



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: UNCERTAIN TIME

NOVEMBER 12, 2023

**ST. MARK EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
HAMILTON, NEW JERSEY**

*A family of faith, rooted in Word and Sacrament,
proclaiming the redeeming love of Jesus Christ
through worship, nurture, and service.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY

St. Mark's observance of an extended Advent season begins today. Historically, a seven-week Advent season predates the custom of a four-week Advent season. Advent serves as a counterpart to Lent: while Lent helps worshipers prepare for Easter, Advent helps us prepare for Jesus' coming at Christmas. With Christmas items already filling the stores and our surrounding culture rushing toward the holidays, the extended Advent season teaches us to slow down, reflect, and cultivate the spiritual practices of waiting and anticipating.

This year, our Advent theme "Out of Time" orients our observance. Advent thrusts upon us the reality that time is limited. We run out of time to reconcile, to prepare, to make a change. Yet even as we are running out of time, God is outside of time entirely. God's infinite being and infinite patience cut through our fear as God enters human time to dwell with us.

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Please stand as you are comfortable.

People of God, when we think that we have nowhere left to turn, we can always turn to God. Whether we feel frozen or are rushing with no time to rest, whether it feels like life is happening to us too quickly or like our lives will never change, God is with us. For God, there is always time for forgiveness. We trust God, and we confess our sins together.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy One,

We have not stayed awake.

We have missed you when you appeared

in our neighbors,

in strangers half a world away,

in the suffering planet.

We have wasted the time and the skills that you gave us

and assumed we were powerless to mend

the breaches in our world.

Sometimes, we even gave up

on your mercy, justice, and love.

God, is it too late for us?

Speak tenderly to our anxious hearts.

Tear open the heavens

and heal what we have done. Amen.

God's judgment is certain

and God's forgiveness is lightning fast.

Hear this good news:

in the name of Jesus Christ, all your sins are forgiven.

Forgiveness gives us the courage we need.
Wherever we wait for God's time to come,
we will witness wonders. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN

O HAPPY DAY WHEN WE SHALL STAND

ELW 441



1 Oh, hap - py day when we shall stand a - mid the
2 Oh, bless - ed day when Christ shall come and show him -
3 Oh, what a might - y rush - ing flood of joy and
4 O Lord, your grace is ev - 'ry - thing; your love has



heav'n-ly throng; and sing with hosts from ev - 'ry land the
self as Lord, and thou-sands meet in their new home which
love and peace will roll down o - ver us with good and
made us free to stand a - mong the saints and sing the



new ce - les - tial song, the new ce - les - tial song.
Je - sus has pre - pared, which Je - sus has pre - pared.
bless - ed - ness and grace, and bless - ed - ness and grace.
glo - ry that we see, the glo - ry that we see.


GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

And also with you.


KYRIE

Refrain



Ky-ri-e e - lei - son, on our world and on our way.

Ky-ri - e e - lei - son, ev-'ry day.




1 For peace in the world, for the health of the church, for the

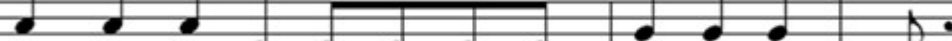
2 That we may live out your im - passioned re - sponse to the

3 For peace in our hearts, . . . for peace in our homes, . . . for

4 For your Spir - it to guide; that you cen - ter our lives in the



u - ni - ty of all; for
 hun - gry and the poor; that
 friends and fam - i - ly; for
 wa - ter and the word; that you



this ho - ly house, for all who wor-ship and praise,
 we may live out truth and jus - tice and grace,
 life and for love, for our work and our play,
 nour-ish our souls . . . with your bod - y and blood,

let us pray to the Lord, let us pray to the Lord. *Refrain*

GLORY TO GOD

Refrain



Glo - ry to God in the high - est, the high - est, and



peace to God's peo - ple on earth.



1 Lord God, heav-en - ly King, al - might-y God and Fa - ther,



we wor-ship you, we give you thanks, we praise you

Refrain



for your glo - ry. Glo - ry to God in the high-



est, the high - est, and peace to God's peo - ple on earth.

2 Lord Je - sus Christ, on - ly Son of the Fa - ther, Lord God,
Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world: have mer - cy on us; you are seat - ed at the
right hand of the Fa - ther: re - ceive our prayer.

Refrain
Glo - ry to God in the high - est, the high - est, and
peace to God's peo - ple on earth. 3 For you a -
lone are the Ho - ly One, you a - lone are the Lord,
you a - lone are the Most High, Je - sus Christ, with the
Ho - ly Spir - it, in the glo - ry of God the Fa - ther.
A - men. A - men. A - men.

Final refrain
Glo - ry to God in the high - est, the high - est, and peace to God's
peo - ple on earth. Glo - ry to God in the high -
est, the high - est, and peace to God's peo - ple on earth.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:13)

Let us pray.

God of already's, never's, and everything in between,
it is hard for us to sit with uncertainty.

We do not know when you will return,
we do not know if it's too late to prepare,
we do not even know exactly how to get ready.

