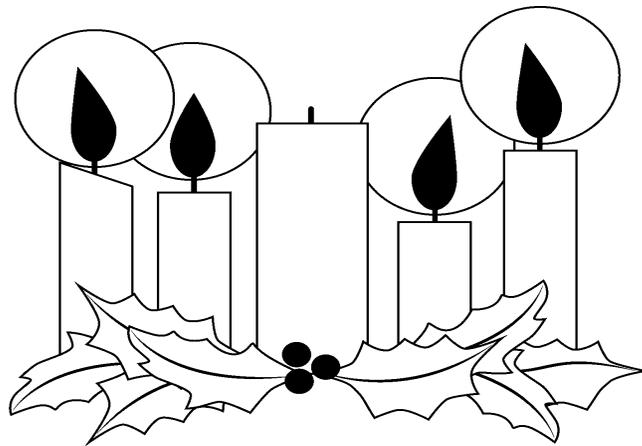


**Covenant Presbyterian Church
Butler, Pennsylvania**



**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF
*Advent***

December 24, 2017

The Rev. Dr. James E. Swanson, Pastor
Pastor's Phone: 724-752-8383 / 724-712-1407
Church Office Phone: 724-287-7731
Website: <http://covenantbutler.org>
Social Media: [facebook.com/covenant230](https://www.facebook.com/covenant230)

Order of Service for Worship

December 24, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Eleven O'clock, A.M.



Rev. Dr. James E. Swanson, Pastor
Organist/Music Director: Beverly Antis
Liturgist of the Month: Lars Morrison

THIS IS GOD'S HOUSE ~ ALL ARE WELCOME HERE !

Even as the world seeks to judge or divide us according to our economic, racial and ethnic groups, ages, gender, abilities, preferences, politics and theological positions, we believe that in Christ there should be no such division.
Our congregation is strengthened through difference and diversity, and in the name of our Lord, we welcome all who come seeking refuge and healing from condemnation, prejudice and discrimination.

PRELUDE *Sweet Slumbers* arr. John Mock
Lars Morrison, flute **Beverly Antis**, alto recorder
Ave, Ave, the Angel Sang Robert Lau
Lars Morrison, alto recorder **Beverly Antis**, organ

CHORAL INTROIT

Of the Father's Love Begotten Plainsong, Mode V
*Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been, And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore! Amen.*

—Aurelius Clemens Prudentius

*OPENING HYMN #20

Watchman, Tell Us of the Night ABERYSTWYTH

*PRAYER OF ADORATION

LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

Candle of Love *Women of the Covenant Choir*
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*As the fourth candle is lit, the ones lighting will say:*

Our Advent journey is almost complete, and the Christ child will soon be here. As we light the fourth candle, we are reminded of the love that only Christ can give.

Here these words from the prophet Micah:

*But you, O Bethlehem, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, of ancient days.*

God's love is meant for the whole of creation; together, we await the day of his coming with earnest desire and heightened expectation.

*The congregation will pray together:*

**God our Savior, you alone rule with justice and love. As we seek to be bearers of your grace in the world, may we be sources of peace and safety to others. Amen.**

**O come, Desire of nations, bind  
 All peoples in one heart and mind;  
 Bid envy, strife, and discord cease;  
 Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.  
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
 Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

—Latin, c. 12th century

Trans. John Mason Neale

## PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 89: 1-4, 19-26      (*Pew Bible OT p. 475*)

## CORPORATE PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**O God of compassion, you send forth your Spirit, yet we ignore your commands and turn away from you.**

**Angels herald good tidings and peace on earth, but hostility and treachery are everywhere to be seen; the poor cry out for relief, but their cries go unanswered; the sick are not healed, the oppressed are not freed, and the grieving wait to be comforted.**

**As people of God, we repent and plead for grace. Make us worthy to receive Christ into our lives and send the peace that passes all understanding.**

