

Call to Worship

The sinners, the saints, the broken, the whole:
we all come seeking the One who offers grace and hope.

The doubters, the devout, the wonderers, the wanderers:
**we all seek to follow the One who works
for justice and hope for all of God's people.**

The hesitant, the heroic, the grandparents, the little children:
**we all listen for the songs of joy all creation sings
to the One who gives life and peace.**

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Lighting the Candle of Love

We've gathered here on this Advent Sunday to draw near to you, God. Our hearts long to be close to you. Help us this season to open our hearts so that you may draw near to us. Open our eyes to the true light that came into the world as we wait to receive it again. Open our ears to the truth of your Word.

Hear the Word from the prophet Isaiah (40:21-26): "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in."

"He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff."

"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

We waver, God. We can be so fickle and feeble. We need your mighty strength. We need the light of Christ to reveal your steadfast presence.

(Lighting the Candle of Love)

[Lisa Vanderkamp. Longing for More | Reformed Worship.](#) Accessed September 18, 2024

Hymn

Hope is a star

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1. Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain

*When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

2. Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

Refrain

3. Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.

Refrain

4. Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.

Refrain

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of light and life and love,
we are in awe of your faithfulness and care for us and all creation.
You are steadfast, ever present, full of surprises and blessing.
We come to worship you with hope, gratitude, and love, giving thanks
that you come near to us through the birth of your Son,
in who all our hope is founded and to who our praise in worship and song is raised.
You are the Creator of heaven and earth and yet you care for the least of us and all
of us. Thanks be to God for your compassion and love.

Joyce Yanishewski written for the 4th Sunday of Advent, December 22, 2024.

**Although we have found love in Christ, we are a people divided
against ourselves and against one another.**

**We have not loved as you love us and we have too often been careless
with our words, our bodies and how we treat others and your world.**

**We abuse your good gifts of imagination and freedom, intellect and reason,
and have turned them into bonds of oppression. Lord have mercy upon us.**

**Heal us, forgive us and set us free to serve you in the world
as agents of your reconciling love in Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Fourth Sunday of Advent. December 22, 2024. Year C.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, God is for us and not against us.
For that very reason, God sent the Son into the world—
not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Believe the good news: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Volume 1 © 2012 Westminster John Knox Press

Scripture Readings

❖ **Isaiah 40:12-26** The Creator of All You Can See or Imagine

¹²⁻¹⁷ Who has scooped up the ocean in his two hands,
or measured the sky between his thumb and little finger,
Who has put all the earth's dirt in one of his baskets,
weighed each mountain and hill?
Who could ever have told GOD what to do
or taught him his business?
What expert would he have gone to for advice,
what school would he attend to learn justice?
What god do you suppose might have taught him what he knows,
showed him how things work?
Why, the nations are but a drop in a bucket,
a mere smudge on a window.
Watch him sweep up the islands
like so much dust off the floor!
There aren't enough trees in Lebanon
nor enough animals in those vast forests
to furnish adequate fuel and offerings for his worship.
All the nations add up to simply nothing before him—
less than nothing is more like it. A minus.

¹⁸⁻²⁰ So who even comes close to being like God?
To whom or what can you compare him?
Some no-god idol? Ridiculous!
It's made in a workshop, cast in bronze,
Given a thin veneer of gold,
and draped with silver filigree.
Or, perhaps someone will select a fine wood—
olive wood, say—that won't rot,
Then hire a woodcarver to make a no-god,
giving special care to its base so it won't tip over!

²¹⁻²⁴ Have you not been paying attention?
Have you not been listening?
Haven't you heard these stories all your life?
Don't you understand the foundation of all things?
God sits high above the round ball of earth.
The people look like mere ants.
He stretches out the skies like a canvas—
yes, like a tent canvas to live under.
He ignores what all the princes say and do.
The rulers of the earth count for nothing.

Princes and rulers don't amount to much.
Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted,
They shrivel when God blows on them.
Like flecks of chaff, they're gone with the wind.

25-26 "So—who is like me?

Who holds a candle to me?" says The Holy.