As we light the first candle, dwell with us in this uncertain time.

Meet us in the space between *always* and *never*.

Help us name our grief for what's past
and our hope for what's to come. **Amen.**

RESPONSE

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

ELW 257

We sing Verse 1 only.



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things
3 O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on
4 O come, O Branch of Jes - se, free your own from Sa - tan's



Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
far and nigh: in strength and beau - ty come and stay;
Si - nai's height in an - cient times you gave the law
tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell your peo - ple save,



un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
teach us your will and guide our way. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
in cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.
and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave.



Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

Please be seated.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Amos 5:18-24

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 70

¹Be pleased, O God, to de- | liver me;

O LORD, make | haste to help me.

²**Let those who seek my life be put to shame | and confounded;**

let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and | be disgraced.

³Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat | over me

turn back because | of their shame.

⁴**Let all who seek you rejoice and be | glad in you;**

let those who love your salvation say forever, "Great | is the LORD!"

⁵But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me quick- | ly, O God.

You are my helper and my deliverer; O LORD, | do not tarry.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, siblings, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Please stand as you are comfortable.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the
words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia.
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:1 - 13

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

This is the good news of the gospel.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Please be seated.

SERMON

Please stand as you are comfortable.



1 Keep your lamps trimmed and burn - ing, keep your
 2 Dark-er mid - night lies be - fore us, dark - er
 3 Lo, the morn - ing soon is break - ing, lo, the
 4 Keep your lamps trimmed and burn - ing, keep your



lamps trimmed and burn - ing, keep your lamps
 mid - night lies be - fore us, dark - er mid - night
 morn - ing soon is break - ing, lo, the morn - ing
 lamps trimmed and burn - ing, keep your lamps



trimmed and burn - ing, for this work's al - most done.
 lies be - fore us, for this work's al - most done.
 soon is break - ing, for this work's al - most done.
 trimmed and burn - ing, for this work's al - most done.



Refrain

Chil-dren, don't grow wea - ry; chil-dren, don't grow wea - ry;



chil-dren, don't grow wea - ry, for this work's al-most done.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

People of God, we are each other's kin, and we are family with all creation. As we wait and yearn for God, we pray together for our community, for the church around the world, and for every need.

God, the heavens tremble, the stars fall, and the earth quakes. We pray for places in conflict, especially Gaza and the Holy Land.

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, you garden in the wilderness, even where it seems like nothing can grow. We pray for all creation, especially animals migrating south for the winter.

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, you create accessible paths through rough terrain, and you love the bodies and minds of your people. We give thanks for diverse abilities and we pray for people in need of healing, especially people living with cancer, and those we name before you now...

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, you call us to rebuild ancient ruins, but we need your help to finish the work. Our need for healing is urgent. We pray for your justice and peace, especially in cities affected by gun violence. Protect the vulnerable and keep all your people safe.

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, you show us how to perceive each other with the eyes of the heart. We pray for understanding in a divisive time. We pray especially for our relationships with our neighbors and family members when we disagree.

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, nothing is impossible with you, but it is hard for us to trust what we can't observe ourselves. We pray for your presence with us whenever we are uncertain or unsure, especially for our newly elected leaders seeking a path forward.

Hurry, God. Hear our prayers. **Tear the heavens and come down.**

God, you are always with us. We gather these prayers together, and we entrust them to your endless love in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

PEACE

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

We share a sign of peace – a smile, a wave, a handshake – with the words “Peace be with you.”

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

OFFERING

An offering is gathered for the mission of the church, including the care of those in need. Offering plates are located by the entrances to the sanctuary. Your gifts support St. Mark, its mission, and its partnerships with local, statewide, and national partners.

Please stand as you are comfortable.

Let the vine - yards be fruit - ful, Lord, and

fill to the brim our cup of bless - ing. Gath - er a

har - vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be fed with the

bread of life. Gath - er the hopes and the dreams of all; u -

nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your

pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

OFFERING PRAYER

Let us pray.

Loving God, for the time we have, we say: **Thank you.**

For the gifts we offer, we say: **Thank you.**

For the chance to help others, we say: **Thank you.**

For the people whose lives will be better because of these gifts, we say: **Thank you.**

For the ways you are changing the world, we say: **Thank you.**

We pray in the name of Jesus, who appears wherever people need our help. **Amen.**

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

God our Creator,
the abundance of your goodness
overflowed into creation—
earth, sky, water, plants, animals, and human beings all came to be
and you called us good.
Down through the generations,
your goodness continued to pour:
in friendship with humanity,
in acts of liberation,
in provision for your people.
In all of this, you prepared a way.
And so, with joyful hearts, we join the angels in their song:

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might,
heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry, full of your glo-ry. Ho -
san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high -
est. Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -
san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Finally, when the time was right,
you entered our human existence in Jesus,
who was born humbly,
who spent his life with the unlikely and unloved,
who healed and taught and preached the good news of your way.

On the night when he was betrayed,
he took bread, gave thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

Again after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this in remembrance of me.