## SILENT CONFESSION

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Pastor: The God of all mercy and consolation has reconciled the world through Jesus Christ, offering us true forgiveness for all our sins. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

People: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!**

\*GLORIA PATRI 579

GLORIA PATRI

\*THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH      from *"The Confession of 1967"*

**God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of the human mind. Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness. But God reveals divine love in Jesus Christ by showing power in the form of a servant, wisdom in the folly of the cross, and goodness in receiving sinful men and women.**

**The kingdom represents God's triumph over all that resists the divine will and disrupts God's creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in all people and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption.**

**With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.**

\*GREETINGS OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP

SHARING OF JOYS, CONCERNS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHORAL PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION Sarum plainsong, Mode IV

*Creator of the stars of night, Your people's everlasting light,  
O Christ, Redeemer of us all, We pray You, hear us when we call.  
Amen.*

—Latin, 9th century  
Trans. John Mason Neale

FIRST LESSON 2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16 (*Pew Bible OT p. 245*)

Liturgist: This is the Word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

EPISTLE LESSON Romans 16: 25-27 (*Pew Bible NT p. 926*)

Liturgist: Here ends the second lesson.

All: **Praise be to you, O Lord.**

\*GOSPEL READING Luke 1: 26-38 (*Pew Bible NT p. 831*)

Pastor: The Gospel of our Lord.

All: **Glory to You, O Christ.**

\*CONGREGATIONAL CANTICLE NUN KOMM, DER HEIDEN HEILAND

Hymn 14, **vs. 4** - *Savior of the Nations, Come*

**Brightly does Your manger shine,  
Glorious in its light divine.  
Let not sin o'ercloud this light,  
Ever be our faith thus bright.**

—Ambrose of Milan, 4th century  
Para. Martin Luther  
Trans. William Morton Reynolds

SERMON “*SISTER (NOT MOTHER) MARY*” Pastor Jim

PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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 and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

CHORAL AMEN

*Two-Fold Amen*

Beverly Antis

HYMN # 16

*The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came*

GABRIEL'S MESSAGE

PRESENTATION OF TITHES, OFFERINGS, GIFTS  
& CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

*Song of Mary*

William Crotch  
Ed. By Robert Wetzler

*My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior,  
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.*

*For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his Name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.*

*He hath showed strength with his arm,  
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,  
and hath exalted the humble and meek;*

*He hath filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.  
He, remembering his mercy, hath holpen his servant Israel;  
As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost:  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be;  
world without end. Amen.*

—Luke 1: 46-55

\*ADVENT DOXOLOGY - Hymn #36, vs. 4

CRANHAM

**What can I give Him, Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
Yet, what I can I give Him: Give my heart.**

—Christina Rossetti

\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**In gratitude and love, O God, we pour out our thanksgiving and praise for all your blessings. Receive our gifts and shape our lives by your grace so we may be messengers of the good news of your love for all peoples. Amen.**

\*RECESSIONAL HYMN # 12      *People, Look East*      BESANÇON

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CHORAL RESPONSE      *Come, Lord Jesus*      Thomas Olivers  
Harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams

*Come, Lord Jesus, Come, Lord Jesus,  
Come, Lord Jesus, Everlasting Christ, come down!*  
—Charles Wesley

\*A TIME OF SILENCE

\*CHARGE AND DISMISSAL

Pastor: Friends, as we complete our journey through Advent –  
Waiting and hoping...  
May the God of hope,  
who loves us and gave himself for us,  
fill us with joy as we trust in Him,  
so that in believing, we may abound in hope.  
Now let us go in peace, and serve the Lord !

