

WORSHIP SERVICE PLAN**(Traditional & Online Service)**

December 14, 2025 • Third Sunday in Advent • Joy • Dulcimers

Luke 1:39-66*"Waiting with Elizabeth"*

Sometimes joy comes just knowing we aren't alone.

(online only) Preparation for Worship

Gather these items for worship. If an items unavailable, fret not:

- a piece of **blue or purple** cloth
- an end table or stand
- a plate
- a cup
- a glass or bowl
- a lighter/match
- an **advent wreath**
- one of something that comes in pairs
- a computer or internet-accessible device
- a thank you card to God for something this week

For each item you have, thank God for the provision. For each piece you do not have, thank God you don't need it. Place the table/stand in the area you plan to worship. If more than one person will be present, place the table in the middle of where you will be seated. Drape the cloth over it. Arrange the cup, plate, glass of water, and other items on the table. Keep the Bible in front of you. Have enough elements for each person in your household. Be prepared to light two purple candles and one pink candle on the wreath.

Questions for the announcement loop*In preparing for Worship, consider the following:*

- In what do you typically take pleasure?
- How would you define joy? Does your definition match God's, in your opinion?
- Is joy something you choose or something that happens to you?
- What's a question you would have for Mary this week?

Opening Sentence**Luke 1:46-47 (CEB)**

Mary said,

"With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am

I rejoice in God my savior...."

Welcome to this service of Worship, We are glad you are with us! We have a few Community Notes for you to consider as we worship throughout the week...

Welcome Visitors!

We are glad you are here! Our nursery is in the Education Building and our restrooms are in the buildings other than this Sanctuary.

**Do Something Silly!**

One of the things about becoming an adult is we forget how to play and be playful. Everything gets serious. This isn't a call to be lazy or to be wanton. But it is a reminder that the ability to laugh, to try new things, to enjoy, is not a childhood thing: it's a human thing. Like other aspects of our faith, the wider culture sometimes teaches us to suppress certain aspects of our faith in polite company. Humbug to that! Instead of doomscrolling, look instead for a joke to share. When you come into good news, obsess about that and gossip about that (really, gossip about something good). Take time to dance, whether or not you have music playing. Play a game. Be silly. Do something you truly enjoy knowing that God wants to enjoy it with you. As you move through the week, pay close attention to the ways you make room for yourself and others to experience joy.

The Longest Night Is an Opportunity

As we get closer to the winter solstice, the nights get longer. In a similar fashion, as we get closer to Christmas, there are many in our community for whom the date brings its own darkness. The Longest Night Service is an opportunity for us as a



community to surround and support each other through the contrast of the decorations, music and brightness of the season with the losses, mourning, grieving, missing, and hurts. We do this in partnership with Crossroads Presbyterian and this year Hawfields is the host! Rev. Kate Harper is our guest preacher. **The service will be Tuesday, December 16th, at 7:00pm in the Sanctuary.** A reception will follow.



“Mary, Did You Know?”

Our Christmas Cantata will be on Sunday, December 21st during the 10:00 AM worship service. Arranged by Russell Mauldin, it is entitled Mary, Did You Know? Please plan to attend and embrace the hope to our world represented in the birth of our Savior and King! Our Theme for Advent 2025

Waiting with Mary, Our Theme

An expectant mother isn't just a bystander or a passive observer of their pregnancy. Waiting on the child to be born means wellness visits, fulfilling cravings, bones and hormones shifting, nesting, changes in clothing, changes in priorities, changes in habits. Waiting on the child can involve self-reflection, changing relationships, periods of discovery, even illness. And hopefully the community surrounding and supporting the mother to be are going through changes as well. We have traditionally called Mary the *theotokos*,

“God-bearer.” And Mary's journey through Advent is instructive for us. Our theme is *Waiting with Mary!* As we anticipate what God is going to do, is our waiting passive or active? Are we making room, making preparations for the grace of God to arrive in our lives? May our own journeys through Advent involve self-reflection, changing relationships, periods of discovery as well. Jesus is coming!



(10am only) Greet one another in Christ!

(10am only) Gathering Song

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” GTG #82

**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.**

(10am only) Prelude:

“Star of the East” arr. A. Kennedy

Sometimes joy comes just knowing we aren't alone.

In this moment, let us please *remain seated*, take a deep breath, silence our devices, and continue in worship. Let us observe the tradition of the Advent Wreath...

