

# FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

December 3, 2023



*An open community united in love and justice*

# PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

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## ADVENT I: WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WEARINESS

### PRELUDE

Bobby Nguyen

*Deux versets* by César Franck

### WELCOME

Lydia Mulkey

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Laurie Jolicoeur

*Wade In* by Rev. Sarah Speed

Over time

wind and water

will sand down the edges of a stone.

For humans,

our wind and water

is the grief of the world.

Stay here long enough

and pieces of you

will be pressed upon

by life's never-ending stream.

It's enough to make you weary.

It's enough to make you question.

It's enough to make you quiet.

And yet, the stream continues.

So do not be afraid to stand in that water.

Wade in. Soak the hem of your jeans.

Drip wet footprints through every room in your house.

Let the water stains tell your story.

And when your body grows weary of swimming,

name the stream.

Acknowledge your weariness.

For eventually,

you will pick flowers from

the opposite bank.

And over and over again, we'll tell this story.

And over and over again,  
a weary world will rejoice.

*Listen as the sound of the singing bowl fades.*

## THE CANDLE OF HOPE

Clara Kearley, Carina Kearley Pruitt,

How does a weary world hope?

Ava Pruitt, and Amaya Pruitt

By telling stories of hope, by lighting candles in the night, and planting seeds in the winter that will bloom in the spring.

By praying for children as they grow and picking up trash on the sidewalk.

By insisting that small acts can make a difference.

There are a million ways to practice hope.

So today we light the candle of hope as a reminder and a charge.

**With God's help, may we bring hope into a weary world. Amen.**

## ADVENT CANDLE RESPONSE

Sanctuary Choir

*Light Dawns on a Weary World*

& 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.

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## \*PASSING THE PEACE

Lydia Mulkey

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

## \*OPENING HYMN

Sanctuary Choir  
& Congregation

*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (Blue hymnal no. 2)

**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 every nation, / Joy of every longing heart.**

**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.**

## PRAYER FOR WHOLENESS

Don Sibley

Gracious God, we are weary.

For weary bodies that ache and cry out, we pray:

**Forgive us for pushing ourselves too hard.**

**Reminds us that we deserve Sabbath rest.**

For weary minds that feel overwhelmed and saturated with news, we pray:

**Forgive us for creating so many distractions.**

**Remind us that in the quiet, we can hear you.**

For weary hearts that long to feel the joy of this season, we pray:

**Forgive us for being impatient with ourselves.**

**Remind us that healing takes time, and that joy and grief can coexist.**

For the weary edges of our faith that struggle to hold onto hope,

**Forgive us. Remind us of Zechariah and Elizabeth.**

**Remind us that your good news knows no bounds. Amen.**

*Time for Silent Prayer*

## ASSURANCE OF LOVE

Family of faith,

no matter how many times we wear ourselves thin,

no matter how many times we lose ourselves to distractions,

no matter how many times we ask ourselves, "How can this be?"

God's love keeps showing up for us.

So say this with me:

**We are loved. We are claimed. We are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## MUSICAL RESPONSE

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Black hymnal no. 116, v. 1)*

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

Sanctuary Choir  
& Congregation

## LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

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### TIME FOR SHARING

The First United Puppeteers

### \*SONG OF ILLUMINATION

*Come to Me, You Weary (Black hymnal no. 484)*

**"O come to me, you weary, and I will give you rest."  
The blessed voice of Jesus, which comes to hearts oppressed!  
It tells of benediction, of pardon, grace, and peace,  
of joy that has no ending, of love which does not cease.**

**"O come to me, you wanderers, and I will give you light."  
The loving voice of Jesus, which comes to cheer the night!  
Our hearts were filled with sadness, and we had lost our way;  
but morning brings us gladness and songs for each new day.**

**"O come to me, you fainting, and I will give you life!"  
The cheering voice of Jesus, which stills our inner strife!  
The evil one surrounds us and would our faith subdue,  
But you are strong within us, our courage brave and true.**

**"All you who come and seek me will never be cast out."  
The welcome voice of Jesus, which drives away our doubt!  
And though we are unworthy of love so free and true,  
we hear your call to sinners; in trust we come to you.**

