

GATHERING

Prelude

Welcome

Welcome to worship with FPC! We are glad you are here this morning.

If you are new here, we invite you to fill out a welcome card or email secretary@fpcmissoula.org with your information so we can get connected with you.

This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it!
Let us prepare our hearts and minds to worship and encounter our living God.

Call to Worship

One: Children of God: welcome!

All: Welcome to this place of love and grace,

One: Welcome to this place of hope and safety.

All: God invites all of us to be a part of the beloved community,

One: God invites all of us to embrace this good news:

All: We are welcome, just as we are. We are loved, just as we are.

One: In gratitude for all of this, let us worship God.

Gathering Song: Prepare the Way, O Zion



Pre - pare the way, O Zi - on, your Christ is draw - ing
He brings God's rule, O Zi - on; he comes from heav'n a -
Fling wide your gates, O Zi - on; your Sa - vior's rule em -
near! Let ev - ery hill and val - ley a
bove. His rule is peace and free - dom, and
brace, and tid - ings of sal - va - tion pro -
le - vel way ap - pear. Greet One who comes in
jus - tice, truth and love. Lift high your praise re -
claim in ev - ery place. All lands will bow re -
glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry.
sound - ing, for grace and joy a - bound - ing.
joic - ing, their a - dor - a - tion voi - cing.
O blest is Christ who came in God's most ho - ly name.

Frans Mikael Franzen***

PRAISING

Advent Wreath Liturgy: Peace

One: We light this candle in Peace.

**All: On this day, we remember the Lord of All,
who brings peace surpassing all understanding.**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife and discord cease, fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Thomas Helmore***

Prayer of Adoration

God, you who are the Most High Lord of all,
you have a surprising preference
for people who are small and humble
and who turn to you in reliance and trust.
You chose Mary, the unassuming virgin from Nazareth,
to become the mother of your Son, Jesus.

By your Holy Spirit
make us aware of the poverty of our hearts,
that we may be open to you and welcome you.
Strengthen us to be ready, like Mary, to serve you and your plans,
and expect everything from you.
Come to us and give yourself to us
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BELONGING

Kids on the Steps

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

In this season of Advent, we are reminded of God's love for us, shown in the impossible act of God becoming incarnate, coming close to reach us in love and rescue us from our wanderings. This is God to whom we make our confession. Let us then come to God with the truth of our lives.

Holy and loving God,
we too often dwell in darkness
and prefer it to the light;
we are proud of our accomplishments
and despair over our shortcomings.
We look at the worries of our world
And wonder how anything will change.
In your mercy, smooth down the mountains of our pride,
and lift up the valleys of our doubts.
Open a path in the wilderness of our lives
that we might find our way to you again
and take hold of the peace you offer.
Strengthen and renew us in our Advent waiting.
This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the promise is true: God loves us. God forgives us. God is coming to us even now to save us. Thanks be to God!

STEWARDING

Invitation to Offering

In this Advent season, we wait for the One who promises to bring peace to this world. And we practice leaning into this peace – a peace that is deeper than our anxiety and fear, a peace that grows from our trust in God. The gifts we give each week are one way that we help to cultivate God’s peace here on earth as we wait for the coming of Christ. So let us give generously of our gifts, our hearts, and ourselves.

Musical Offering: Gloria

Fernando Ortega**

Advent Doxology



Matt Boswell**

FORMING

Sermon: Luke 1:26-38

Last April I was making a rare foray into Facebook posts and came upon a post that was life changing for me. My oldest great niece posted pictures of her with a newborn baby boy. Her newborn. Since none of us knew she was even pregnant, it was a shock to say the least. As those first few weeks went by I realized how much that baby changed her world and the world of all those around that baby.