(10am only) Wreath Liturgy: Joy

...In the world around us and within us:

We will serve the Lord with celebration! We will come before God with hearts ready to express joy! Let every living thing praise the Lord!

Jesus is coming...(pink candle is lit)

Let us pray:

Lord God, thank you for teaching us your songs even in times of breathless evil. Thank you for teaching us to have joy that sustains and empowers. Thank you for causing joy to be kindled in us. Help us take heart as the season of Advent continues. Amen.

Sing:

"O Lord How Shall I Meet You" GTG #104

Prayer of Confession/Preparation

Sometimes we simply set aside the joy God offers us. It's not good that we do that. It's important to talk about our shortcomings so that we're ready to hear what God has to say. Let us begin with silent prayer...

(Please pray silently...)

Pray: Coming Christ, there are causes for joy all around us. Not shallow, short-lived bursts of happiness, but the assurances of your sovereignty and guarantees your love makes. The constancy of the sun, the beauty of this earth, the plenty we have available, the access with which we are privileged. Even at our worst we yet possess the ability to heal, to help, to transform. And most of all, you, God, still believe in us. There's a lot to be thankful for. There's a lot to be joyful about. Teach us to sing, Lord, if not with our voices then with our lives. Please, help us not take the blessings we already have and all that is coming for granted. Remind us that it is *given*. May we come to reflect your generosity as enthusiastically as we receive it. Thank you for listening, God. Amen.

(10am only) Assurance of Pardon

God's love can change everything, even the power of our sins over us. God's will that we have this power:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

The Peace of Christ be with you

And also with you.

(10am only) Gloria Patri (Glory to God)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost

As it was in the beginning

It is now and ever shall be

World without end: Amen, amen.

Reading of Scripture

Say: God's Word is a gift. And good gifts are meant to be opened. Our hearts and minds are gifts. And good gifts are meant to be opened. God offers to help us open our presents by God's own Spirit. Let us take God up on that offer and ask for help to understand. Let us pray...(everyone sings)

Pray/Sing: "While We Are Waiting, Come"
GTG #92 (v.3)

Come, Savior, quickly come;

Come, Savior, quickly come;

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel,

While we are waiting, come.

The story of Mary is an opportunity to contemplate the ways in which we wait on God, answer God's call on us, and anticipate our role in what God is doing. Mary's visit with Elizabeth is one of the most important turning points in the narrative, in the anticipation of Jesus' arrival. Listen closely to the Word of God to us all and our ongoing place in God's story...

Read: Luke 1:39-66 (CEB)

Mary visits Elizabeth and Mary's Song

³⁹ Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. ⁴⁰ She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. ⁴³ Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵ Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."

⁴⁶ Mary said,

"With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

⁴⁷ In the depths of who I am

I rejoice in God my savior.

⁴⁸ He has looked with favor

on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on,

everyone will consider me highly favored

⁴⁹ because the mighty one

has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

⁵⁰ He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm.
He has scattered those
with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

⁵² He has pulled
the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,

⁵⁵ just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and
to Abraham's descendants forever."

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months,
and then returned to her home.

⁵⁷ When the time came for Elizabeth to have her
child, she gave birth to a boy. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and
relatives celebrated with her because they had
heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day, it came time to circumcise the
child. They wanted to name him Zechariah because
that was his father's name. ⁶⁰ But his mother
replied, "No, his name will be John."

⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives have
that name." ⁶² Then they began gesturing to his
father to see what he wanted to call him.

⁶³ After asking for a tablet, he surprised everyone
by writing, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ At that moment,
Zechariah was able to speak again, and he began
praising God.

⁶⁵ All their neighbors were filled with awe, and
everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked
about what had happened. ⁶⁶ All who heard about
this considered it carefully. They said, "What then
will this child be?" Indeed, the Lord's power was
with him.

*One: For the Word of God in Scripture, for the
Word of God among us, for the Word of God within
us...*

All: Thanks be to God!

Children's Sermon

Adults, you'll need:

- a wrapped present or box

- Make space for questions if you get them "JOY"
- What is this?...Yes! a gift! And this is definitely the season for those. And presents can come in all shapes and sizes and ways.
- Is every present you get always what you want? Is every present you get only meant for you? And do you like getting presents? What do you like about that?...Sometimes a present, getting a present can make you happy.
- But I want to teach you an important word. That word is "Joy." Joy is different from Happy. A present can make you happy when you get it. But joy is knowing that the present is coming.
- Our faith is like that. God doesn't just give us presents. God gives us joy. We get to know that God will take care of us, God will give us what we need, that God loves us.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them about what promises of God give them joy.
- Don't forget to pray!