Sanctuary Choir  
& Congregation

### SCRIPTURE READING – LUKE 1:1-23

Don Sibley

### SERMON – WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WEARINESS

Lydia Mulkey

## SERMON RESPONSE

*Wait for the Lord*

**Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.**

**Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart.**

Sanctuary Choir  
& Congregation

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

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### COMMUNION

Lydia Mulkey  
& Don Sibley

### COMMUNION MUSIC

*Sing It True*

Beth Albrecht, Bill Chin,  
Bobby Nguyen, and Nadav Simon

Emmanuel, we're waiting here.

We hold onto hope despite our fears.

Emmanuel, we're waiting here for your promised day,

Where joy will stay.

*Chorus:*

We can hold grief in both our hands. Even still, our feet know how to dance.

Even on the longest night we will see the stars shining bright.

For when the world wears us thin, when it says get tougher skin,

We'll sing for you.

For all it takes is just one voice for joy to be a force for good.

We'll sing it true.

Oh, when the world is wearing thin, Emmanuel reaches in,

We'll sing for you.

For all it takes is just one voice for joy to be a force for good.

We'll sing it true.

Emmanuel, the night is cold,

But hope is a match that warms the soul.

Emmanuel, the angels sing "Joy to the world."

We are listening. *Chorus*

Mourning to dancing,

You turn our mourning to dancing.

You give us reason for dancing.

We sing Joy to the world. *Chorus*

# PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Don Sibley

## \*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

Caden Eckert

**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

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## INVITATION TO JOIN THE CIRCLE

Lydia Mulkey

## \*CLOSING HYMN

Sanctuary Choir  
& Congregation

*Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn* (Black hymnal no. 107)

**Awake! Awake, and greet the new morn, for angels herald its dawning,  
sing out your joy, for Jesus is born, behold! The child of our longing.  
Come as a baby weak and poor, to bring all hearts together,  
to open wide the heavenly door, and lives now inside us forever.**

**To us, to all in sorrow and fear, Emmanuel comes a-singing,  
whose humble song is quiet and near, yet fills the earth with its ringing.  
Music to heal the broken soul and hymns of loving kindness,  
the thunder of the anthems roll to shatter all hate and injustice.**

**In deepest night Christ's coming shall be, when all the world is despairing,  
as morning light so quiet and free, so warm and gentle and caring.  
One without voice breaks forth in song, a lame one leaps in wonder,  
the weak are raised above the strong, and weapons are broken asunder.**

**Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night, though cold the winter and cheerless, the  
rising sun shall crown you with light, be strong and loving and fearless;  
Love be our song and love our prayer, and love, our endless story,  
may God fill every day we share, and bring us at last into glory.**

**\*BLESSING**

Lydia Mulkey

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

*Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* and

*Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn* by J. S. Bach



# ABOUT THE BULLETIN ART

*Annunciation to Zechariah* by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Luke 1:1-23

Acrylic and ink on wood panel

Zechariah is dressed in a breastpiece, ephod, robe, checkered tunic, turban, and sash, just as the book of Exodus specifies. In my painting, gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns are woven together and bejeweled with engraved stones which bear the names of the sons of Israel (Exodus 28:4).

Zechariah stands in the Holy Place wearing the most meticulous of garments. Does he expect to encounter the divine? Or is he just going through the motions, lighting the incense as an all-too-familiar scent fills the air?

After all these years of fulfilling priestly duties and “living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord” (Luke 1:6), Zechariah and his wife are still childless. Regardless of their desire for children, in their culture and context, childlessness bore the implication of God’s contempt.

I ruminated on this image... a weary priest wrapped in layered fabrics, colors, symbols, textures, and rare stones that proclaim God’s providence and power. The contrast is not lost on me.

I often try to neglect my weariness by putting on a veneer of unwavering trust in God—while feeling like I may suddenly unravel into a pile of beautifully-curated threads, stones, and gold accessories.

In this image, I decided to depict the angel as smoke from the altar of incense. Zechariah has one hand over his mouth in fear and disbelief, while his other hand cradles the notion—not yet hope—of his son’s existence.