I realize that all births change lives, but the birth of someone who only his mom had been waiting for, required a quick adjustment for everyone, including the dad. It makes me appreciate that Mary wasn’t surprised, but she was also given the opportunity to prepare for the world changing event in which she would play such a huge part. We don’t always like to wait, but there is grace in having time to wait for the birth of something or someone that will totally change your life and the world. Hear how Gabriel prepares Mary for the birth of the Son of God. Read Luke 1:26-38

We include this scripture in our preparation for Christmas and that might make us forget that it came approximately 40 weeks earlier. If Jesus was full-term, Mary had a longer wait than we have for Christmas. Those of you who have had children know that sometimes it seems like a very long wait. But Mary wasn’t waiting for any old baby, but the King from David’s line, the Messiah, and she was waiting to give birth to a child conceived in an impossible way.

An unmarried mother isn’t as much of a problem now as even 60 years ago when I graduated from high school. But that was nothing compared to being stoned to death, an acceptable solution in Mary’s days when an unmarried women got pregnant. Her “yes” to have it done to her as Gabriel said was an act of incredible trust in the God who sent the message, and acceptance of his assurance that nothing is impossible with God. Gabriel’s appearance alone set the stage for the impossible. Like all faithful Jews, she was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, but this was no ordinary coming. It required her to trust the message.

But she still had to wait for the birth, and Gabriel’s detailed description of the baby she was carrying surely enabled her to wait. It is true for all of us, we are better at waiting when we are excited about what is coming. When we are confident that it is worth the wait. Maybe that’s why the lectionary includes Jesus second coming when we celebrate Advent. It reminds us that we are all waiting, as Mary did, for Jesus’ coming and the putting right of the world and every knee bowing and tongue confessing that Jesus is King.

Dan mentioned that last week, that we are waiting for God to establish the “peaceable kingdom on earth as in heaven. We are waiting because though we have a “vision of God’s better future where all things are made new” (<https://godspaceligh.com/blog/>) I’m thinking that if we believed in this visions and were excited about Jesus reign spreading from shore to shore, “til moons shall wax and wain no more”, we could wait as Mary did, doing what we can to prepare for the birth of the new heaven and new earth.

So when we are waiting for Christmas, just what are we really waiting for? Andrew Kuyper a Dutch theologian and politician once said, “...there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” That tells me that one big thing we are waiting for every Christmas is the birth of Jesus, the birth of the one who says of the whole realm of human existence, “This is mine. It belongs to me?” That’s who it was Mary was told she would bear.

Are we waiting for the one who commands our absolute allegiance as a subject to a king?

A king whose kingdom will have no end? As some of you know I am very likely addicted to Korean dramas. One thing I have discovered about the historical ones is that the royal palace and intrigue are closely connected. So when they are waiting for the birth of the king’s child half of the palace officials are trying to get in good with the king and the other are figuring out how to get

rid of him before the birth or how to use it to their political advantage. With few exceptions, no one is concerned about how to best serve the king.

Things weren't that different at the time of Jesus' birth because look what King Herod did. He was afraid that he would be dethroned, and he killed all the children two and under to try and kill off any rival to his throne, any threat to his power. While in seminary I learned the 5 great themes of the Reformed tradition and the one that comes to my mind most often in my daily life is this: the "human tendency towards tyranny and idolatry." It shows up over and over again not just in Korean dramas or bible stories but in real life in nations, organizations and even as small a group as a family.

The human tendency toward tyranny was bypassed altogether with Mary. She would never have been a model for a drama, Korean or otherwise, to be the mother of a King. She wasn't from a prominent family. She didn't have important political connections. Instead, she found favor with God. Period. Her status would not make the baby king. Which is just one indication that this king was going to be like no other. All greed for power and control, the tendency toward tyranny, was thwarted by God's unique way of bringing the child to be born.

Mary was God's servant and she understood just how amazing it was that God chose her. She was given what she needed to bring the Messiah into the world God's way. That birth was going to change not just her world but the universe through all times. While Mary was waiting, all attempts to coopt the power of that baby were defeated before they got started.