People: **Thanks be to God!**

\*POSTLUDE      *The Angel Gabriel*      Robert Lau

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\* Those who are able, please stand

**YOU WERE GREETED TODAY BY** *Connie Brown*

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**THE POINSETTIA PLANTS IN THE SANCTUARY**

**TWO LARGER PLANTS ON CHANCEL STEPS**

Given by Helen Ferguson  
“*In Honor of the Covenant Choir &  
Beverly Antis, Choir Director*”

**PLANTS ON THE RISER**

Given by Members and Friends  
*in Honor and/or Memory of Loved Ones*



*2017 Christmas Joy Offering*

**Will be Received TODAY, December 24th  
During the 11am Worship Service**

Make checks payable to: Covenant Presbyterian Church  
designated "Christmas Joy Offering" in the memo.



**Available in the narthex today!**

**PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**Week 4 ~ Advent Devotionals**

If you miss a Sunday, or wish to have all weekly installments  
please contact Elsie in the office



**In Sympathy**

The church family offers  
heartfelt sympathy to...

*Gil & Carol Wagner & family  
upon the death of their son, David  
on Thursday, December 21, 2017*

David fought a courageous battle with leukemia,  
but is now in the arms of his loving Creator.

***Visitation Tuesday, Dec. 26 prior to a  
brief service to be conducted at 8 pm  
by Pastor Jim at Geibel's Funeral Home, Butler***

Check Geibel's website to view David's obituary:

<http://www.geibelfuneralhome.com/listings>

**JOIN US FOR OUR WEEKLY TIME**

**OF FELLOWSHIP !**

...Immediately following worship each Sunday, downstairs in the Assembly Room. Please join us for fellowship (and food!)

Hosting Today: Ms. Claus's Kitchen



## *Worship Schedule*



### **Christmas Eve**

TONIGHT, December 24, 2017

### **“A Service of Lessons & Carols”**

With Communion (*seated*) and Candle Lighting

Lighting the Christ Candle:

Jim & Karen Swanson & Family

**7:00 pm ~ Festival Music**

**7:30 pm ~ Worship Service**

**THE CHURCH OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED**

*for the Christmas Holiday*

**Tomorrow, Monday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Tuesday, December 26<sup>th</sup>**

**& Wednesday, December 27<sup>th</sup>**



If you have a special need, Pastor Jim can be reached at 724-712-1407 (cell) or 724-752-8383 (home), or you may leave a voice message.



December 31, 2017

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Christmas Day

*Two Worship Services ~ Sanctuary*

@ 11:00 AM ~ MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE & FELLOWSHIP

@ 3:00 PM ~ ALL AREA CHURCH WORSHIP SERVICE

Service & Music based on the style of Lessons & Carols— but less formal. Covenant and other church choirs (including bell) as well as clergy and musicians from area churches will be participating in this joint collaboration in the Sanctuary.

There will be no reception following the service so that those attending New Year's Eve celebrations can be home in time to celebrate the evening!



### **The New Flower Chart for 2018**

... **NOW POSTED**  
*on the Assembly Room bulletin board.*



Please sign up for any open Sunday.  
The cost is currently \$35 for two vases.

Please make checks payable to Covenant Presbyterian Church. Flowers are ordered through the church office unless otherwise requested.

*Flower forms are available in the narthex.  
Please submit payment with your order.*

*Thank you.*

### **Reminder: Seekers Class**

No Seekers Class this Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup> or  
next Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>.

*Seekers will resume in the new year*



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**UPPER ROOM DAILY DEVOTIONAL**

**January/February 2018 Edition**

*Copies now available in the narthex -- Take one, they're free !*

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**Prayer Concerns**

**Bev Antis** ~ We love you, Bev! May the melody and harmony of God's comfort bring peace to your soul and strengthen you on your journey.