Whenever we share this bread and cup,
Jesus is here with us in this moment.
Whenever we share this bread and cup,
God takes us out of time
and joins us with God's people in every time and place.

Send the Spirit of your presence on us now, O God,
so that we too will overflow with goodness.
Strengthen us by this meal, so that through us,
your presence will flow out
in friendship, in acts of liberation, in provision for others.
In this, we prepare the way for your arrival again,
when you will return to remake all of existence
into your kingdom of perfect mercy, justice, and love.

The time is now! Taste and see God's goodness! **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

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 trespasses,

as we forgive those

who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION


These are the gifts of God for the people of God, holy things for holy people, and they are for you.

At St. Mark, we share communion with wheat and gluten-free wafers and with red wine and red grape juice.


Everyone is welcome to receive communion, regardless of age, religious background, or life experience.

Please be seated.


COMMUNION SONG




Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the



world; have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the



world; grant us peace, grant us peace, Lamb of God.

COMMUNION HYMN

BLESSED ASSURANCE

ELW 638



- 1 Bless-ed as-sur-ance, Je-sus is mine! Oh, what a fore-taste of glo-ry di-vine!
- 2 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, per-fect de-light, vi-sions of rap-ture now burst on my sight;
- 3 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, all is at rest; I in my Sav-ior am hap-py and blest,



Heir of sal-vation, pur-chase of God, born of his Spir-it, washed in his blood.
 an-gels de-scend-ing bring from a-bove ech-oes of mer-cy, whis-pers of love.
 watch-ing and wait-ing, look-ing a-bove, filled with his good-ness, lost in his love.

Refrain



This is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long:



this is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long.

Please stand as you are comfortable.

TABLE BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in his grace.
Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray.

We give you thank, O God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life. In your mercy, strengthen us through this gift, in faith toward you and in love toward one another, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

CHARGE AND BLESSING

As you leave this place, remember: even when you travel through uncertainty, God travels with you. Keep alert; trust God; seek peace.

God our Creator, who made the starlit sky, blesses you. God blesses you.

God blesses you.

Jesus our Redeemer, who arrives at just the right time, blesses you. Jesus blesses you.

Jesus blesses you.

The Holy Spirit our Enlivener, who sparks hope for the hopeless, blesses you. The Holy Spirit blesses you.

The Holy Spirit blesses you.

You are blessed in the name of God, the Three in One. **Amen.**



1 Wake, a - wake, for night is fly - ing, the watch-men
 2 Zi - on hears the watch-men sing - ing, and all her
 3 Glo - ri - a! Let heav'n a - dore you! Let saints and



on the heights are cry - ing; a - wake, Je - ru - sa - lem, at last.
 heart with joy is spring-ing. She wakes, she ris - es from her gloom.
 an - gels sing be - fore you, with harp and cym-bal's clear-est tone.



Mid - night hears the wel come voic - es, and at the
 Her dear friend comes down, all glo - rious, the strong in
 Gates of pearl, twelve por - tals gleam - ing, lead us to



thrill-ing cry re - joic - es; "Come forth, you maid-ens! Night is past.
 grace, in truth vic - to - rious; her star is ris'n; her light is come.
 bliss be - yond all dream - ing, with an - gel choirs a - round your throne.



The bride - groom comes! A - wake; your lamps with glad - ness take!"
 Now come, O Bless - ed One, Lord Je - sus, God's own Son.
 No eye has caught the light, no ear the thun-d'ring might



Al - le - lu - ia! Rise and pre - pare the feast to share;
 Sing ho - san - na! Oh, hear the call! Come one, come all,
 of such glo - ry. There we will go: what joy we'll know!



go, meet the bride - groom, who draws near.
 and fol - low to the ban - quet hall.
 There sweet de - light will ev - er flow.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Wait for God. **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE

Thank you to today's worship leaders!

Lector: Barbara Moonlight
Communion Assistant: Barbara Moonlight
Ushers: Michaela Arzt and JoAnne Malta
Livestream Operator: Jody Hodge
Church Administrator: Robin Harris
Minister of Music: John Kling
Pastor: Rev. Linnéa Clark
Ministers: People of St. Mark

Worship with Us

*We gather for worship on Sundays at 9:30 am (a full-length, more formal service)
and on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm (a shorter, more informal service).
You are always welcome.*

*We host Peace of Mindfulness, a mindfulness meditation class, on Tuesdays at 6:30 pm in the sanctuary.
Beginners and advanced practitioners alike are welcome.*

Serve with Us

*We welcome volunteers every Sunday after worship to help with Lunches with Love, which prepares lunches
for clients of HomeFront. Recently, we shared our 11,000th lunch! Contact Karen Breninghouse
(kbreninghouse@gmail.com) for more information.*

Contact Us

You can reach our office at admin@stmarkhamilton.org and at (609) 585-7087.

*You can reach Pastor Linnéa Clark directly at pastor@stmarkhamilton.org
or at (215) 620-4977 in case of emergency.*

*You can also find us online at stmarkhamilton.org
and at facebook.com/stmarkhamilton.*

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