



**South
Mecklenburg**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**A Service of Worship
Third Sunday of Advent
December 15, 2024
10:10 a.m., Sanctuary & Livestream**

We Gather

Prelude *Appalachian Carol* arr. Albin C. Whitworth

Welcome and Concerns of the Church Dr. Whitney Bayer

Introit DIX

*Light a candle bright and tall
For the Joy this season brings.
Joy like fountains brimming full.
Through our world now let it ring!
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Joy, to us, we pray.*

***Call to Worship**

Lighting of the Advent Candle – JOY
Ruth Ann and Dick Engle

One: Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid, for the LORD is my strength and my might;

All: **God has become my salvation.**

One: With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice!

All: **Sing praises to the LORD, for God has done glorious things!**

***Hymn 93** *Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates* TRURO

1 Lift up your heads, ye might - y gates; be - hold the
 2 Fling wide the por - tals of your heart; make it a
 3 Re - deem - er, come! I o - pen wide my heart to

King of glo - ry waits; the King of kings is
 tem - ple, set a - part from earth - ly use for
 thee; here, Lord, a - bide. Let me thy in - ner

draw - ing near; the Sav - ior of the world is here.
 heaven's em - ploy, a - dorned with prayer and love and joy.
 pres - ence feel; thy grace and love in me re - veal.

Prayer of Confession (*unison*) Rev. Lindsey Odom
Merciful God, always with us, always coming, we confess that we do not know how to prepare for your Advent. We have forgotten how to have peace, and we have ignored the promise of your kingdom. We get distracted by all the busyness of this season. The stories of your faithfulness abound, O God, yet we confess that we do not trust in your provision and care for us. We go our own way, longing for joy and peace, but not recognizing our need for communion with you and our neighbors. God, restore us to the joy of our common life in you. By your Spirit, lead us to live in a way that shows your love, peace, joy, and grace to those around us.

Assurance of God's Grace Rev. Odom

***Response of Praise**
*Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,
 and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.
 Gloria in excelsis Deo; Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

We Hear and Respond to the Word

1. One of our adult classes is studying the various symbols of Advent. Today, they are looking at the Chrismon tree. The Chrismon tree is an SMPC tradition, and you might have even had your photo taken in front of it, but do you know what it means? It is not a regular Christmas tree. Each of the ornaments is hand made and has a special Christian meaning. Check out this [interactive slideshow](#) of our Chrismon ornaments to learn more about what each of them means.
2. The two scripture readings we have today have a very similar message: even when things are hard, we can trust God, because we know that in the end, God's love will win. One of my very favorite Christmas books from when I was growing up is *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree* by Gloria Houston. Listen to a [readaloud](#) of this story. This story is a story of hardship and joy, and how love wins in the end.
3. Today we light the pink candle on the Advent wreath, the candle of Joy! Spread some joy today. Maybe you will make something beautiful and bright to hang up in your house. Maybe you will call a friend or relative and sing them a Christmas carol. Spreading joy is one of the best parts of Advent!
4. Journal, considering the following:
 - a. What have the hard times in your life taught you?
 - b. Why do you think God doesn't make everything easy for us all the time?
 - c. How can you spread joy, even when things are hard?



Children's Liturgy

Rebecca Guzman

As the children four years old through third grade gather for Children's Worship, the congregation is invited to sing (hymn no. 114 stanza 3):

***Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.***

Congregation: God be with you there.

Children: God be with you here.

The children will return to join their families following the sermon.

Prayer for Illumination

Rev. Odom

First Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Rev. Odom

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Anthem

No Night There

Dan Forrest

Chancel Choir; Blythe Kinsey, piano

God is with us, God is for us; do not be afraid. There shall be no night there, no crying there; God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; lo, I am with you always, even to the end. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

Second Reading Zephaniah 3:14-20 Dr. Matthew S. Brown
Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

One: This is the word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon Prelude to Joy Dr. Brown

***The Affirmation of Faith** (*unison*) *The Confession of 1967 - 9.21, 9.23*
Dr. Bayer

The reconciling work of Jesus was the supreme crisis in the life of humankind. His cross and resurrection become personal crisis and present hope for women and men when the gospel is proclaimed and believed. In this experience, the Spirit brings God's forgiveness to all, moves people to respond in faith, repentance, and obedience, and initiates the new life in Christ.

The new life does not release people from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, and fear. They still have to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as they mature in love and faithfulness in their life with Christ, they live in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer Dr. Bayer

. . . (unison) **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.

Offertory

Mary, Did You Know?
Chancel Ringers

Derek Hakes

As an alternative to the traditional offering plate, you may support the ministry of SMPC by giving online at www.smpchome.org/give or texting SMPC to 73256.

***Doxology**

Advent Doxology

R. G. Huff

Praise to God, the One who made us.

Praise to Christ, the soon-born Son.

