger
Sierra BlackShear
Catrina Crowe
Jahniyah Greene
Laina Lalane

Officers

Reaching Out

Curtis Watson *Witness (2024)*

Engaging

Charles Ardis *Faith Formation (2025)*

Pat Harper *Worship (2024)*

Nichole Howell *Worship (2025)*

Mary Catherine Whisnant *Faith Formation (2024)*

Belonging

Doug Bolton *Welcome (2025)*

Louly Hay Kapp *Marketing (2023)*

Bob Tabb *Finance (2023)*

Connecting (Deacons)

Tom Crews *Pastoral Care (2025)*

Dana Hall *Faith & Fellowship (2025)*

Eleanor Scarborough *Pastoral Care (2023)*

Darcel Tabb *Faith & Fellowship (2024)*

More

Billy Fortson *Personnel (2024)*

Stan Hall *Facilities (2023)*

John McCarthy *Clerk of Session*

Ed Perkerson *Strategic Planning (2023)*

In Our Thoughts and Prayers

- ✦ 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 Pritchard

Celebrations and Thank Yous!

- ✦ 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

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



Lectio Divina
PASTORS' BIBLE STUDY
 Tuesdays at Noon in the Parlor
 Roundtable discussions on the week's scripture with Neeley and Erin
 Starting back Tuesday, January 9th!

Welcome!

Mark Fiddie

Director of Music & Worship Arts

Mark will begin his call at FPC Covington on January 8th





Mark's email with us will be mark@fpccov.org

Mark's first Sunday with us is January 14th and we will hold a welcome reception following worship!

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

Life at FPC

Music Ministry starts back on January 10th
with our new Director of Music & Worship Arts!

Children's Choir
Wednesdays at 5:00pm

Handbell Choir
Wednesdays at 6:00pm
Childcare provided.

Chancel Choir
Wednesdays at 7:00pm
Childcare provided.

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.

Sunday, December 31

Epiphany

11:00am Worship—STAR WORDS

Monday, January 1

Office CLOSED for New Year's Day

Wednesday, January 3

10:00am Coffee Club

Sunday, January 7

Baptism of the Lord

9:45am Sunday School

11:00am Worship

O.A.S.I.S.
Lunch Bunch
FPC

Older Adults Sharing In Service at FPC
O.A.S.I.S.

January Lunch
11:30AM on Wednesday, January 10th
Townhouse Café
RSVP to FPC by Tuesday, January 9th

FPC Youth

Youth Art Hang

Wednesday, January 10th at 6:00pm in the art classroom

Come take an art class with your FPC Youth friends lead by Elise Hammond of Southern Heartland Art!

RSVP to erin@fpccov.org

Mondays from 5:15pm-6:15pm

Jan. 29 | Feb. 5 | Feb. 12

In the Gathering Room at FPC

Come in the Office Door

Childcare provided.

Have you been "visiting" for a while?
Presbyterianism 101 Taught by Neeley and Erin

Come learn what it means to be Presbyterian on a *spiritual* level **and** a *functional* one!

We'd LOVE to have you!

We suggest this class to visitors & new members at FPC!



pcusa.org
fpccov.org