Look at the night skies:

Who do you think made all this?

Who marches this army of stars out each night,
counts them off, calls each by name

—so magnificent! so powerful!—

and never overlooks a single one?

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❖ Romans 4:18-25

¹⁸ Abraham was first named "father" and then *became* a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he *couldn't* do but on what God said he *would* do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, "You're going to have a big family, Abraham!"

¹⁹⁻²⁵ Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, "It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child." Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us *right with God*.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message We Waver

Who is God to you?

When you think of God, what image comes to mind?

How big is God for you?

These are important things to consider, as, depending on your image of God, God may or may not be enough in your mind to really handle or take on the challenges of your life. Think about how much you want to control the situations or people around you. Wanting to have control of our lives is something that each of us desires. Somehow, we think that if we could just control a situation then we could fix it or make it unfold as we think it

should, and often to our best interests. However, that may not necessarily be to the best interests of all involved. It takes people who have let go of their own need to be in control, or at least aware that they have little to no power over others, to see another's need and take that into consideration. At the very least it takes practice to think that way. It does not come naturally.

From birth we are concerned about our needs. Babies need care, food, and love, and they will cry until they get it. And if that care and love does not arrive, and especially if it happens over and over again, the child will not develop into the healthy adult that they were created to be. So, this want to make sure our needs are met is part of us. Still as we mature, from children into adults, we come to learn of the needs of others, and that all those needs should be taken into consideration as well. Most of us also come to a place of realizing that we have little to no control over situations and certainly little to no control over what others do.

I want to say that there are extreme cases where someone never figures out that healthy relationships do not include the abuse and imbalance of power in the relationship. Much help is needed in those cases, especially for the one who is being held captive by another's control. If you find yourself in that situation please reach out for help.

For most of us, we are dealing with our own need for power and control over our own lives. We get to a point where we understand the only person we can really change or steer is ourselves. Even then, we realize that we have little to no power because the world's pressures have so much influence over us. The demand of family, work, study, and friends seem to push and pull us...tug on us.

Now you may have heard the saying, "Let go and let God." Meaning, knowing that we cannot control the people and relationships that are around us, we let God take it, whatever that "it" is. Or as country singer Carrie Underwood sang, "Jesus take the wheel".

Some people might think it a cop out to let God take the lead in our lives, suggesting that those of us who give to God what we cannot handle is just a way to let go of responsibility or that we use God as a crutch, but this is far from the truth. Giving to God our problems doesn't necessarily take away the situation, in fact it rarely lifts us out of our situation. What it does do is help us to let go of control of that which we have no control over anyway. Still, we are called into these moments to live as people filled with grace, with hope, and with love, *because* we are letting God take our lives. And that can take work! How does that old hymn go? "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee."

Even when we are practiced at letting God handle things in our lives, it is so easy to waver and think, maybe God needs a little help, or maybe God isn't up to the task. In our arrogance we may not think that God is up to the task or can really handle the situation or, maybe not take care of it to our liking. We may become concerned that God will have mercy on someone we would rather not see have God's grace and love poured out on,

so instead of allowing that to happen, we grab the reins back from God in hopes that our desired outcomes come to pass.

Most of the time we simply don't trust God to be who God says God is. We allow the influences of society to infiltrate what we know to be true. That God is really who God says God is...the God of Abraham. The God who gave Abraham and Sarah a child when all the odds were against them. At their ripe old age, they couldn't understand how God would be able to deliver on the promise of Abraham becoming the father of all nations. They even tried to help God make it happen by having a child through another woman. They wavered, but not for long. In Romans Paul writes, "When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn't [himself] do but on what God said God would do." Abraham trusted God based on his relationship with God and knowing that God had always been faithful and present.

We are so fortunate; we have hundreds of stories of God's faithfulness to the world and the people God created as we can lift one story after another from the words of scripture. The scriptures being the words of people's experience of God throughout the centuries. Our God has proven over and over again to be present, to have compassion, and to be merciful. What is even more amazing is that when we pay attention, we may find that we have our own stories of God's faithfulness, presence, and grace in our lives and that of people we know and love.

