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Gospel Centered
CHRIST EXALTING

The Lord's Day
December 20, 2020

Covenant's Mission Statement
Covenant seeks to glorify God by
Establishing Disciples biblically,
Engaging Culture redemptively,
Expanding Christ's Church faithfully.

Covenant's Values
Covenant is *biblical* by affirming the Bible as the
authoritative Word of God,
connectional by affiliating with the Presbyterian Church
in America (PCA),
confessional by adhering to the Westminster Standards,
missional by seeking to spread the Gospel worldwide, and
relational by encouraging families to build community.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
Love

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*
John 3:16

Prelude

**During the prelude, prepare for worship by
reflecting on John 3:16 printed above.**

Life of the Church

Opening Hymn

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory”

Angels, from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah's birth:

refrain: *Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn King.*

Shepherds in the fields abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing, yonder shines the infant light:

refrain

Sages, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations; ye have seen His natal star:

refrain

Saints before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear,
suddenly the Lord, descending, in His temple shall appear:

refrain

All creation, join in praising God the Father, Spirit, Son;
evermore your voices raising to th'eternal Three in One:

refrain

CCLI 209271

Today's Advent Readers are Dave and Mary Peery
with Jacob, Emmie, and Noah

Responsive Reading

Reader: The Lord our God is with us and is mighty to save us.

**Congregation: God will take great delight in us and will quiet us
in love. God will rejoice over us with singing.**

¹“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD. ²“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.

³For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. ⁴“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

⁵For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. ⁶For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. ⁷For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

⁸In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer. ⁹“This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you.

¹⁰For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Prayer

Corporate Confession of Faith

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Doxology

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;
 praise Him, all creatures here below;
 praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
 praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

The First Lesson: The Fall of Man and the First Proclamation of the Gospel.
Genesis 3:1-15

J. C. Baker, Ruling Elder

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,

³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head."

Corporate Confession of Sin

Almighty God, You who shaped out of nothing all that is, forgive us for returning empty-handed. You who called forth light, forgive our preference for the dark! You who sent John to be a voice crying, forgive our unwillingness to say anything at all! Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Individual Prayer and Meditation (Silent Prayer)

Assurance of Pardon

Isaiah 40:1-2

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
 comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
 Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
 tell her that her sins I cover, and her warfare now is over.

Yea, her sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed;
 all that well deserved His anger He no more will see or heed.
 She hath suffered many a day now her griefs have passed away;
 God will change her pining sadness into ever-springing gladness.

For the herald's voice is crying in the desert far and near,
 bidding all men to repentance, since the kingdom now is here.
 O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
 let the valleys rise to meet Him, and the hills bow down to greet Him.

Make ye straight what long was crooked, make the rougher places plain;
 let your hearts be true and humble, as befits His holy reign.
 For the glory of the Lord now o'er earth is shed abroad;
 and all flesh shall see the token, that His word is never broken.

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The Second Lesson: The Prophet foretells of the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:2, 6-7

Kevin Breniman, Ruling Elder

7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

6:7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

The Carol

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

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.
 Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art,
 Dear desire of ev'ry nation, Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Joy to those who long to see Thee, Dayspring from on high, appear;
 come, Thou promised Rod of Jesse, of Thy birth we long to hear!
 O'er the hills the angels singing news, glad tidings of a birth;
 “Go to Him, your praises bringing; Christ the Lord has come to earth.”

Come to earth to taste our sadness, He whose glories knew no end;
 by His life He brings us gladness, our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.
 Leaving riches without number, born within a cattle stall;
 this the everlasting wonder, Christ was born the Lord of all.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
 born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
 By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
 by Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

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² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.

The Carol

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond’ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv’n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav’n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

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*²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”
²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.*

³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God.

36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

The Carol

“Good Christian Men, Rejoice”

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice;
give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today;
earth and heav'n before Him bow, and He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!!

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath opened heaven's door, and man is blessed evermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice;
now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all to gain His everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

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The Fifth Lesson: The Virgin Mary responds to the words of the angel in worship and humility.
Luke 1:46-56

Bill Scholl, Ruling Elder

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

The Carol

“All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord”

All praise to Thee, Eternal Lord, clothed in a garb of flesh and blood;
choosing a manger for Thy throne, while worlds on worlds are Thine alone.

Once did the skies before Thee bow; a virgin's arms contain Thee now;
angels who did in Thee rejoice now listen for Thine infant voice.

A little child, Thou art our guest, that weary ones in Thee may rest;
forlorn and lowly is Thy birth, that we may rise to heav'n from earth.

Thou comest in the darksome night to make us children of the light,
to make us, in the realms divine, like Thine own angels round Thee shine.

All this for us Thy love hath done; by this to Thee our love is won:
for this we tune our cheerful lays, and shout our thanks in ceaseless praise.

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The Sixth Lesson: St. Matthew and St. Luke tell of the birth of Jesus.
Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7

Bill Scholl, Ruling Elder

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

2:17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

The Carol

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold Him born the King of angels;

refrain: O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

God of God, Light of Light;
lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb:
very God, begotten, not created;
refrain

Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
glory to God in the highest;
refrain

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning:
Jesus, to Thee be glory giv'n;
Word of the Father, late in flesh appearing;
refrain
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The Seventh Lesson: The Shepherds are led to the Manger.
Luke 2:8-16

Carl Monroe, Ruling Elder

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

The Carol

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear”

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heav'n's all-gracious King:"
the world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come, with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heav'nly music floats o'er all the weary world:
above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hov'ring wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.

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:
O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.

For lo, the days are hast'ning on, by prophet bards foretold,
when with the ever-circling years comes round the age of gold;
when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.

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The Eighth Lesson: The Wise Men are led by the star to Jesus.
Matthew 2:1- 11

Carl Monroe, Ruling Elder

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ ““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.””

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

The Carol

"Gentle Mary Laid Her Child"

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
there He lay, the Undeiled, to the world a stranger.
Such a babe in such a place, can He be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race who have found His favor.

Angels sang about His birth, wise men sought and found Him;
heaven's star shone brightly forth glory all around Him.
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, heard the angels singing;
all the plains were lit that night, all the hills were ringing.

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
He is still the Undeiled, but no more a stranger.
Son of God of humble birth, beautiful the story;
praise His Name in all the earth, Hail! the King of Glory!

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The Ninth Lesson: St. John unfolds the great mystery of the incarnation.
John 1:1-14

Steve Kinzler, Ruling Elder

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Carol

“See, amid the Winter’s Snow”

(stanzas 1, 2, 5)

See, amid the winter's snow, born for us on earth below,
see the tender Lamb appears, promised from eternal years.

Lo, within a manger lies He who built the starry skies:
He who, throned in height sublime, sits amid the cherubim.

Sacred Infant, all divine, what a tender love was Thine,
thus to come from highest bliss down to such a world as this!

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Message

“The Length of Love”

1 John 4:7-12

Pastor Reed

*7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves
has been born of God and knows God.*

8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

*9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his
only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*

*10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent
his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

*12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us
and his love is perfected in us.*

The Concluding Carol

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.

refrain: Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be, which inspire your heav’nly song?

refrain

Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

refrain

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Scriptural Benediction

Postlude

Sermon Notes
"The Length of Love"
1 John 4:7-12

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(PT - Partial Term)

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