



Artist John Giuliani

*A Service of Worship for the
First Sunday of Advent
29 November 2020*

It's an unconventional birth announcement.

Defiant.

Prophetic.

Unsentimental.

We like to paint Mary in the softer hues—her robes clean,
hair combed and covered,
body poised in prayerful surrender—but this young woman was a fierce one,
full of strength and fury.

When she accepts the dangerous charge before her,
(every birth was risky in those days, this one especially so),
rather than reciting a maternal blessing,
Mary offers a prophecy.

Rachel Held Evens

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!
And also with you!

Ring in the hour
Silence is kept

Prelude

Johann Pachelbel

“Magnificat”

Call to Worship

Lighting the First Advent Candle

†Opening Sentences

**Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
But how will we recognize You?
Will You be cloaked in the baroque splendor of the stars?
Or in the dust of our dailiness?
Or in the thunder of pomp and circumstance?
Or in the wear and tear of our secret lives?
And how can You come,
You who fit but awkwardly into the modes of our language,
Into the turns and twists of our thinking?
Can You steal into the silences between our words?
Can You speak into the clamor between our pauses?
And how will we receive You?
With fear and trembling?
Or with casual condescension?
With hope and joy?
Or with unbelief and boredom?
We dare not answer our own questions, Lord.
You must answer them by coming.**

Scripture Lesson

Luke 1:36-56

These are our sacred stories.

Thanks be to God.

Time for Children

+Response:

Hymn to Joy

*Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, Opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the gloom of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day.*

Presenting a Bible to Sebastian Alexander

Minister: Every week we read from the sacred stories together and each of us understands them a bit differently. Listening together we can hear many things.

People: Thus, we are joined as a community of interpreters, giving and receiving in our search for what is sacred.

Minister: One of our customs is to offer our children the sacred stories in the hopes that they will read them carefully and offer us their insights.

People: For we affirm that every person has access to the divine.

Minister: There is one among us, Sebastian, who has recently turned ten. We welcome him, officially this day, into the community of interpreters. Together we have much to learn from each other. Sebastian, we would like to give you a Bible. It is full of stories that are sacred to us. Will you read them and think about them, always remembering that they are meant to teach us love for God, our neighbors, and our world?

Sebastian: I will read these sacred stories and seek to learn from them.

People: Then together we will join with you, Sebastian, and with others in the great and ongoing conversation among interpreters. We will share our understanding, our experiences, our questions, and our hopes as we read from the sacred stories and open ourselves to the dialogue that follows. We welcome and affirm you as a companion in this process.

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**O Holy God, our very waiting in Advent is itself a confession.
If we are waiting for Emmanuel, we are not yet with you;
if we are waiting for Jesus, we need a Savior;
if we are waiting for a Messiah,
the proud are still powerful,**

**the mighty are still exalted,
the hungry stand unheard at the door;
if we are waiting for your incarnation in human form, we confess that
we have not known you in our sister,
we have not loved you in our brother,
we have not served you in our neighbor.
In this time of great meaning,
in the stillness of Advent love and light,
hear our deepest confession;
heal us and make us new
through the good tidings of your presence in our lives. Amen.**

Words of Assurance

Music

Francesco Durante

“Magnificat anima mea Dominum”

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

Hymn

Veni Emmanuel

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Prayer

Invitation

†Prayer of Dedication

**Wake us then, during our season of waiting
with the Word that has come to us again and again
that we might learn to be more than takers of it
choosing instead to embody it in this life
making ourselves transparent
for the living Word in us all**

**daring to speak what we most hope
for ourselves and our world.**

Amen.

*Doxology

Old Hundredth

*Praise God the Source of life and birth.
Praise God the Word, who came to earth.
Praise God the Spirit, holy flame,
All glory, honor to God's name! Amen.*

+Affirmation of Faith

**Now is the time, let us pause.
As we wait, may we hear the voice of God.
Now is the time, let us watch.
In our homes, at our work, even while waiting in line
—may we see the face of Christ.
Now is the moment, let us prepare our hearts.
In our words, in our hearts, in all we say and do
—may God's extravagant love shine through.**

Benediction

Postlude

Johann Pachelbel

“Magnificat”

Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Dale Thomas**.

