

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

Second Sunday in Advent • Love

Luke 1:5-25; Genesis 18:1-15*"Waiting for a Promise"*

Sometimes love is a matter of trust.

(online only) Preparation for Worship

Gather these items for worship. If you don't have a particular item, fret not:

- a piece of **blue or purple** cloth
- an end table or stand
- a plate with bread
- a cup with juice
- a glass or bowl of water
- a lighter/match
- an **advent wreath**
- 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 on the Advent Wreath.

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

- Do you use the word "love" seriously or casually?
- What makes something or someone worth loving?
- What do you imagine God loves about you?
- What's a question you would have for Mary this week?

Opening Sentence**Genesis 18:14 (CEB)**

[God said,] "...Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"

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.

Take the Leap!

Take a chance! Take the risk! Take the leap! Phrases that all point to largely the same meaning. It's interesting that we use the verb "take" to describe them. Loving someone is that chance, that risk, that leap. Love means we're willing to let go of control, that we're willing to risk getting hurt, that we're willing to embrace a future we don't fully know or understand. That's a tall order when it comes to another person. That's a tall order when it comes to God. That's even a tall order when looking in a mirror. Loving, true loving, is a deliberate act, a decision we make (or should) every day. As you move through the week, pay attention to when you decide to love, to whom you choose to extend it, and the ways you choose to display it. And when it comes to love: take a chance, take the risk, take the leap.

All God's Children

As a part of our Advent celebrations, on Friday, December 12th, at 6:00pm in the Fellowship Hall, we will be celebrating the gifts in our community with a Christmas-themed variety



show! Come see an intergenerational cast of our folks sharing their gifts and uplifting the ultimate gift: Jesus.

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!



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! **The service will be Tuesday, December 16th, at 7:00pm in the Sanctuary.** A reception will follow.



Our Theme for Advent 2025

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!

We celebrate our December babies today!

(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.
Isreal's strength and consolation,
hope of al the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.**

(10am only) Prelude:

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" arr. Michael Larkin

Sometimes love is a matter of trust.

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: Love

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

We will serve the Lord with celebration! We will come before God with hearts ready to love! Let every living thing praise the Lord!
Jesus is coming...(second 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 love in the needs around us and within us. Thank you for causing love to be kindled in us. Help us take heart as the season of Advent continues. Amen.

Sing:

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry" GTG #96

Prayer of Confession/Preparation

We are sometimes dismissive of our task to love even though it's the most important thing we can do. We should talk openly 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: Holy God, we have our work cut out for us. We have challenges before us that are vast, complicated, and spans generations. Hunger. Being unsheltered. Being at war. Greed. Apathy. Jealousy and envy. Despair and grief. Losses, so many losses. Even waning hope. And in the face of all of that and more, your prescription is love. And even though you created everything and even though you made us, we still imagine at times that we know better than you. We are scornful, even have disdain for the idea that love really is the answer. That love should be our answer. Yet how do we ever express our thanks for the love you demonstrate to us, especially the trust in us your love represents? 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. And it is 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

While we are waiting, come;

While we are waiting, 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. But Mary's story is not her own. It is full of the ways in which God blessed not only her, but the other people in her life. Listen closely to the Word of God to us all and our ongoing place in God's story...

Read: Luke 1:5-25 (CEB)

John's birth is foretold.

⁵ During the rule of King Herod of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ They were both righteous before God, blameless in their observance of all the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to become pregnant and they both were very old. ⁸ One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God because his priestly division was on duty. ⁹ Following the customs of priestly service, he was chosen by lottery to go into the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense. ¹⁰ All the people who gathered to worship were praying outside during this hour of incense offering. ¹¹ An angel from the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw the angel, he was startled and overcome with fear.

¹³ The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to your son and you must name him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many people will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the Lord's eyes. He must not drink wine and liquor. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. ¹⁶ He will bring many Israelites back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will go forth before the Lord, equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and he will turn the disobedient to righteous patterns of thinking. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? My wife and I are very old."

¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in God's presence. I was sent to speak to you and to bring this good news to you. ²⁰ Know this: What I have spoken will come true at the proper time. But because you didn't believe, you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day when these things happen."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered why he was in the sanctuary for such a long time. ²² When he came out, he was unable to speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he gestured to them and couldn't speak. ²³ When he completed the days of his priestly service, he returned home. ²⁴ Afterward, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. She kept to herself for five months, saying, ²⁵ "This is the Lord's doing. He has shown his favor to me by removing my disgrace among other people."

Read: Genesis 18:1-15 (CEB)

Isaac's Birth Is Announced.

¹ The LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he sat at the entrance of his tent in the day's heat. ² He looked up and suddenly saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from his tent entrance to greet them and bowed deeply. ³ He said, "Sirs, if you would be so kind, don't just pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought so you may wash your feet and

refresh yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me offer you a little bread so you will feel stronger, and after that you may leave your servant and go on your way—since you have visited your servant."

They responded, "Fine. Do just as you have said."

⁶ So Abraham hurried to Sarah at his tent and said, "Hurry! Knead three seahs of the finest flour and make some baked goods!" ⁷ Abraham ran to the cattle, took a healthy young calf, and gave it to a young servant, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then Abraham took butter, milk, and the calf that had been prepared, put the food in front of them, and stood under the tree near them as they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where's your wife Sarah?"

And he said, "Right here in the tent."

¹⁰ Then one of the men said, "I will definitely return to you about this time next year. Then your wife Sarah will have a son!"

Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were both very old. Sarah was no longer menstruating. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, I'm no longer able to have children and my husband's old.

¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Me give birth? At my age?' ¹⁴ Is anything too difficult for the LORD? When I return to you about this time next year, Sarah will have a son."

¹⁵ Sarah lied and said, "I didn't laugh," because she was frightened.

But he said, "No, you laughed."

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 Message

Adults, you'll need:

- a heart cut into big, easily assembled puzzle pieces
- Make space for questions if you get them

"LOVE"

- (showing the pieces) Okay, what are these? Well, they're puzzle pieces. And what are you supposed to do with puzzle pieces? Yes, you put them together! Let's see what we have...(have them put the heart together). Great! We have a heart!
- But what if I give you a piece, and give you a piece, and give someone else a piece?...How do we get the puzzle together? How do we get the heart put together?...
- You see, our faith is like that. God gave all of us pieces of a heart puzzle that God wants us to put together. That's love. That's God's love.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them how love works in their life.
- Don't forget to pray!

(10am only) Anthem:

"Christmas Is Coming" by Joel Raney; Duet: Lora and Noah Melton; Percussionist: Chason Alligood

Sermon: "Waiting for a Promise"
Sometimes love is a matter of trust.

Sometimes it really is the simple thing. Simple things can sometimes defy explanation and yet are accessible to all of us. **Take an echo**, for example. When we enter that cave or valley or hall and raise our voice and hear our voice speaking back to us... we don't have to be an audiologist or acoustician to experience wonder at the phenomenon. I don't have to explain it completely (or even at all) in order to benefit from it.

I love the way UCLA describes, as another example, **the echocardiogram**:

"An echocardiogram, typically referred to as an "echo," is a non-invasive test that uses sound waves to produce live images of the heart. It is likely one of the most widely used diagnostic tools in cardiology because it permits doctors to watch how the heart is functioning in real-time without the necessity for surgery or radiation. By creating detailed pictures of the heart's chambers, valves, walls, and blood flow, an echocardiogram helps specialists detect heart illnesses, monitor ongoing conditions, and evaluate treatment effectiveness."
 (https://dev.neos.epss.ucla.edu/wiki/index.php?title=What_Is_An_Echocardiogram_And_How_Does_It_Work)

Did you catch that? An echo can get a doctor a detailed picture of a heart working in real time without making the first cut, without having to be hands on with what's going on in a person's body.

