

# **First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**

## **Advent Series, 2020**

### **Children's Christmas Pageant and Choir Concert**

#### ***Hello, My Name is... Everlasting Father***

**Sunday, December 13, 2020**

**Rev. Emily Riley Campbell**

#### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements**

Good morning and welcome to worship! Today is Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, and today is the third Sunday in Advent. We are delighted that you are worshiping with us from wherever you are today. Now, if you tuned in this morning with the hope of finding a little bit of Christmas joy or hope for a sign of God's love, than you have made a wise choice! Today in our worship our entire service is being led by our choirs, and first let me just say before anyone has any kind of heart attack, that when you see the choir--whether the children's choir or the adult choir members singing next to each other without masks, please be aware this is footage from previous years' Christmas pageants and concerts.

Yet, in addition to that, there is an entirely new script of our children's pageant this year. There's a new message that ties all of this together. You will see individual children reading their parts and unless they are with siblings, they are being as careful as possible.

My heartfelt thanks, today, goes to Carol Moon for writing our new children's pageant. We're so grateful! We're so grateful, as well, to Darlene Maginley, our Children's Ministry Director, for ensuring that the kids were able to be here in a way that was both fun, yet safe for everyone. And I do want to thank Susan Underhill for her amazing video skills, for bringing all the various pieces of this particular service together for us today.

Now, friends, the children will kick us off today and after the children have shared their message with us, I'll be sharing a very brief reflection on the love of God that we experience through our Everlasting Father, as that is our theme today. Our celebration of God's love, which will be started by the children, will carry on with our Chancel Choir who will end our service today. Again, I'm so grateful to Dr. Jerry Smith for leading our Chancel Choir, for Sue Scott on the organ and Sharon Smith on the piano. Thank you for sharing your incredible talents with us as a church.

Now at the end of this service, if you find yourself still not feeling as though you have had enough of our Chancel Choir, then I invite you to come back on Sunday evening December 13<sup>th</sup>, at 5:00 p.m., in our parking lot, where we will be having a Christmas carol celebration. If you come that night you will hear our Chancel Choir singing live, socially distanced, and in masks. They will be leading some of our very favorite carols and we will have the opportunity, in the safety, comfort, and warmth of our cars, to listen through our car radios to the Chancel Choir singing. We can sing along with them. As an added benefit, as you turn into the parking lot for the 5:00 p.m. concert on December 13<sup>th</sup>, you will receive hot chocolate and Christmas cookies, which in my book is a reason to come, in and of itself!

Friends although our worship services are clearly different this year, the gift that we celebrate at Christmas never changes. Christmas is a celebration of God's love revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Let's focus on that truth today as we listen now to Kyle and Christine Medaugh, along with their two boys, Patrick and Thomas. They will be lighting our Advent candle today, our third candle, which represents the light of God's love.

### **Kyle and Christine Medaugh and family – Lighting of Advent Candle**

Friends, hear God's promise of love as it is recorded for us by the Prophet Jeremiah. The Lord appeared to him from afar saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you with loving-kindness." This morning we light our first three Advent candles, affirming that Christ is our hope, Christ is our joy, Christ is our love.

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord, for the hope, the joy and the love that we have through your Son Jesus Christ.

### **Ashley S. Ashley – Opening Prayer**

Let us pray. Loving God, we thank you that in love, you created us, redeemed us and sustain us. Help us to respond to your love today with our own love, joy, and praise. May our words echo those of the children. May our hearts be lifted in praise, may our lives forever reflect your love, joy, hope, and peace that is at work within us. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Children's Pageant – "Unprecedented Times"**

#### **Cody**

This year has been described as unprecedented, unique, unlike any other time in history. I just call it yucky! I haven't been able to play with my friends or see my cousins, in what feels like forever! With all that is going on, how can I possibly be thinking of a wonderful Christmas? That is the question we are all asking ourselves. Should we even celebrate? Why should we celebrate when there's so much craziness going on all around us?

#### **Inara**

Believe it or not this is not unlike the craziness that was happening in the world back when Jesus was born. Imagine, with me, thousands of people having to travel for weeks and months at a time to be counted in the census. They didn't have planes, cars or trains to travel by. No, they took the donkey express. Of course, there is nothing "express" about how a donkey travels.

### **Children's Choir: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

#### **Julianna**

Arriving in Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem, you could look around and see crowds of people everywhere. Everyone from his family, every cousin, second cousin, aunt and uncle had to come back to Bethlehem to be counted. And, of course, Joseph's family wasn't the only family in Bethlehem. There was no calling ahead to make reservations or writing an email to let the family know that you were on your way. You just showed up and hoped there was a room for you to stay somewhere.

## **Dominic**

So now it is not such a surprise when Joseph and Mary arrived there wasn't any room for them to sleep in anyone's house. One kind innkeeper offered them his barn for shelter. Let me just say that barns are not the cleanest places: the dirt, the animals, and, oh my, the smell. Baby Jesus would be born in the middle of a stinky, dirty, smelly barn. It is pretty amazing that the King of Creation chose such a yucky place to come into this world.

