

Advent Chapel Worship
United Theological Seminary
December 16, 2009

Call to worship

One: Remember not the former things! Do not consider the things of old! Look – God is doing a new thing! Now it is springing forth – don't you see it?

Many: Creative God, we are waiting. Do a new thing among us!

One: God will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made low.

Many: Powerful God, we are waiting. Do a new thing among us!

One: Here is God's servant, the chosen one. He will not lose hope or courage. He will establish justice on the earth.

Many: Gracious God, we are waiting. Do a new thing among us!

All: Sing a new song to the Lord! Sing the Lord's praises, all the world; praise God, all you people. Let even those who live in distant lands give praise and glory to our God!

Opening collect (unison)

Holy One, you are eternity captured in time, heaven sleeping in a manger. As you reach down to us in our darkness, forgive us our sin. Loose us from our treacheries toward you, and our cruelties toward one another. Open our minds and our hearts, that we may rejoice again at your coming. We ask it in the name of him whose advent we celebrate, even Jesus Christ our Lord who reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

**O come, thou Dayspring from on high
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Scripture Isaiah 60:1-2, 17b-20

Reading "First Light" Myrna Reid Grant [Shaw, p. 7]

It is an early morning like all others.
The moonlight slants along the snow. Faint stars
Dissolve into the sky. The household,
Cat and children, deeply sleep.

It is a morning like no other morning.
There is a signifying in the silver dawn.
Stars hesitate, streets listen,
Snow melts in tenderness, trees wait.
The strangeness of the moment quiets lungs
And blood. The touching of a cup,
The turning of a page is holy.
Even the stillness of the room breathes wonder.
Child, Light to my soul-shadow, my confusion,
Coming sweetly, and so small,
Growing within, a stealth, a mystery –
I am moved by this simplicity.
Transfixed with thanks, folded in love,
I cannot adore enough. I cannot speak.
Like trees and snow and stars and street,
I too am silent in the widening light.

Prayer (unison) [Winifred, pp. 32-33 (adapted)]

O Dayspring, dawn of day, we watch for your coming to dispel the darkness, to reveal the unknown, and to unmask the shapes and shadows of the night. In your sun-brilliant shining, we wait to discover the secrets of righteousness and justice, and to learn that where you are there is no shadow, no darkness, no death. Pour upon us again the light of your Word, that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in all our lives. Amen.

Please follow the lighted candle to the next station.

Hymn

**O come, thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Scripture Isaiah 61:1-3

Reading "Life-Giving Power" Frederick Buechner [Buechner, p. 130-131]

Most of the time we tend to think of life as a neutral kind of thing, I suppose. We are born into it one fine day, given life, and in itself life is neither good nor bad except as we make it so by the way that we live it. We may make a full life for ourselves or an empty life; but no matter what we make of it, the common view is that life itself – whatever life is – does not care one way or another any more than the ocean cares whether we swim in it or drown in it. In honesty one has to admit that a great deal of the evidence supports such a view. But rightly or wrongly, the Christian faith flatly contradicts it. To say that God is spirit is to say that life does care, that the life-giving power that life itself comes from is not indifferent as to whether we sink or swim. It wants us to swim. It is to say that whether you call this life-giving power the Spirit of God or Reality or the Life Force or anything else, its most basic characteristic is that it wishes us well and is at work toward that end.

Heaven knows terrible things happen to people in this world. The good die young; the wicked prosper; and in any one town, anywhere, there is grief enough to freeze the blood. But from deep within whatever the hidden spring is that life wells up from, there wells into our lives, even at their darkest and maybe especially then, a power to heal, to breathe new life into us. And in this regard, I think, every one is a mystic because every one at one time or another experiences in the thick of joy or pain the power out of the depths of life to bless. I do not believe that it matters greatly what name you call this power – the Spirit of God is only one of its names – but what I think does matter, vastly, is that we open ourselves to receive it; that we address it and let ourselves be addressed by it; that we move in the direction that it seeks to move us, the direction of fuller communion with itself and with one another. Indeed, I believe that for our sakes this Spirit beneath our spirits will make Christs of all of us before we are done....

Prayer (unison) [Winifred, p. 27 (adapted)]

O Key of David, come, unlock our prisons of distrust and fear, of secrecy and doubt, of injustice and unkindness. Unlock our blindness to the splendor of your light. Unlock our deafness to the melody of the world and the harmony of the universe. Unlock our lameness to the dance of your life. Set us free, O God, from all our bondage; and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you offer us through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please follow the lighted candle to the next station.

Hymn

**O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh.
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Scripture Isaiah 11:1-9

Reading "The Foolishness of God"

Luci Shaw [Shaw, p. 134]

Perform impossibilities
or perish. Thrust out now
the unseasonal ripe figs
among your leaves. Expect
the mountain to be moved.
Hate parents, friends and all
materiality. Love every enemy.
Forgive more times than seventy-
seven. Camel-like, squeeze by
into the kingdom through
the needle's eye. All fear quell.
Hack off your hand, or else,
unbloodied, go to hell.

Thus the divine unreason.
Despairing now, you cry
with earthly logic – how?

And I, your God, reply:
Leap from your weedy shallows.
Dive into the moving water.
Eyeless, learn to see
truly. Find in my folly your
true sanity. Then, Spirit-driven,
run on my narrow way, sure
as a child. Probe, hold
my unhealed hand, and
bloody, enter heaven.

Prayer (unison) [Winifred, p. 8-9 (adapted)]

O Wisdom, gift on the breath of creation, holder of all things together since before time and forever; come as mentor and guide so that we will delight in knowledge, learn discernment, and claim intuition and understanding for our own. Help us both to know and understand what we ought to do, and give us the grace and power to faithfully accomplish it. Amen.

Please follow the lighted candle to the next station.