Do you bind up your weariness in a neat and tidy bow, put your head down, and project okay-ness like me? What would it look like to acknowledge our weariness, quit powering through, and open ourselves up to what God might have in store for us? Perhaps we’ll meet an angel. —Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

# 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](http://firstunitedoakpark.com/calendar). Follow us on Facebook ([facebook.com/firstunitedoakpark](https://facebook.com/firstunitedoakpark)) for our weekly newsletter and lots more.*

## NEXT BEGINS NOW

December is a busy time at First United. Many matters demand our attention. This year, we have an important additional responsibility, the payment of our commitments to the NEXT BEGINS NOW Capital Campaign. Please remember to pay your 2023 contribution before December 31, designating "Capital Campaign" as its destination. If you have not yet made a commitment to the campaign, please do so now. Many thanks.

## Alternative Christmas Store

Shop the Alternative Christmas Store to benefit our local mission partners and/or support international fair trade. We also offer a way to donate directly to some of our Faith in Action Mission Partners. Shopping dates are December 3, 10, and 17 before and after worship.

## Holiday Food and Gift Basket Gifts Due and Drivers Needed

Today is the day for everyone to bring wrapped and tagged gifts back to church. If you can't make it for some reason, contact Sher Watts Spooner ([sandaspooner@comcast.net](mailto:sandaspooner@comcast.net)) to make arrangements. We also need a few drivers on Monday night, December 4, to transport gifts to a central drop-off point. Please let Sher know if you are able to drive and arrive at 7 p.m. at church.

## ACS Shopping Event at Ten Thousand Villages, December 6

Mark your calendars for a special shopping event at Ten Thousand Villages (121 N. Marion St.) on Wednesday, December 6 from 6-8 p.m. 15% of your purchase will be donated to First United Mission Partners!

## Children's Ministry Advent Event, December 9

Join the Children's Ministry team in the lounge from 9-11 a.m. on December 9. Make an Advent wreath, Christmas ornaments, and a peg people nativity set. Take some fun holiday pics in the photo booth. This event is free and open to the whole community.

## Sing We Joyous, December 9 & 10

The Oriana Singers, City Voices, and Pro Musica Youth Chorus will ring in the season with the holiday spectacular "Sing We Joyous" on December 9 at 7:30 p.m. and December 10 at 4 p.m. at First United. Visit [oriana.org](http://oriana.org) to purchase tickets and for more information.

## Hanging of the Greens, December 10

Next Sunday, our Church School kids lead worship during our annual Hanging of the Greens service. Our younger grades will provide music and lead prayers and blessings while the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders share the message.

## Advent at the Movies with Adult Ed, December 10

Hope, peace, joy, and love: God's gifts to us during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Rev. Stan Davis will lead us as we watch a clip from four movies, each showing one of these gifts, then you can share a personal memory which embodies that gift for you. William Hurt, Janelle Monáe, Tom Hanks, and you! In Centennial Hall at 9:45 a.m. The Bible Group will also meet this Sunday as Rev. Charlie Morris considers the question, "Should you care about the genealogy of Jesus?" at 9:45 a.m. in the Conference Room.

## Deck the Halls with Soup and Singing, December 11

Join other Prime Timers for a soup luncheon and a chance to sing Christmas carols at noon Monday, December 11, in Centennial Hall. Soup, bread, dessert, and cider will be supplied; the cost is \$5. RSVP by December 7 to Sher Watts Spooner ([sandaspooner@comcast.net](mailto:sandaspooner@comcast.net)).

## Candlelight Peace Vigil, December 12

First United will host the 2023 Candlelight Peace Vigil to End Gun Violence on December 12 at 7 p.m. Come to honor all gun violence victims and survivors impacted by the violence, to lament the tragedy and pain, and to build community, creating hope, healing, and change, supporting violence prevention in all forms.

## 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. Following the service there will be a simple supper of soup and bread in the lounge. Childcare will also be available.

## Advent IV 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 services will be at 5 and 8 p.m.

# 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:office@firstunitedoakpark.com)) for more information.



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