Word after word, story after story, experience after experience, both ancient and current let us know that God is faithful even when we are not, even when we want to be but waver in our trust and hope in God, even when we forget God or push God aside. God is present. God is compassionate. God has got you. You just may not know it because you are not looking for God or you feel abandoned by God.

Let me remind you through the words of the Psalmist who this God is that cares for you and me and every person created as we are the image bearers of God. The psalmist writes about this one who created all that you can see or imagine.

12-17 Who has scooped up the ocean in his two hands,
or measured the sky between his thumb and little finger?
Who has put all the earth's dirt in one of his baskets,
weighed each mountain and hill?
Who could ever have told GOD what to do
or taught him his business?
What expert would God have gone to for advice,
what school would he attend to learn justice?

21-24 Have you not been paying attention?
Have you not been listening?
Haven't you heard these stories all your life?
Don't you understand the foundation of all things?

God stretches out the skies like a canvas—
yes, like a tent canvas to live under.

²⁵⁻²⁶ “So—who is like me?

Who holds a candle to me?” says The Holy.

Look at the night skies:

Who do you think made all this?

Who marches this army of stars out each night,
counts them off, calls each by name

—so magnificent! so powerful!—

and never overlooks a single one?

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This is God in whom we trust. This is the God to whom we sing our praises each Sunday, and especially now in the carols we sing. Our God is powerful, is the Creator, and yet cares enough about the human condition that Jesus came to us as God with us. Walking the face of the earth...bringing heaven to earth.

This is God “... who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. This is God who cares about your life and desires for you to live an abundant life. A life in which relationships are beautiful and healed, where God cares for us even and when we waver in our ability to be able to let God lead us in his power. A life where we do what we are called to do in order that others might come to know the freedom that can be experienced when God is invited in. We may waver, but God never does. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of Zechariah and Elizabeth and John,
God of Mary and Joseph and Our Lord Jesus Christ,
through all generations you have been faithful to us.

Thank you, O God, for all the faithful saints we have known in our lives.

Their trust in you gives us hope whenever our own faith wavers.

May we be faithful in this generation as others have been before us,
so that our ministry and mission in Jesus' name will be renewed,
engaging the world in refreshing, respectful ways.

We pray today for those struggling with loss and discouragement this season:

for those who have lost someone dear;

for those who cannot find meaningful work;

and all for whom challenge and change make the future uncertain.

Embrace them with your compassion and strength to persevere.

We pray for those for who are facing sickness and death

and for those who have given up on themselves and on the goodness of others. We remember those who face conflict in their homes or their homelands, who wonder or fear what tomorrow may bring. We pray for the creation that has suffered from fire, storm and earthquake this year, and for the lives disrupted by drought and despair.

Embrace all who suffer with your comfort and courage.

God of all life and each life,
as we move towards a new year,
let us have a strong sense of your presence as we celebrate Christ's birth.
With the tenderness of your Spirit, lighten our burdens,
and show us new possibilities for our own lives
and for the ministries we take up in Jesus' name,
for we find confidence in the prayer he taught us:

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Fourth Sunday of Advent. December 22, 2024. Year C.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Invitation to the offering

We make our offering this day with hearts full of love, filled with the hope and joy this season brings. Give knowing God's love will spread far and wide through what we offer in Jesus' name.

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Hymn

It came upon the midnight clear

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1. It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"To all the earth good-will and peace,
from heaven's all-gracious King";
the world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.
2. Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

3. But with the woes of sin and strife,
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong,
but we, through din of war, hear not
the love-song which they bring.
Oh hush the noise, oh still the strife
and hear the angels sing.

4. And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! For glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
Oh rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing.

5. For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
God's promised splendours fling,
and all the world take up the song,
which now the angels sing.

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Benediction

As you leave this gathering, hear God's call to *go!*
Go into the uncertainty of the journey ahead,
trusting that of this you *can be certain:*
God is with us, and we are sent out together.
We are not alone. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, December 2022
[.Discipleship Ministries | Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year A -...](#)