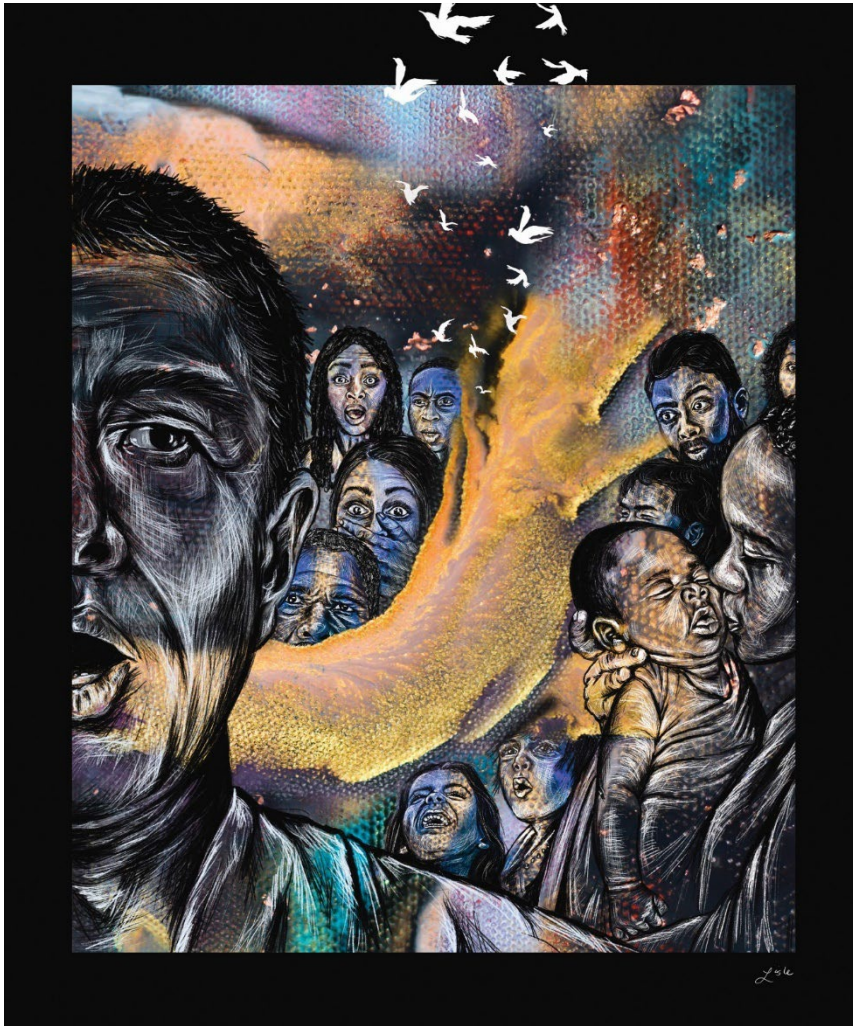


FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

December 17, 2023



An open community united in love and justice

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

ADVENT III: WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE AMAZED

PRELUDE

Bobby Nguyen

Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen by J. Brahms

WELCOME

Lydia Mulkey

POEM

Annie Barnes

Awe by Rev. Sarah Speed

The birds could spend their lives
on telephone wires,
feet under them,
sure and steady.
Or they could open their wings,
leave the ground,
and let the wind carry them home.
I want to be like the birds.
I want an open heart,
open arms,
open eyes.
Give me a sky view,
for I do not want to miss a thing.

Listen as the sound of the singing bowl fades.

THE CANDLE OF JOY

The Segbawu Family

How does a weary world practice joy?
By dancing, and throwing birthday parties.
By hanging Christmas lights, and holding sleepy babies.
By singing loudly, and looking for good news.
By telling the story of Jesus, and showing up for our community.
There are a million ways to practice joy.

So today we light the candle of joy as a reminder and a charge.
With God's help, may we bring joy into a weary world. Amen.