(10am only) Anthem:

"Gloria Medley" arr. Bill Shilling

"Waiting with Elizabeth"

Sometimes joy comes just knowing we aren't alone.

What would you say governs your life the most? **Joy or Worry?** One of the things about all of the traditional themes of Advent—Hope, Love, Joy and Peace—is they all seem to require trust, that is, faith. A belief that God can and will do exactly as promised. This is what makes Joy different from garden-variety happiness. Being happy can be full of the emotion that a moment or circumstance can bring. Winning that promotion or job. Gaining recognition. Getting that gift or possession. Receiving affection. Achieving that goal. Being liked or even loved in some demonstrable way. Why not be happy in those circumstances? Why not embrace the euphoria that comes with those things? (Just to be clear: we should.)

But joy, real joy, **is not fleeting like that.** It is a choice, a response to what is going on around you, to what is happening to you. Anything making you happy can be taken away. Circumstances can

change. Things can be lost. We get reasons daily (maybe even hourly) to fall into sadness or even despair. To be overwhelmed with the collaboration of forces against our happiness. Even when things are going well.

I mean, poor Mary. Despite the early victory and wonder at the changes to her heart, to her body, do you really imagine that her pregnancy was not a struggle? To whom does she turn for advice? Even the well-meaning folks in her circles probably struggled with how to address her questions. When she comes to you asking, "How do I get my head around raising God's baby?", what do you say? How do you avoid looking at her like she's crazy? And how many times do you think she fielded questions about how it worked? What was it like? What exactly did the Spirit of God *do*? And you're *sure* Joseph's okay with this? If Jesus himself couldn't avoid criticism, ridicule, opposition, incredulity, how was Mary to avoid those things?

And then there are all the folks giving "free" advice, free judgements, free direction: *opinions*. One of the things about our profit-driven, sensationalism-addicted news feeds, social media posts and other "sources" of information is they are all fundamentally devoid of a pretty basic element: they don't know you. You might even argue they don't care about you except I'm certain they care about your money, a great deal. People probably thought they were being helpful or even solving problems for Mary when all she probably needed was a soft place to land. A space to allow her to vent her feelings, her questions, without being told to not question God or to use this particular elixir or to not get caught committing some sin while carrying God's baby. Can you imagine the scrutiny? So she ends up doing the same thing her future son would do. She takes time to get away. But she doesn't just go to Rome or some other trendy vacation spot. She doesn't even go the mountain top. She goes to the one person who might truly understand what she is going through without having to explain everything.

Read: Luke 1:39-66 (CEB)
Mary visits Elizabeth and Mary's Song

To be sure, **Mary still had her doubts.** We really have no idea how close Mary and Elizabeth were. We don't know how often they kept in touch or if they even liked each other. Anything we presume about their relationship is just that: a presumption. But what we do know is that upon getting Elizabeth's greeting, Mary sings. She *sings*. Mary is overwhelmed with joy. But why?

Before we answer that and get into Mary's song, we need to flip to the end of the story. Just because it's the way God works, **Elizabeth's name means "My God is an oath."** A promise. Remember, for both Mary and Elizabeth, God's blessing, God's promise, wasn't just for them, it was for everyone. Becoming mothers were intensely personal experiences for them both, to be sure. But the blessing their children would be would change the world. I wonder if we look at our own blessings that way. I wonder how differently we might move through life if we considered our blessings, even our intensely personal ones, as being not *just* meant for us. As Philippians 2 alludes, imagine if Jesus Christ considered being God as a blessing meant only for himself. But the blessing of Jesus' humanity and divinity is meant for more than just Jesus. It is meant for every healing, every feeding, every one pulled from the stormy waters, every one crucified alongside, every one destined to received the gift of God's Spirit. Our blessings point to the Elizabeth in our lives, the promise of God that says our future is spoken for.

But what kind of future?

Let's first acknowledge that **Mary's reaction to Elizabeth's greeting** speaks to relief that her gamble paid off. She took a chance that the angel's reference to Elizabeth meant that she could do more than take inspiration from her life. She hoped she could find some help from the only other person she knew who was having a miracle baby. Elizabeth's greeting meant that, not only Mary's hopes realized but she truly wouldn't be going through this alone. She experienced joy.