### **Children's Choir: "Away in a Manger"**

## **Maddie**

We hear the news of the world instantly on TV or in emails or on the Internet. None of that was around when Jesus was born. How were the people going to find out this wonderful news? God has his own way of sharing information. He sent angels. This was such important news that he didn't just send one angel. Oh no! He sent hundreds of them! The angels filled the sky as they sang about baby Jesus.

### **Children's Choir: "Angels We Have Heard on High"**

## **Clare**

Who would the Angels sing to? Who would be so important that God himself would send angels to tell them about Jesus' birth? Shepherds! You heard me, shepherds! Imagine you are just lying around, making sure no wolves or other animals hurt your sheep, when this happens. This bright light and all these voices. Only the most incredible news you've ever heard! I wouldn't be surprised if the shepherds were pinching each other to make sure they weren't dreaming.

## **Scott**

The angels wanted to be sure that the shepherds were paying attention, so they told them, "Fear not." Those two little words, "Fear not" are just as important for us to remember now as they were when the angels said them to the shepherds. You can continue to share this news of comfort and joy with the whole world.

### **Children's Choir: "Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"**

## **Calise**

Christ is born in a dirty, smelly manger. He came as a tiny baby, to be our sacrifice and He came in the middle of a chaotic time. Things were anything but normal when Christ arrived, kind of like today. Things are not normal for us. We might not celebrate with friends and family, like in years past, but we're still given the wonderful news of Jesus. Christmas may be a little different this year; however, the reason we celebrate will never change. It isn't about the cards, or the gifts, or the parties. Christmas is all about the baby in the manger. This reminds us of the best gift of all--our salvation. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. As you celebrate his birth, don't forget why he came. Now more than ever people need to hear the greatest news, so we must share the greatest news ever. Christ was born for you, so let's shout it from the mountaintops.

### **Children's Choir: "Go, Tell It On the Mountain"**

## Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Homily

Friends, would you all please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the way that you have spoken through our children today. We thank you for the powerful reminder we have received that the greatest gift of Christmas is the gift of your Son. Help us to open our hearts to receive him anew as we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Friends, it does not matter whether we are meeting together, all of us here in the sanctuary, or if, as is the case this year, we are watching this service separately from our homes. Either way, I can tell you that whenever children are involved in leading worship, these services are absolutely some of my favorites! I love watching the enthusiasm and the unbridled joy of children. And I love the honesty that children bring into their relationship with God, because as you watch the children, you know exactly what they're thinking. You can tell immediately who is so excited to be reading God's word, who is so excited to be singing out God's praise, and at the same time, you can see the kids that can barely contain their joy and their movement, they're almost breaking into dance. You can also tell the kids that are bored. Even though that may seem as if that is something that's not appropriate, what is entirely appropriate in our relationship with God is that we are honest before God in whatever we are feeling and especially as we continue to weather this global pandemic.

We have a lot of feelings we are bringing before God and we—like the children—are all over the map. We may be mad, we may be frustrated, we may have moments of joy, but God invites us wherever we are today, to bring all those feelings honestly before God. What I have also been reminded of this morning, through our children, is not only should we always approach God honestly but we should always approach God with an openness that is ready to have God speak to us in new ways. The children shared the Bible story so sustainably, and it doesn't matter how many times I've heard that Christmas story, I am always struck by the fact that God amazed the characters in that story.

The shepherds, Mary and Joseph, they were open to hearing God speak to them in a new way. If there was ever a time that we need to be open to hearing and experiencing God in a new way, I would have to say it is this year!

Now let's keep in mind and remember that none of the original events that occurred in that original Christmas story took place in a church building. Now I know, many of us, with good reason, are sad that we cannot be together in the church building. But that does not mean that God is not where we are. God has always been with us outside in the world and that is true today. My prayer for us this Christmas is, as the children shared through their story, that we would be open to hearing God in new ways, that we would be open to seeing stars, to hearing angels, that we would be open to God being at work in our midst.

Friends, I hope, as we continue to move closer to Christmas, we will be honest before God always. We will be open to God working in new ways. Finally my prayer is that we would be *aware* that the entire message of Christmas is a message all about God's amazing love for us. God would rather die for us than live without us. That's the ultimate message of why God and Jesus Christ came into the world and that love offered to us in a babe in Bethlehem is a love that will hold us through our entire lives and through our every experience. As one of the children, I believe Cody, said at the very beginning of our worship service, "This year stinks," but it is an honest statement. This year *does* stink but it is not without God's love still on offer and available to us. This is why we can be joyful

at Christmas. This is why we can have hope. This is why we can have peace in the middle of the storm. And this is why today I am with the children and soon with our Chancel Choir. This is why today we celebrate the love of God that will never let us go. Thanks be to God for the gift of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Benediction and Blessing**

Friends, let us go from here today in joy, and may our lives sing of God's love and hope and peace to a world in need.

And as we go, may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and on all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.