ADVENT CANDLE RESPONSE
Light Dawns on a Weary World

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

1. Light dawns on a wea - ry world when eyes be - gin to see all peo - ple's dig - ni - ty.

Refrain

Light dawns on a wea - ry world: the pro - mised day of jus - tice comes. The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands, gush with springs; the hills and moun - tains shall break forth with sing - ing! We shall go out in joy — and be led forth in peace, as all the world in won - der ech - oes sha - lom.

The musical score is written on four staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and accessible, with lyrics written below the notes. The first line ends with a double bar line. The second line begins with a double bar line and the word 'Refrain' above it. The fourth line ends with a double bar line.

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*PASSING THE PEACE

Porter Luckett

The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you.**

*OPENING HYMN

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

Isn't It Amazing (see next page)

Isn't It Amazing?

GLORIA ("Angels We Have Heard on High")

Text: Anna Strickland (2023)

Music: Traditional French Carol



Seeds with-in the so - il grow Deep un - der the
Deep - er, deep - er grow the roots Reach - ing up - ward
Cell by cell a plant is built Toward the sun the
Ev - en when the earth seems bare Plant the seeds of



ground be - low Plant - ed when the earth was bare
grow the shoots Through the earth they weave and snake
leaves will tilt Nour - ished by the sun and rain
hope with care If you wat - er in the drought



No life show-ing an - y - where Glo -
Un - til so - il starts to break Glo -
To bring forth its seed and grain Glo -
You will reap with joy - ous shout Glo -



ri - a Is - n't it a - ma - zing?



Glo -

ri - a



Is - n't it a - ma - zing?

PRAYER FOR WHOLENESS

Porter Lockett

Holy God, somewhere in our childhood we face pressure to outgrow awe. We turn into adults who obsess over data and facts. We praise those who have answers, and assume that wonder is an answerless game. Forgive us for closing that door to you. Remind us that the kingdom of God belongs to children. Teach us the ways of awe and wonder, so that like Zechariah, when we find ourselves speechless, our first words will be words of praise. With hearts open wide, we pray, amen.

Time for Silent Prayer

ASSURANCE OF LOVE

Family of faith,

Just as we marvel at mountains and newborns, at sunrises and sunsets, God marvels at us. There is nothing you could do or leave undone that could prevent God from loving you. So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: **We are forgiven. We are loved. We belong to God. Amen.**

MUSICAL RESPONSE

Sanctuary Choir

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Black hymnal no. 116, v. 2)

& Congregation

**O come, o Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, and help us in that way to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!**

LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

TIME FOR SHARING

The First United Puppeteers

*SONG OF ILLUMINATION

Sanctuary Choir

Watcher, Tell Us of the Night (Black hymnal no. 103)

& Congregation

**Watcher, tell us of the night, what its signs of promise are.
Traveler, O a wondrous sight! See that glory-beaming star!
Watcher, does its beauteous ray news of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes; it brings the day, promised day of Israel!**

Watcher, tell us of the night, higher yet that star ascends.

**Traveler, blessedness and light, peace and truth its course portends.
Watcher, will its beams alone gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own; see, it bursts o'er all the earth!**

**Watcher, tell us of the night, for the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, shadows take their flight, doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watcher, you may go your way; hasten to your quiet home.
Traveler, I rejoice today, for Emmanuel has come!**

SCRIPTURE READING – LUKE 1:57-66

Porter Lockett

SERMON – WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE AMAZED

Ally Vertigan

SERMON RESPONSE

Wait for the Lord

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

CALL TO THE OFFERING

Pauline Coffman

Fourth Sunday Offering to benefit ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid)

OFFERTORY

Sanctuary Choir

On Jordan's Bank by Michael Connolly

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin; make straight the way of God within,
And let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

For you are our salvation, Lord, our refuge and our great reward;
Without your grace we waste away like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand, and bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth and let your light restore Earth's own true loveliness once more.

All praise the Son eternally, whose advent sets his people free,
Whom with the Father we adore, and Spirit blest for evermore.