Praise the Spirit, ever with us. Praise the Godhead, Three in One.

Clear a path! Prepare the way! Advent leads to Christmas Day!

***Prayer of Dedication**

Madi Jenkins

Holy One, this Advent season we wait in joy, and we give with joy. Joy for all you have given us; joy because of your sacred promises. Receive our gifts and offerings and use them to spread your joy in our world. Amen.

We Go Out to Serve

***Hymn 87**

Comfort, Comfort Now My People

GENEVAN 42



1 "Com - fort, com - fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
 2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
 3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



"Com - fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn - ing un - der sor - row's load.
 call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.
 Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits God's ho - ly reign.



To my peo - ple now pro - claim that my par - don waits for them!
 O, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.
 For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their sins I cov - er, and their war - fare now is o - ver."
 Let the val - leys rise in meet - ing and the hills bow down in greet - ing,
 and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.



***Charge and Benediction**

Dr. Brown

***Benediction Response**

R. G. Huff

Go, all ye faithful! All who know the Savior.

Carry the message far beyond these walls.

Hold forth the Christ-light. Conquer every darkness.

Go forth, O Church of Jesus! Proclaim the One who frees us!

Speak peace! Reach out in mercy, in kindness, and love.

Postlude

Postlude on "Gloria"

Jason D. Payne

Worship Service Notes

Leading Worship this Morning

Dr. Matthew S. Brown, Pastor

Dr. Whitney Bayer, Associate Pastor

Rev. Lindsey Odom, Associate Pastor of Youth & Missions/Outreach

Zach Bowyer, Director of Music & Organist

Rebecca Guzman, Director of Spiritual Formation

Chancel Choir, Chancel Ringers

Blythe Kinsey, piano

Madi Jenkins, liturgist

A/V Team: Chris Wilcox, Joe Wilcox

Lemonade Team: Chuck Griffiths, Lina Griffiths

Ushers: Dick Engle, Jenny Gates, Curt Ireland, Jon Myers, Craig Parrish, Carol Watkins

Welcome Team: Chuck Griffiths, Lina Griffiths, Wendy Sinclair, Jack Hess

The flowers in worship this morning are given by Linda Nagle Hanson to the glory of God and in memory of her late husband, Russell T. Hanson, Jr.

Welcome to South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church! If you are joining us in person or online, are a first-time visitor, a long-term member, or anything in between, we are glad that you are worshiping with us and we want to stay connected with you. To receive our **emails**, sent on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, contact Nancy Metzler, Director of Hospitality and Connection, nancy@smpchome.org. These emails contain a weekly devotion and information about upcoming worship services and church activities. Also, find us on Facebook:

@southmecklenburgpresbyterian and Instagram: **@southmeckpres**.

A note to parents: We are so delighted that you and your children are here! Children are an integral part of our faith community, and we strive to support parents during worship. Here are some helpful things to know:

- Children are welcome in worship. We understand that means wiggles!
- We provide blue worship totes in the Narthex to help children engage in worship. Please return the totes after the service.
- There is a nursery located in the Palmer Building with dedicated staff who are happy to keep your infant - three year old safe.
- Children's Worship is provided for children ages 4 through 3rd grade. The children gather after the Church Family Moment and return after the sermon. During this time, they will explore the story interactively and engage with their peers.
- A glider and changing table are available in Room 301 for mothers who wish to have privacy while nursing.

- During worship, the service is broadcast to the parlor, where there is more space to move around if your little one becomes restless.

Interested in joining South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church? Our Session will gather to welcome new members on December 22 at 11:30 a.m. To learn more, contact Nancy Metzler, Director of Hospitality and Connection, nancy@smpchome.org or 980-265-2839.

Congregational Notes (as of December 12, 2024)

Remember in Prayer

- Rosemary Hawver, as she recovers from surgery.
- All those involved in the continued hurricane recovery efforts.
- All those living with uncertainty in the Middle East.
- All those affected by the conflict in Ukraine.
- Our mission partners in Bayonnais, Haiti, amid the chaos that has enveloped their country.

To join the prayer chain or send a prayer request:

prayer@SMPChome.org.

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South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church

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PO Box 79321, Charlotte, NC 28271

smpchome.org

WELCOME!

After worship, we hope you'll join us for lemonade and cookies outside between the sanctuary and chapel buildings. Come meet friends old and new! Registry pads are located on your pew. Please sign and pass to your neighbor and perhaps speak to someone you haven't met!

THIS WEEK'S CLASSES & EVENTS

today
DEC. 15
6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Festival of Carols - "Dreams of the Holy Night"
Sunday, December 15, 6:00 -7:30 p.m., Sanctuary and Livestream
Join us for a special worship service led by ensembles of all ages within the SMPC Music Ministry. Our worship and music will be enhanced with scripture and poetry written by Director of Spiritual Formation Rebecca Guzman. Childcare will be provided. Bring a friend! Contact: Zach Bowyer, zach@smcphome.org.

tuesday
DEC. 17
10:00 a.m.