The prelude is played by Patrick Parker, organ.

The Call to Worship is from *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas* by Jan L. Richardson.

The Opening Sentences are by Vassar Miller.

The Unison Confession is from *Touch Holiness*, edited by Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi.

“Magnificat anima mea Dominum” is sung by The Covenant Singers, David Lee directing (12/15/19).

The set of words sung to "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" are by Barbara Lundblad.

The prayer is from Illustrated Ministries Advent prayer, Do Not Be Afraid.

The Prayer of Dedication is by Jeremy Rutledge.

The Affirmation of Faith is by Nancy Gowler Johnson.

Education 9:00 - 9:40 a.m.

Adult Education recorded education sessions will be made available on this page: [Adult Education Recordings](#).

In recognition that November 29 is the first Sunday of the Advent season, the adult education class will be the first of two sessions featuring portions of a set of fascinating recorded lectures by John Dominic Crossan, one of the prominent scholars of the life of the historical Jesus and a key leader of the Jesus Seminar. He is also a delightful teacher. The title of the lectures is “The Challenge of Jesus,” referring to the threat Jesus posed to the Roman Empire and by extension to local rulers of the empire such as Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate. In these first selections, Crossan provides the historical background and delineates the theological beliefs about Caesar Augustus that legitimized Caesar and the Empire and that were challenged by the advent, life, and ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist.

- Bill Martin

Zoom links and materials are available on the Online Gatherings page on our website: <https://www.covenanthouston.org/covenant-gatherings.html>

Announcements

Sunday schedule for November 29:

9:00 - Adult Education with Zoom

10:00 - Worship via videos on the worship website

11:00 - Gather together for coffee time with Zoom

Covenant will be holding smaller groups on Zoom. We will also hold virtual coffee time each Sunday at 11am on Facebook.

Calendar

Sun. Nov. 29	9:00 a.m.	Worship Online
	10:00 a.m.	Adult Education via Zoom
	11:00 a.m.	Facebook Live coffee time
Mon. Nov. 30	1:00 p.m.	Lunchtime Lectionary Lab, Zoom Meeting
Wed. Dec. 2	6:00 p.m.	Youth Group, Zoom Meeting
	7:00 p.m.	Covenant Singers, Zoom Meeting
Thur. Dec. 3	10:00 a.m.	Community Group, Zoom Meeting
	8:00 p.m.	Community Group, Zoom Meeting
Fri. Dec. 4	1:00 p.m.	Lunchtime Lectionary, Zoom Meeting

Helpful Information

Visitor Cards: If you're a visitor with us, please submit a [Visitors Card](#).

Celebrations and Concerns: If you would like to share a celebration or concern with the Covenant community, please submit a [Celebrations and Concerns Form](#).

Membership: If you are interested in learning more about Covenant, we encourage you to talk with one of the ministers or the worship leader. Email Office@covenanthouston.org.

Newsletter: To subscribe to the newsletter, send a request to office@covenanthouston.org.

Office Hours: The church office is currently not open, but we are responding to emails and phone calls.

*Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality
of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.*

*We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations,
all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.*

*We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond
to God's call to ministry in her or his own understanding
of God's all-encompassing love.*

*We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are
intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging
and contemporarily relevant.*

We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.

*We value participation so that we might hear many approaches
to our shared faith.*

Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation

Members of Covenant, Ministers

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jodi Bash, Director of Children & Youth

Director of Communication

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

David Lee, Interim Director of Music

Patrick Parker, Organist

Monique Cruz, Office and Financial Administrator

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Pursuant to Section 30.07, Penal Code (trespass by license holder with an openly carried handgun), a person licensed under Subchapter H, Chapter 411, Government Code (handgun licensing law), may not enter this property with a handgun that is carried openly.