We are waiting for this birth in a similar time. We don't see swords and arrows used to eliminate rivals as I see, and fast forward through, in historical Korean dramas, but we still have powers of the world today whose greed for power is killing innocent civilians in Gaza and kidnapping children and bombing maternity hospitals in Ukraine. Closer to home we also wait for the birth of the new heaven and new earth that Jesus will usher in amidst people trying to manipulate the truth and jockeying for position in our government – at every level. We may not live in old Korea where commoners weren't considered human, but we still live where fear of those not like us brings out angry attacks on people on the "wrong" side of an opinion. Even in families[\[JM1\]](#).

We all live waiting for the Prince of Peace, Jesus, to bring that shalom where the lamb will lie down with the lion, where Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." And as we wait, we also have what Mary was given as we wait for the birth of the new heaven and new earth that Jesus' birth started. We can live everyday knowing that Jesus is the King whose kingdom will have no end. That can't be said for any other power or kingdom.

We can make decisions on what we will do and not do every day based on our allegiance to this king, the Son of the Most High. We can live as the Lord's servants not expecting to be served. We can offer ourselves as Mary did, "I'm the Lord's servant. Do with me as you will."

Waiting isn't a favorite pastime for most of us. Waiting for a birth is harder because usually that requires patience because it isn't instant. But like Mary, we know what we are waiting for is world changing and worth the wait. Like Mary we know it is God bringing it about. And like Mary, we have others who wait with us, those who also know that with God, nothing is impossible.

My nephew and his wife in Washington state decided to major renovation of their house. To do that they constructed a big garage and made a sort of apartment in it to live in while they worked on the house. They were going to move 2 adults and 2 teenagers 2 dogs and a cat into an area only a fraction of their house. When they were showing us how they would make it work, I was amazed at how cooperative the children were. They both had their own room and now they would have a space that held their bed and a dresser.

What I realized is that their parents did a great job of selling them on the idea of the new, improved house. So much so that the kids were looking forward to the adventure because they were waiting for something wonderful. I saw the inconveniences but even the kids saw that what was coming was worth the problems endured while waiting.

Like every birth, the birth of the new heaven and new earth, where tears and pain and death will no longer exist, requires waiting. We wait still for the fulfillment of the promise given to Mary that of his kingdom, "there will be no end. But we wait knowing that God promised and God will make it happen as God did through Mary. And we wait, as Mary did, as servants to the one who has set it all in motion, the God with whom still, all things are possible.

Song of Response: My Soul in Stillness Waits

Please join in singing the refrain:



For you, O Lord, my soul in still-ness waits, tru-ly my hope is in you.

One: O Lord of Light, our only hope of glory, your radiance shines in all who look to you; come, light the hearts of all in dark and shadow. Refrain

One: O Spring of Joy, rain down upon our spirits, our thirsty hearts are yearning for your Word; come, make us whole, be comfort to our hearts. Refrain

Marty Haugen***

Celebration of the Lord's Supper and Lighting of Community Advent Wreath

For you, O Lord, our souls in stillness wait. Truly our hope is in you...

Friends, we come to the Lord's Table today, carrying seemingly impossible things.
Impossible burdens. Impossible conflicts. Impossible anxieties.

We come to the Lords' Table, carrying what seems impossible. Waiting upon the Lord to heal what is broken and put the world right.
Hoping in the One for whom all things are possible.

We come carrying impossible things, exhausting things, angering things, the weight of the world's shallowness and division, trusting – trying to trust - that everything will be possible with God. Trying to trust that the Lord will work the miracle of his peace. In all of us whom he loves.

And so as we come to the Lord (who has come first to us), I want to invite you to share aloud your prayers for peace and other impossible things.

We will then come light them as prayers at our community advent wreath and come together to taste of the Lord-come-close to do what is impossible

in forgiving, in healing, in reconciling, in redeeming,
through bread and cup, body and blood freely given in world-transforming love

What are your prayers for peace and other seemingly impossible things?

[war in middle east – the agony of long wounds and violence...

[fearsome health conditions...

[loved ones in harm's way...

[meanness, conflict, and violence in our country...

Let's pray...

For you alone our hearts in stillness wait. Truly our hope is in you...

In this season of Advent,
we wait for You to break into our worlds, unexpectedly.

Help us to stay awake, to be aware, to hope against hope.