***DOXOLOGY**

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow
(Old Hundredth)

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; / Praise Christ, all people here
below;
Praise Holy Spirit evermore; / Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Lydia Mulkey

**Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.
Amen.**

GOING FORTH IN DEDICATION AND SERVICE

INVITATION TO JOIN THE CIRCLE

Lydia Mulkey

***CLOSING HYMN**

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

There's a Voice in the Wilderness (Black hymnal no. 120)

**There's a voice in the wilderness crying, a call from the ways untrod:
Prepare in the desert a highway, a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted, the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places where Emmanuel may go!**

**O Zion, who offers good tidings, to the height of the mountains dare!
Lift your voice to the cities of Judah: "Behold your God!" declare.
Like the flowers of the field we perish, our human works decay,
the power and pomp of nations shall pass like a dream away.**

**But the word of our God is forever, our Defender's will is strong;
God stands in the midst of nations, to render right the wrong.**

**Then God shall be as a shepherd, the lambs gathered to God's breast;
and pastures of peace shall greet them, to give to the weary rest.**

*BLESSING

Ally Vertigan

Family of faith, as you leave this place, you go into a weary world. So speak tenderly. Do the good that is yours to do. Choose connection. Hold onto hope. And remember that Christ took on flesh for you. You are God's beloved. So go rejoicing. The world needs it. Amen.

*BENEDICTION RESPONSE

Sanctuary Choir
& Congregation

Weary World Rejoice (v. 1)

(tune: Silent Night)

Weary World, God's own vine

Tears our only bread and wine

Crying out to be restored / Desperate for a break from war

Weary world, rejoice / Come and raise your voice

POSTLUDE

Bobby Nguyen

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme by J. S. Bach

ABOUT THE BULLETIN ART

What Wonder Turns Into by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Inspired by Luke 1:57-66

Acrylic painting on canvas with digital drawing

When was the last time you were truly amazed? I don't mean surprised; there is much about this world that should shock us. I mean amazed— wrapped up in wonder, absorbed in an unexpected delight. I love witnessing the moments when my one-year-old daughter allows amazement to wash over her like a gentle rain: her jaw drops open, her eyes widen and stay fixed, and for a rare moment, she gets very still. This recently happened when she discovered the kids across the street playing basketball for the first time. Her senses have not yet grown dull to the magic surrounding her.

In this image, I wanted to capture the moment Zechariah's voice returns to him. I decided to depict only half of Zechariah's face; this miracle is not really about him, but about what happens through him. When he confirms John's name, he sheds his distrust of the angel's impossible news. His skepticism and weariness subside as he awakens to the joy in his midst. He allows himself to be amazed. Zechariah's voice pours out of him, parting the surrounding crowd like the Red Sea, stirring each person into confusion and bewilderment. The blessing of his song spills over to his son, who is held tenderly by his mother. Elizabeth is the only person in this scene who is not presently swept up in wonder. I believe Elizabeth has spent months allowing herself to be amazed. She was in isolation for the first five months of her pregnancy (Luke 1:24). Perhaps she needed that time to go inward—to heal from the trauma of her infertility, to trust the promise of life in her womb, to attune herself to her child. She was capsized with awe the day Mary showed up at her doorstep. And so, when Zechariah's voice returns, Elizabeth's senses have not grown dull. Instead, her amazement has metabolized into something new: attunement for her child. It has transformed into love and deep trust. It has turned into joy. When we allow ourselves to be amazed, we might be surprised what that wonder can turn into. —Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

EVENTS AND UPDATES

Below is just a sampling of the news and events at First United. You can find our full calendar at firstunitedoakpark.com/calendar. Follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/firstunitedoakpark) for our weekly newsletter and lots more.

Fourth Sunday Offering (on the Third Sunday)

Our special offering in December will go to ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid); they help refugees and others hurt by conflicts in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon. ANERA has no political or religious affiliation, but it works with partners (NGOs) to provide both emergency relief and resources for long-term health, education, and economic development. The offering will be received on December 17 and again on Christmas Eve when 20% of the offering will be designated for ANERA aid.

Blue Christmas: Liturgy for the Weary, December 20

For those who have experienced loss, the joy of the holiday season can often feel elusive and out of reach. Rev. Ally Vertigan will lead a service quietly acknowledging that even at Christmas time we can feel blue, through candle lighting, readings, and songs in the chapel at 6pm. Following the service there will be a simple supper of soup and bread beginning at about 6:45pm in the lounge, ending at 7:30p.m. Childcare will be available.

