



Painting by He Qi

*A Service of Worship for the
Fourth Sunday of Advent
20 December 2020*

This Advent season
we confess our need
to slow down
to watch
to wait
to listen
for the holy
born within
and among
here and now.

Jeremy Rutledge

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!
And also with you!

Ringling in the hour
Silence is kept

Prelude

J.S. Bach

“Sleepers Wake, A Voice Is Calling”

Call to Worship

Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle

+Opening Sentences

When the mystery.

When the shadows.

When the questions.

When the unknown.

May we find what stills us.

May we find what rests us.

**May we find the courage to enter
the cave of the heart.**

**May we light a candle
to the mystery.**

**May it become in us
a pathway.**

**May it become in us
a passage.**

**May it become in us
a map**

by which we know

this step

and this step

and this.

Scripture Lesson

Luke 2:9-14

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.*

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**O God, we offer you our repentance.
We replace holy days with holidays.
We hurry past opportunities to give the
 gifts of kindness and honesty.
We do not prepare the place
 for your birth in our lives.
We do not listen to the angels in our dreams,
 forgive those dearest to us,
 or welcome into our hearts and homes,
 the poor and the stranger.
Accept our humility and guide us to your grace. Amen.**

Words of Assurance

Music
Vivaldi

Antonio

“Gloria in excelsis” from *Gloria*

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

Hymn

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

Prayer

Invitation

+Prayer of Dedication

**O Great Spirit.
Roll away from me the weight
of dead and frozen thoughts.
Clear away from me the fogs
of falsely sweet illusions.
Ignite in my heart
the warmth of true love
That with new eyes of new love
And my angel at my back
I may see the Truth of the World.
I may feel the Beauty of the World.
And I may act with courage for the good.
O Great Spirit.**

*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

**Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel's song,
in a newborn child.
Our God is the One who cannot be found
locked in the church,
not even in the sanctuary.
Our God will be where God will be
with no constraints,
no predictability.
Our God lives where our God lives,
and destruction has no power
and even death cannot stop**

the living.
Our God will be born where God will be born,
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.
When God is ready
God will come
even to a godforsaken place
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch
for you know not when
God comes.
Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.

Benediction

Postlude

Jean-François Dandrieu

“Joseph, Hear Me”

Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Joyce Courtois**.

The prelude is played by Patrick Parker, organ.

The Call to Worship is from *An Improbable Gift of Blessing: Prayers and Affirmations to Nurture the Spirit* by Maren C. Tirabassi and Joan Jordan Grant.

Natalie Rodgers and **Jerrell Jones** light the fourth candle of Advent 2020.

The Opening Sentences are “Blessing” by Jan Richardson.

The Unison Confession is from *An Improbable Gift of Blessing: Prayers and Affirmations to Nurture the Spirit* by Maren C. Tirabassi and Joan Jordan Grant.

“Gloria in excelsis” from *Gloria*, **Fran Avera**, directing from 12/13/15 video.

The Prayer of Dedication is a prayer of David Tresemer, psychologist and playwright in *Prayers for a Thousand Years*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon.

The Affirmation of Faith is from *Kneeling in Bethlehem* by Ann Weems.

The postlude is played by Patrick Parker, organ.

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

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

The Adult Education session for Sunday, December 20, will feature John Dominic Crosson talking about the birth of Jesus, helping as in recent classes to understand the gospel stories in the light of the historical and theological situation at the time, drawing on *The First Christmas*, a 2009 book he co-wrote with Marcus Borg.

- *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 this Sunday:

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. Dec. 20	9:00 a.m.	Worship Online
	10:00 a.m.	Adult Education via Zoom
	11:00 a.m.	Facebook Live coffee time
Wed. Dec. 23	7:00 p.m.	Covenant Singers, Zoom Meeting
Thur. Dec. 24	10:00 a.m.	Community Group, Zoom Meeting
	11:00 a.m.	Christmas Eve Service, Zoom
	5:00 p.m.	Christmas Eve Fellowship, Zoom

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.