We pray for your peace in this world
when You will settle things fairly between nations,
and make things right between peoples.

We pray for your peace
when all will turn their weapons into plowshares.

We pray for wisdom and courage to be advocates for your peace and hope.
Take what seems impossible and make it possible through your love and power.

We pray for the peace you bring within families.
We pray for the peace you bring within ourselves.
We pray for your peace to come for those who are ill,
those who are grieving,
those who are struggling,
those who are suffering,
those who are lonely,
and those who have been devastated by disaster.

Surprise us with the possibilities
of how a vision of your wholeness, flourishing and delight might ignite our hope,
of how this feast of belovedness you host for all your children might renew the whole creation.

For you, alone, our souls in stillness wait. Truly our hope is in you...Come Lord Jesus.

[As you celebrate the Lord's Supper at home, you may either be part of the online service (where Pastor Dan will lead) or lead for yourself by taking the bread in your hands and saying:

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread.
And when he had given thanks, he broke it.
And he gave it to his disciples, saying, 'This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Then take the cup in your hands and say aloud:

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, and said 'This is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood. Whenever you drink of it, do this in remembrance of me.'

Will the servers please come forward? (There are both bread and gluten free wafers so that all may participate.)

I invite you to ignite your prayers for peace and other impossible things then come be fed upon the promise of Christ's presence and power to make all things possible in his love.

Now Friends, whether one person is serving others or you are celebrating the Lord's Supper personally, tear off a piece of bread – as large as you wish! - and say:

The body of Christ, given for you, because he loves you.
(the one receiving or you yourself may add: Thanks be to God!)

Then dip the bread into the cup and say:

The blood of Christ, given for you, because he loves you.
(the one receiving or you yourself may add: Thanks be to God!)

Amen.

Communion Song: If God/Nothing But the Blood

*One: What shall we say to these things? There's still cancer, and so much disease.
What shall we say to these things? So much hurting, and broken esteem.
So many questions, but still one answer:*

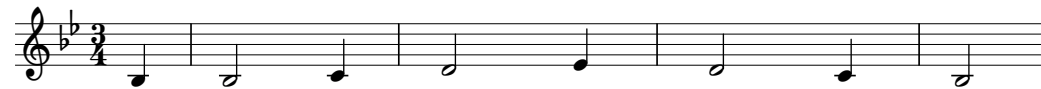
**All Sing Refrain: If God be for me, who can be against me?
If God is with me, whom shall I fear?
If no one knows me, still His heart adores me. I am safe, I am loved, I am healed.**

*One: What shall we say to these things? So much violence, it's getting hard to believe.
And what shall we say to these things? So many people hurting, with broken esteem.
So many questions, but still one answer. **Refrain***

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
And what can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.
No other fount I know: nothing but the blood of Jesus. **Refrain**
Casey J, Jon Webb Jr. and Natalie Sims**

SENDING

Sending Song: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry



On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry
Let ev - ery heart be cleansed from sin,
To heal the sick, stretch out your hand,
To you, O Christ, all prai - ses be,

On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry
 Let ev - ery heart be cleansed from sin,
 To heal the sick, stretch out your hand,
 To you, O Christ, all prai - ses be,
 an - nounce that the Lord is nigh;
 make straight the way for God with - in,
 and make the fal - len sin - ner stand;
 whose ad - vent sets your peo - ple free;
 a - wake and lis - ten, for he brings
 and so pre - pare to be the home
 shine out, and let your light re - store
 whom with the Fa - ther we a - dore,

John Chandler and Charles Coffin***

Benediction

And now may the Sovereign God who keeps his promises, give you all you need to wait for the fulfillment of all God’s promises. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leading in Worship This Morning:
 Liturgist: Tracey Cravy
 Sermon: Janet Malone
 Musicians: Emma Thackston, Joselyn Thomsen,
 Noah Hill, Simon Hill
 Sound and Video Techs: Diane Wells-Cherry,
 Zane Reneau and Ron Righter

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 Preaching Pastor, Blackfoot Church of the Potomac: Natalie Mauer