I think Scripture can function that way for us. I think these words, by the power of God's Spirit, can serve as echoes for our faith, for the very will and activity of God. And like an echo, we don't have to be hands on, we don't have to cut our lives apart, we don't have to be able to explain everything away in order to benefit from what we learn, what we can know, what we can realize.

I have to imagine it was that way for Mary's cousin, Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah.

Read: Luke 1:5-25 (CEB)
John's birth is foretold.

The story starts out with echoes: talk of ancestors, Abijah and Aaron, priests in a long line of priests.

I don't mind telling you that I struggle **with verse 7**. The Gospel writer directs fault with Elizabeth for the fact that this couple couldn't have children. That may very well have been the case. Of course, we know now that guys can be just as infertile. But it gives me pause with the term "miscarriage." It implies that the mother in question could have done something differently. Our words matter, y'all. And this word, miscarriage, is less description and more a cultural echo that has its roots in generational patriarchy.

But we grow where we're planted. And Elizabeth probably made her peace with being childless long ago (as did Zechariah). The passage even says that she saw her status as a disgrace. But Elizabeth and Zechariah stayed together into their old age. A reminder that love remains the most important reason to come together as people. Not what we can get out of each other.

And so they go about life, ordinary life. **Then God's angel, God's messenger**, shows up, unlike Mary's experience, it does startle Zechariah. And also unlike Mary and Joseph, we are, in fact, given a

little about the faith life of Elizabeth and Zechariah: they are devout and blameless.

Exactly like Mary and Joseph, however, it turns out Zechariah and Elizabeth are well-acquainted with biology. Their age matters. But Zechariah's doubt leaves him speechless, literally.

I think this happens to us now. Rather than embrace what we know, what God has taught us, rather than trust completely in the love God has for us, we harbor doubts and allow those doubts to rob us of our speech, our expression, our freedom. We self-impose a prison of silence around our ideas, our dreams, causing us to believe in our perceived security in silence rather than the messy, noisy world expression invites.

Put another way, imagine if God chose to keep God's love a secret from us because God didn't want to get hurt by us?

I'll never forget my first real crush. I imagined so much that might happen, how much we could share. I also imagined her laughter, her mocking, her rejection. And so neither of us have any idea what actually happened with our love because silence was allowed to suffocate what could be.

It took a long time, but God finally pried that instinct loose and gave me the freedom to start taking chances. I can just hear echoes of God's Spirit saying, **"Take a chance...it's totally worth it. Trust me."** Despite the subsequent rejections, hurts, and confusions, I don't regret taking God's advice.

God's advice. You know, I've heard talk all my life about people trying to know and understand God's will. One of the remarkable things about Seminary for me. It was the Library. Books and books, articles upon articles, references referring to other references, echoes, y'all. We've been slicing and dicing Scripture and our ideas about God for millennia. Our questions, even our doubts are not new. One of my great realizations remains that while our questions are not new, God's answers are just as ancient.

That's why, when I read about Elizabeth and Zechariah, I hear echoes of Abraham and Sarah. That sense that Zechariah is surprised by God's grace after all of his years of service and that Elizabeth would have felt vindication at becoming pregnant, echoed their forebears.

Read: Genesis 18:1-15 (CEB)
Isaac's Birth Is Announced.

Can you hear it? Did you experience the echoes? The age was a factor. In Mary's case, being a virgin was a factor. Abraham tried to fix up God's plan (that's a whole story in itself!). Both Sarah and Elizabeth experienced disgrace at being childless. Joseph thought he would end the engagement quietly. **God's voice echoes over the generations: "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"**

Well, okay, fine. But what does love have to do with any of this? It sounds like what we're really talking about is trust, not love.

I disagree.

We can look at what God is doing. We can talk about *how* something was accomplished. We can talk about *when* something happened. We can talk about *what* happened and even *where*. **But to truly grasp what God is up to, to even begin to grasp the Echocardiogram of God's will we have to talk about why.** Why did God choose Abraham and Sarah? Why did God send a messenger to Elizabeth and Zechariah? Why did God employ Mary and Joseph? Why does God call us?