Handiworkers Group
Palmer 104
All knitters, needlepointers, quilters, cross-stitchers and crocheters are invited. Meets weekly. All levels. Contact: Judy Jameson, jgjameson@gmail.com.

tuesday
DEC. 17
5:30 p.m.

The Longest Night Service
Chapel
A special worship service that offers hope and consolation for anyone who has experienced a loss of any kind. Contact: Whitney Bayer, whitney@smpchome.org.

wednesday
DEC. 18
9:30 a.m.

Conversations with Dr. Matt Brown
McQueen Room or Zoom
We will discuss the scripture for the coming week's sermon. All are welcome! Contact Matt Brown, matt@smpchome.org, for the Zoom ID#.

thursday
DEC. 19
12:30 p.m.

Food for Thought Book Group
McQueen Room
They are reading *Bright Lights, Big Christmas* by Mary Kay Andrews. All booklovers welcome! Contact: Kathy Paquette, khesspaquette@aol.com.

thursday
DEC. 19
7:30 p.m.

Making Space Mom's Group
Chapel 206
This group meets on the first and third Thursdays of every month. Moms of all ages are invited to join us for study, fellowship and service. This will be the last meeting for this group for the holidays. They will resume on Thursday, January 16. Contact: Allison Reeves, allison.tarwater@gmail.com.

saturday
DEC. 21

Center of Hope Breakfast
Meet in the SMPC Parking Lot at 5:15 a.m.
On the third Saturday of each month, SMPC preps, cooks and serves breakfast for guests at the Center of Hope. Food donations are due Thursday, December 19. Monetary donations are always welcome. Sign up via QR code. Contact: Bob Williamson, bobwill31@hotmail.com.



sunday
DEC. 22
9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Adult Bible Study - The Symbols of Advent
McQueen Room or Zoom
This is the last week of a three-week study that explores the Advent symbols, such as the dove, wreath, and candle. Register on Realm. All are welcome even if you didn't make the first two classes! Contact: Melissa White, melissawhite1018@yahoo.com.

sunday
DEC. 22 **SMPC Christmas College Party**
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. **The Wheelers' House, 7019 Turning Point Ln., Charlotte, NC 28277**
 SMPC college students are invited to join us for an evening of Christmas fun, food and fellowship! Sign up on Realm by Monday, December 16. Contact: Debi Wheeler, ERW7019@carolina.rr.com.



JOIN US FOR CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, SANCTUARY AND LIVESTREAM

3:00 p.m. - Family Worship - Lively, family-friendly worship for all ages. Messages are geared toward a younger audience but are relevant for teens and adults and will include a children's nativity! Childcare is provided for ages 4 and under.

5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. - Candlelight Communion - Traditional worship services with handheld candles and communion. We will be joined by the Youth Choir and Youth Ringers at 5:00 p.m. and the Chancel Choir at 8:00 p.m. Childcare for ages 4 and younger is provided at both services.



Shop the Alternative Gift Market online! Scan the QR code!



Scan to see Advent info or go to smpchome.org/advent

SERVE IN THE NEW YEAR!

American Red Cross Blood Drive, Saturday, January 4, 2025, 8:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., The Commons - The need for blood is imperative right now! Please consider signing up to donate blood (via QR code) or volunteer. Find more information on our website under Serve Our Community. Contact: Bill Ramsey, bill.john.ramsey@gmail.com.



Room in the Inn - Sundays, January 12, February 16 and March 2, Various Times and Opportunities, Sardis Presbyterian Church - There are spots open for food donations and volunteers to help with dinner, overnight stays or breakfast and cleanup. Contact: Lindsey Odom, lindsey@smpchome.org.

Tour Nourish Up's New Hunger Hub - Thursday, January 16, 10:00 a.m., Nourish Up, 901 Carrier Drive, Charlotte, NC 28216 (meet at SMPC at 9:00 a.m. to carpool) - We will tour and learn about Nourish Up (formerly Loaves & Fishes and Friendship Trays) whose mission is to nourish our neighbors with food and compassion. Register on Realm or via QR code. Contact: Donna Brown, donnamatt89@gmail.com



SMPC PRESCHOOL

Preschool registration opens for church members on Tuesday, January 21. The school requires that new preschool families complete a contact form and meet for a tour prior to registering. Tours will take place Monday, December 16-Friday, December 20 and Thursday, January 9-Monday, January 13. If you are interested in enrolling a 2-year-old through TK child in the fall of 2025, now is the best time to tour! Visit www.smpcpreschool.org for more information or to complete a contact form. Contact: Tammy Winchip, tammy@smpchome.org.