Advent IV Morning Worship: Virtual Only

The Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve fall on the same day this year. On December 24, our 11 a.m. morning advent worship will be virtual only on the First United YouTube channel.

Christmas Eve Worship Services

The family friendly Christmas Eve service with pageant will be at 5p.m. and the traditional candlelight Christmas Eve service will be at 8 p.m. Both will be in the sanctuary. No childcare provided. Children are welcome and expected!

Sticky Church Returns on December 31

Get ready for the return of a First United tradition: Sticky Church! On December 31, we will worship around the breakfast table with French toast casserole and plenty of syrup! We are looking for some volunteers to help with breakfast. Please check out the opportunities on the sign-up genius using the QR code or be in touch with Heather in the office (hvanderberg@firstunitedoakpark.com) and she can sign you up!



NEXT BEGINS NOW

If you make your financial decisions in December, now is the time to act! Use the card in this bulletin to make your commitment for the NEXT BEGINS NOW multi-year capital campaign.

Christmas Break, Vacations and Communication Deadlines

First United will be closed December 25 through 29 as staff takes a break following this busy season. Additionally, there will be limited office hours the week of January 1 while Heather is out of the country. Check upcoming eblasts for more details on office hours during that week. Please note that submissions for the December 28 and January 4 eblast as well as the December 24 and December 31 bulletins are due December 20.

Church School Christmas Break

Church School will not meet on December 24 or December 31. We will see you back in the classroom in the New Year!

Wholly: Worship for the Whole People of God, January 7

Wholly is back! Wholly is an intergenerational, multi-sensory worship experience that explores holy ideas in an accessible way. Come to Centennial Hall at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, January 7 to hear an ancient and holy story, explore the story through journaling, art, meditation, games, movement (or all of these!), and gather in community to celebrate, sing and share a light meal.

Second Sunday Sundaes Are Back in 2024

FUJI youth Romy and Fiz are looking to bring back Second Sunday Sundaes. Who doesn't want a sundae after church on the second Sunday of every month?. We are looking for your help including donations to help buy the ice cream and toppings and 1-2 volunteers to help serve. If you want to donate please contact FionaJoBell@gmail.com or find Fiz Bell or Romy Auch after services. The First Second Sunday Sundae will be January 14 in the lounge!

WELCOME TO FIRST UNITED!

We are a union church of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ. We seek to be an inclusive expression of Christ's body celebrating our diversity while finding our unity in Christ. We are a More Light/Open and Affirming congregation, committed to full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in membership & ministry.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT FIRST UNITED

Interested in learning more about First United Church? Look for members wearing gold buttons, talk to Pastor Lydia, or join us for a Newcomers class held three times per year. Next class to be held late winter or early spring.

ADULT EDUCATION

Faith formation doesn't end after Church School. Adult Education takes a variety of forms, from small, group Bible studies to Sunday morning Speaker Series. Weekly Bible study and Speaker Series meet during Sunday education hour at 9:45 a.m.

CHILDREN IN WORSHIP & OUR NURSERY

We love to have children in worship! Age-appropriate worship activities and books are available as you enter the sanctuary. We also offer safe, quality childcare and quiet play for children five and under in our nursery. Ask an usher for directions.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Church School is for children ages birth through 8th grade. Meeting Sundays at 9:45 a.m., September through mid-May, we tell stories of the Bible using a lens of love and justice with singing, praying, and creating. Contact Lydia Mulkey (lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com) to learn more.

MUSIC MINISTRIES

Are you interested in singing in worship with our Sanctuary Choir? Rehearsals are Wednesday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., September through May. For more information contact Bill Chin (bill@firstunitedoakpark.com).

YOUTH PROGRAMS – FUJI (JR. HIGH) & FUSH (SR. HIGH)

The youth groups meet on Sunday evenings from 5 – 7 p.m. here at the church, September through mid-May. Contact the office (office@firstunitedoakpark.com) for more information.



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

an open community united in love & justice

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Pastor Lydia Mulkey – lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com