There's just something about joy. There's relief. Release. This sense of being able to let go. That our trust is justified, that our faith is justified. There's nothing like it. We can't always explain it,

but we know it in deep places when it happens. That our futures are spoken for.

Again, what future?

Mary's song speaks to the duality of the pregnancy. Not only is it a blessing from God for her ("everyone will consider me highly favored...") but it is a blessing for all ("[God] shows mercy to everyone..."). Not only that, but the future will be a reversal of not just fortunes but of status and power. Just for kicks, she even sings about God's promises in verse 55. Mary sings. Sure, she's happy that her visit (her 3 MONTH visit; seriously, what did they *talk* about?) turned out well, but what she's expressing is satisfaction that her call from God will be everything God says.

Do you have people in your life to turn to for this? Who are the Elizabeths in your life to remind you of the promises of God and that your blessings are not your own? Who are the people in your life who can make you sing with their greeting? Oh, I don't necessarily mean that literally. But we run into folks who remind us that a present can make you happy when you get it; but joy is knowing that the present is coming. And if you don't feel like you have these kind of folks, pray. Ask God reveal them to you and make them a part of your life.

Because the last but most important lesson from Mary and Elizabeth's stories is a recognition that even our most solitary and personal tasks from **God are not meant for us to carry alone.** Sometimes joy comes just knowing we aren't alone. We aren't alone working on God's miracles in our life. Joy comes knowing that God doesn't just call us as individuals. God calls upon us all.

In the name of the One who is coming. Amen.

Song of Reflection

"My Soul Cries Out With a Joyful Shout" GTG #100

Offering

God chooses to love us, abundantly. We should respond by choosing to be loving, abundantly. This is why we should give and share what we have and who we are. Let us reflect together on what has been given...

(10am only) Offertory

"What Child is This?" English Melody
Greensleeves

(10am only) Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly hosts;
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Blessing

(text is for the ONLINE service)

Let there be no doubt, Great God: you love us. And we are grateful. Let there be no doubt, Great God: we should be loving in turn. As we receive the gifts you provide, may the gifts we are meant to be emerge. In the great name of Jesus Christ, we pray this together. Amen.

Prayers of the People

- Say: The Lord be with you...and also with you. Let us pray...
- "Come Now, O Prince of Peace" GTG #103 v.3
**Come now, and set us free;
O God, our Savior.
Come, O Lord Jesus;
Reconcile all people.**
- God of Joy, it is a lasting and straightforward truth: you have never promised to make us happy in the moment. But you do promise to give us joy that lasts. Joy that endures. Joy that makes us sing, even in the face of calamity, of tragedy, of losses. You still believe in us and trust enough to engage us in the most unbelievable tasks. The most impossible tasks. Thank you for not leaving us to do them on our own. Thank you for being available in your Word, in your people, with your own Spirit. Help us express our joy, our gratitude by being available. Help us be available to serve as an Elizabeth to someone might need it. And at every step let us serve as a reminder that your blessings are not ours alone.
- Mary and Elizabeth's lives are tough. We might imagine their lives to be worry-free or even glamorous. God, help us set that aside. Help us embrace that, in their full, messy humanity, they chose joy and chose to believe in the promises you made. May our lives sing the same song.
- Thus, let us be Godly people. Let us make a habit of compassion and consolation. Let us make

second nature your grace and mercy and sense of justice. Let us set aside safety and embrace risk-taking with you. May your healing balm reach through us to those around us, especially those on our prayer lists and those we will come to know. Help us love and give love. Help us value mercy as you do. Despite our collective answer of violence, of disdain, of division, of cynicism, to your love, may we truly be washed by you and embrace hope instead...(take time to name your own prayers)

- Thank you for believing in us, Thank you for transforming us. Thank you for teaching us, even how to pray when words fail us, saying,
- **Pray: 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.**

Hymn of Sending

(10am) "Here I Am, Lord" GTG #69

Sending & Benediction

Let us say together our benediction...

Sometimes joy comes just knowing we aren't alone.

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart, Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guide your hearts and minds this day and forever more. Amen!

Sing: "Prepare the Way of the Lord" GTG #95

Prepare the way of the Lord. (x2)

And all people will see

The salvation of our God.

(10am only) Postlude

"Beautiful Star" arr. A. L Phipps