Digital Bulletin December 14, 2025
Third Sunday of Advent
The Will to Dream: Unexpected Joy
Jazz Sunday

GATHERING

WELCOME Dawn Brock-Jones

PRELUDE

THRESHOLD TO WORSHIP Rev. Nancy Nichols

THRESHOLD SONG TFWS #2095 *Star Child* (verse 3)
Grown child, old child, memory full of years,
sad child, lost child, story told in tears,
This year, this year, let the day arrive when
Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!

+CALL TO WORSHIP Rev. Nancy Nichols
We gather together in this place
prophets and dreamers, singers and poets,
we who dare to imagine a world renewed;
We sing with Elizabeth and Mary.
Our spirits rejoice in God, our savior!
We bless the God of justice and joy,
who lifts up the lowly and vulnerable.
from generation to generation.
Come and worship, all you who dream and wait.
We have come to wonder and praise.

OPENING PRAYER
The Lord be with you
And also with you.
Let us pray.
God of surprises,
you interrupt our world
with joy and hope beyond our wildest dreams.
When we feel forgotten or despair,
bless us with your holy joy.
When our world feels barren,
bless us with the gift of possibility.
We pray as people of deep faith,

entrusting ourselves and our world
to the holy unknown,
brought to birth in Jesus, our light and life.
Amen.

+OPENING HYMN UMH #240 *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th' incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH Wesley Advocates Class

Pastor Nancy: The birth of Jesus has been told and retold a thousand times and in a thousand ways.
Its impact cannot be contained in any one perspective. But who is telling the story changes how we hear it, how we imagine it, how we experience it.

Reader: We light the candle of hope because hope creates a path for a new, unknown story to unfold.

Light the first candle.

Reader: We light the candle of peace because peace requires us to pay attention to the needs of those around us.

Light the second candle.

Reader: Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine two cousins embracing and sharing life-changing news with one another. One, an older woman, who knew the physical risks of bearing a child late in life. The other, a not-yet-married woman, who was aware of the social stigmas in her society. Yet each chose joy over fear. Imagine the pure joy of this wonderful occasion.

(wait a full ten seconds before speaking resumes)
Pastor Nancy: Open your eyes. When Elizabeth shares her surprising news with Mary, her joy doubles upon hearing that Mary is also pregnant. The two women sing of joy as they sense, literally, in their bodies that change is coming.

Reader: A joy of defiance that good news perseveres even in the most difficult of circumstances. From Isaiah to Mary and Elizabeth, from biblical times to the present, joy can be found. Joy is not a denial of harm that is happening; it is a refusal to let injustice define all reality.

Reader: A joy that moves from personal experience to communal transformation in the song that Elizabeth and Mary proclaimed, and we proclaim today.

Reader: A joy our world needs to experience this season, not to hide from what is wrong, but to strengthen God's people to bear a world that is not right.
Today, we also light the candle of joy because joy sustains us in the midst of uncertainty.

Light the third candle.

CHILDREN'S TIME

HYMN UMC #211 *O Come O Come Emmanuel* (verse 4)
O come, thou root of Jesse's tree,
an ensign of thy people be;before thee rulers silent fall;
all peoples on thy mercy call.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

PROCLAMATION

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION Pat Ingram

God of whispers and shouts, you proclaim the good news of joy from all corners of creation. As we turn to our scriptures, may the words inspire us to dream of a world where joy thrives among us.

Amen.

LESSON *Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11* Pat Ingram

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and release to the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I, the Lord, love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my whole being shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise

to spring up before all the nations.

PSALTER UMH #801-802 *Psalm 80* (response 1)

I am the vine; you are the branches, rooted in faith and love.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth!
In the presence of Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might, and come to save us!
Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!
O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
and our enemies laugh among themselves.
Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

I am the vine; you are the branches, rooted in faith and love.

You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the river.
Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.

I am the vine; you are the branches, rooted in faith and love.

Turn again, O God of hosts!
Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock which your right hand planted.
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance!
But let your hand be upon those of your right hand,

the ones whom you have made strong for yourself!
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name!
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!
I am the vine; you are the branches, rooted in faith and love.

+SINGING THE ALLELUIA tune: Greensleeves

+THE GOSPEL *Luke 1:24-45* Rev. Nancy Nichols

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

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 leaped 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 leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

MUSICAL OFFERING *Keep your Lamps* Trinity Choir
Arranged by Andre Thomas

THE MESSAGE "Unexpected Joy" Rev. Nancy Nichols

RESPONSE

CALL AND PRAYER OF CONFESSION Rev. Nancy Nichols

Answering the invitation of God, who loves justice and promises us mercy, let us confess our sin.

God of joy, you created this world for joy and flourishing. We confess that we construct barriers to protect our happiness, even at the expense of others. We fill ourselves with good things, taking no heed of those who are left empty.We ignore oppression when it benefits our interests. We dismiss the brokenhearted when we feel inconvenienced. We crave power over liberation. Remember us in compassion and come to our aid.Tear down our dividing walls. Scatter our pride and reawaken the imagination of our hearts. Lead us again in the work of repair and restoration. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God clothes you in salvation and covers you in righteousness. Rejoice and take heart: in grace, you are forgiven, through the saving love of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

OFFERING
STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT
OFFERTORY
+DOXOLOGY

PRAYER FOR THE OFFERING

THE AFFIRMATION OF JOY

Let us affirm God's gift of life-giving and justice-seeking joy.

We believe "joy is the justice we give ourselves." Because God's joy dwells with the humble and is rooted in justice, we find its warmth and light shine brightest through shared witness and sacred disruption.

We believe joy grows through blessing others and fostering authentic relationships.

We believe joy is more than a feeling or the things we possess. Joy is our faith made visible and something we share by choosing connection.

We believe joy is truth and truth-telling.

We believe joy is active resistance, Spirit-filled solidarity, and the bringing of God's dream.

We believe true joy is not the opposite of heartache, but lives right within the swirl of our grief and hardest emotions.

We celebrate the depth of God's joy and how it can hold our pain. When we are filled with this kind of joy, we celebrate what God is birthing now, even amid a world where so much appears to be ending.

We believe joy is freedom and healing, redemption and return.

We believe joy comes from knowing God is close, even when life is hard. God's joy shows up not just in breathtaking beauty but in moments we hurt so much we can't breathe.

We choose justice. We choose love. We choose each other. We choose joy.

CLOSING HYMN UMH #251 *Go, Tell It On The Mountain*

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold through-out the heavens
There shown a holy light.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born.

The shepherds feared and trembled,
when lo! above the earth,
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Savior's birth.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born.

Down in a lowly manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn.
Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain,

that Jesus Christ is born.

BENEDICTION