**Allen Kitchen** (husband of Rev. Mary Kitchen) ~ surgery to remove a tumor on his kidney at Cleveland Clinic has been postponed until December 29

**Peggy Cartwright's Mother & Father** ~ her Dad is dealing with the effects of a recent stroke; her Mom has Alzheimer's

**Diane Dancik** ~ friend of Mary Reefer who has been diagnosed with cancer which has spread to her liver and bowels

**Donna Hobaugh** ~ keep her in prayer; Donna has Alzheimers and lives at 100 Newhaven Lane, Rm. 6-B

**PRAYER CORDON:** Tuesdays at 12 noon in the Church Library.  
To request prayer, contact Virginia at 724-287-3920.

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**Happy Birthday!**

**Robert Marten** (*December 24*)

**Jane Hall** (*December 27*)

**Larry Morrison** (*December 29*)

**Ava Elise DeLorenzo** (*Happy 8th Birthday, December 31*)

--Daughter of Matt & Karen (Reefer) DeLorenzo

--Granddaughter of John & Mary Reefer

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# A Reflection on Today's Gospel

The Annunciation of Mary

Luke 1:26-38

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*--by John J. Pilch, Jr.*

(Biblical scholar and author who died  
July 22, 2016 of heart disease. He was 79.)

In the ancient Mediterranean world, people believed that unless prevented by appropriate measures, a man and a woman who found themselves alone together would inevitably have sexual relations. This is why the culture prescribes that men (fathers, husbands, brothers) watch, guard, and protect the women in their care.

There are a variety of strategies for carrying out this concern. One is to ensure that a woman is always in the company of other women and children (girls and boys) younger than the age of puberty. Another is the structure of the houses where the inner room or courtyard secluded from the view of people (men) in the outside world is reserved as the proper place for unmarried women.

In Luke's account of the annunciation, a presumably masculine angel visits Mary who seems to be quite alone. Very likely, she is in the innermost quarters of her family's home, the proper place for an unmarried young woman. The angel is an intruder, and the scene would strike any Mediterranean person as suspicious, angel notwithstanding.

Moreover, Mary is betrothed (a more accurate word than the misleading "engaged") to Joseph. Betrothal was a family event rather than an event between two individuals. Marriage in the ancient Middle East was arranged by the parents with the intention of joining and strengthening two families.

In Middle Eastern villages today, the marriage contract is negotiated by the mothers to make certain the families are of equal status and that neither family is taking advantage of the other. The patriarchs will ultimately ratify what has been negotiated.

Mary thus finds herself in an embarrassing and potentially shameful situation. Should anything happen to her in the family home, her father and brothers would be shamed for not taking proper care of her. The family's shame would increase on the marriage evening if no tokens of virginity could be produced (read Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

Notice that despite all the honorable assurances from the messenger, Mary is still properly concerned about her honor status: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” She is fully aware of the significance and consequences of the angel’s message. In a flash, she recognizes the new challenges that will emerge in her betrothal and the crisis into which this pregnancy could throw both families (see Deuteronomy 22:13-21 and Numbers 5:11-31).

The angel reminds Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.” Mediterraneans recognize in the angel’s explanation two indications that God is going to play the role of traditional husband for Mary. He will “empower” her (“the spirit will come upon you”) and “protect” her (“overshadow you”), two duties of a Middle Eastern husband. The meaning is not lost on Mary, the Mediterranean maiden.

Her concluding remark is a typical Middle Eastern cultural response when one has lost an argument, or decides to conclude a discussion that is going nowhere. The sentiment “let it be done to me according to your word” is more commonly stated, “As you wish.” At this stage of the story, there still remains much for Mary to face. She may be as perplexed after the angel departs as she was when he arrived.

Historians frequently point to figures in the ancient world whose origins sound just like Jesus. For instance, Asclepius, the healing deity, had a human mother, Coronis (or Arsinoe), and a divine father, Apollo. From their twentieth-century, theologically enlightened perspective, modern Christians find the fact that Jesus had no human father not to be troubling.

Attempting to enter the first-century world and culture of Palestine to understand and appreciate this scene in Luke leads to a more sympathetic view of the unsettling experience it must have been for Mary. Even for saints, faith is not easy.

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*To All of You ...  
from All of Us*

*A Very Merry Christmas  
and a Happy, Healthy  
"Peace-filled" New Year!*

*From the Staff of  
Covenant Church*

***Pastor Jim,  
Larry & Tom,  
Bev & Elsie***