Hymn

**O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Scripture Isaiah 9:2b-6

Meditation "The New Vision" Jonathon Norman [Norman, p. 76-77]

Our world is not the way that God intended it to be. We see it on the evening news... on the front page of the newspaper... and in weekly news magazines. The world is broken... the world is hurting... the world is lost. In your mind's eye, focus on God holding the world and all of its suffering in God's divine hands.

Now imagine that from God's hands springs a new earth, a new vision of what the world ought to be. What does it look like? Focus on the vision.

Now God gives you the new vision to hold. What emotions do you feel as you hold it?

Listen to God speaking to you. What is God telling you about your part in the vision?

Now imagine the vision moving from your hands into your mind and your heart. Become a part of God's new vision.

Silently ask God to send you into the world to help make the vision a reality.

Prayer (unison) [Winifred, pp. 44-45]

O God with us, Emmanuel, whose law and life and rule are love; you are our only hope. Greed and injustice in the justice of all nations find us deep in poverty, starvation, corruption and war. Even our homes are filled with abuse and injury. We cry to you for salvation! You are our only hope: God with us, Emmanuel. Come quickly!

Lighting of the Advent Candles

The Child whose coming we celebrate is the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures. He is the dayspring, the dawning of the light.

Candle 1 Dayspring John 1:1-5

He is the key of David, who unlocks us from all our bondage.

Candle 2 Key of David Luke 8:43-48

He is Holy Wisdom, who orders all things rightly and offers us the wisdom of God.

Candle 3 Holy Wisdom Matthew 5:1-9

He is the Prince of Peace, who reconciles us to each other and to God.

Candle 4 Prince of Peace Galatians 3:23-29

Sharing the Peace of Christ

Hymn *Incarnation*

[*Upper Room Worshipbook*, Elise S. Eslinger, editor. Upper Room Books, 2006.]

The invitation to the table

The light of Christ is here, waiting for you at this table.

If you are lonely, come! Here you will find acceptance.

If you are weary, come! Here you will find rest.

If you are sorrowful, come! Here you will find comfort.

If you are joyful, come! Here you will find the celebration of God.

Come not because you must, but because you may!

All are welcome at the Lord's Table!

The Great Thanksgiving

Responses set to the tune "Angels We Have Heard on High."

The Lord be with you!

And also with you!

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Gracious God, creator of heaven and earth!

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

When our love failed and we turned away from you, you did not forsake us, but promised to abide with us forever.

In the coming of your Son Jesus Christ, your promises proclaimed by the prophets were fulfilled, and the day of our deliverance dawned.

At his birth, the angels sang glory to you in the highest, and peace to all on earth!

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord!

Heaven and earth your glory fills!

Blessed is the one who comes

**In your name to do your will.
Gloria in excelsis deo!
Gloria in excelsis deo!**

Holy are you; and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ, born of Mary in the fullness of time.
He is the Root of Jesse, a sign to all people, and a light to the nations.
He is the Dayspring, the Light eternal and the Sun of justice.
He is the Key of David, who opens every door, and liberates the oppressed.
He is Holy Wisdom, who orders all things rightly.
He is the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God-with-us!

As Mary and Joseph went from Galilee to Bethlehem and found no room there,
so Jesus went from Galilee to Jerusalem and was despised and rejected.

On the night before his betrayal and death Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "Take; eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died to set us free;
Christ is risen gloriously!
Christ will come again one day
Ever in his world to stay!
Gloria in excelsis deo!
Gloria in excelsis deo!**

One: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. May his coming in glory find us ever watchful in prayer, ever strong in truth and love, and faithful in the breaking of the bread.
Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever!

**Gloria in excelsis deo!
Gloria! A – a – men, a – men, a – men!**

The Lord's Prayer

Now with the confidence of the children of God, let us join in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven... Amen.

The fraction

The sharing of the bread and cup

The prayer after communion Frederick Buechner [Buechner, p. 341 (adapted)]

Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, be born again into our world. Wherever there is war, wherever there is pain, wherever there is loneliness, wherever there is no hope, come long-expected one, with healing in your wings.

Holy Child, whom the shepherds and the kings and the beasts adored, be born again. Wherever there is boredom, wherever there is fear of failure, wherever there is temptation too strong to resist, wherever there is bitterness of heart, come blessed one, with healing in your wings.

Savior, be born in all of us who raise our faces to your face, not knowing fully who we are or who you are, knowing only that your love is beyond all knowing and that no other has the power to make us whole. Come, Lord Jesus, to all those who long for you!

Come quickly! Amen.

Closing hymn

Canticle of the Turning

[*Upper Room Worshipbook*, Elise S. Eslinger, editor. Upper Room Books, 2006.]

Reading

“The Wild Hope” Frederick Buechner [Buechner, p. 340]

To look at the last great self-portraits of Rembrandt or to read Pascal or to hear Bach’s B-minor Mass is to know beyond the need for further evidence that if God is anywhere, God is with them, as God is also with the man behind the meat counter, the woman who scrubs floors at the Lincoln Memorial, the high-school math teacher who explains fractions to the bewildered child. And the step from “God with them” to Emmanuel, “God with us,” may not be as great as it seems. What keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive year after year in a world notorious for dashing all hopes is the haunting dream that the child who was born that day may yet be born again even in us and in our own snowbound, snowblind longing for him.

Benediction

The following sources have been used in portions of this liturgy:

- Frederick Buechner. *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Jonathon Norman. *Worship Feast: 100 Readings, Rituals, Prayers, and Guided Meditations*. Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Luci Shaw, editor. *A Widening Light: Poems of the Incarnation*. Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984.
- Mary Winifred. *Hasten the Kingdom: Praying the O Antiphons of Advent*. Liturgical Press, 1996.