What guarantees does God have that we will respond at all to the peace God is offering? How does God know that we will embrace the hope God wants us to have? How does God know that we will allow God's joy to frame our thinking? Why does God love us? We don't know. Y'all, we don't know. There is no book, article, reference manual. All we have are echoes from history, from our shared history with God. **All we have is the simple truth** that God has loved, that God is loving. The belief that God will still love us is not given. It requires something from us. It requires the same

thing every hero of the faith had to demonstrate. Sometimes love is a matter of trust.

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

Song of Reflection

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" GTG #88 (vs. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7)

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

"Who Would Imagine a King?" Arr. Russell Mauldin; Soloist: Lora Melton

(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.**

Blessing

(text online only)

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.

Service of Communion

- Say: Let us first show we belong to a faith larger than ourselves. Let us say what we believe:

I believe in God's LOVE—

**That God created us for a reason,
That God chose people for a reason
That God fought for us for a reason
That God fought against us for a reason
That God called us out on our sins for a reason
That God made us partners with God for the
building of the kingdom
That God created us for a purpose.
That God's already called us to be
prophets, priests, teachers, students,
companions, travelers, historians, parents,**

**grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and most
importantly children
a family worth waiting for
So now by God's grace,
God's love really does
change everything
and makes us people of God
because of Jesus Christ
Who was, who is, and is to come.
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

- Say: The Lord be with you...and also with you. God invites us to the Table as we are, given who we are! God invites us to the Table even though we may think we don't belong. Yet God invites us, does NOT force us, because God still loves us. So let us answer together as one Church across time, across our homes, across our various situations, and eat and drink of what the Lord offers. Let us pray...
- "Come Now, O Prince of Peace" GTG #103
**Come now, O Prince of Peace;
Make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus;
Reconcile all people.**
- Lord God, thank you for waiting on us. Thank you for maintaining hopes that we yet will be what you created us to be, what you love for us to be. No matter how many natural disasters, human disasters, murders, illnesses, economic catastrophes, existential worries, the host of ill-timed, ill-chosen, ill-advised choices we might make, you remain God. You remain our God. You still claim us. Our baptisms matter to you. Your promises to us matter to you. Your dreams for us matter to you. Thank you for such love.
- Help us become better a people of love. In the face of every problem that challenges us, that causes us to question, press us to trust you anyway and love as greatly as we dare. Let love become our way of life, thus making space for something new to be born in us. Even when it feels like our energy, our strength, our creativity, our intelligence, is barren, cover us with your Spirit and allow your possibilities to be pregnant in us. May we not be silenced by our doubts.
- Thus, let us be Godly people. Let us make a harvest of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Teach us to live lives weeding out apathy, selfishness, cravenness,

callousness, and evil. We pray this not only for ourselves, but for so many that we can name... (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.**
- (take the bread in your hands) On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and having blessed it he broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my Body given for you. As often as you eat of it, do this in remembrance of me." (break and eat some of the bread)
- (take the cup with juice in your hands) In the same manner he took the cup, and, having blessed it, he gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup represents the new covenant sealed by my blood for the forgiveness of many. All of you drink of it." (drink some of the juice)
- Say: As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's saving death until He comes. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.
- The only proper response to the grace of God is gratitude. Let us pray together with the whole Church:
- **Pray: Thank you, God, for making us your kingdom. Help us live out that thanks by being a refuge to all you call us to. Thank you for including us at your Table. Help us do the same with ours. In the great name of Jesus Christ we pray this together. Amen.**

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

"Pat-a-pan" arr. Melody Bober

Hymn of Sending

(10am) "Love Divine All Loves Excelling" GTG #366

Sending & Benediction

Let us say together our benediction...

Sometimes love is a matter of trust.

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart, Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of