

# The First Sunday in Advent

## The First Church in Belfast

United Church of Christ

*An Open and Affirming Congregation*

December 3, 2017

10:00 a.m.

### ***WE ARE GATHERED IN***

WELCOME TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

PRELUDE

BRINGING IN THE LIGHT

OPENING SEQUENCE

**Invitation**

*A voice cries out, prepare the way of the Lord!*

**The Words of the Prophet Isaiah 64:1-4**

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...!*

**Advent Hymn** “Keep Awake and Steady Hearted” vs. 1&2

tune: BEACH SPRING      words: Rev. Kate Winters, Belfast, 2017

Keep awake and steady hearted / in this holy Adventide.  
Speak in quiet tones of wonder / with your soul as steady guide  
As the darkness seems so endless / as the nights eclipse the days.  
Watch for hints of incarnation / signs of God’s mysterious ways.

Has your heart been sad and heavy / as the world’s been turning round?  
Have you found there’s little comfort / in this ever shifting ground?  
Yet from dark comes all creation / just beyond our faltering sight.  
Even when we cannot feel it / hope is stirring in the night.

**Candle Prayer**

The prophet Isaiah calls on God to come in power,  
**We too call on the Spirit to come in strength and purpose!**  
Even as the darkness deepens around us,  
**We are gathered here with confidence and courage!**  
A new day has been promised to us!  
**So let us light the candle of hope!**

*(light the first candle)*

**Shared Signs of Hope**

YOUNG PEOPLE’S MESSAGE AND MINISTRY

*The Annual Visit of Brother Advent*

**\*GREETING OF PEACE**

*Dona nobis pacem, pacem.  
Dona nobis pacem.*

**ADVENT MEDITATION**

Words of Jan Richardson

The Advent journey begins in darkness. I am familiar with this terrain. A child of the night, a lover of stars, it is in the darkening hours that I feel most at home. Yet often we are fed the untruth that darkness is synonymous with evil and that all that is light and bright is good. At best this belief hinders us from seeing the gifts present in the darkness, at worst, it encourages prejudices, however subconscious, against persons with skins darker than our own. We require darkness for birth and growth, the seed in the ground, the seed in the womb, the seed in our souls. In the dark lies possibilities for intimacy, for rest, for healing...

In these Advent days of darkness and waiting, it may indeed seem that God's face is hidden from our sight. But the sacred presence is there, breathing in the shadows. This is when we learn to trust senses other than sight and to seek the face of God beneath our fingertips.

*-silent reflection-*

**CHORAL ANTHEM**

*"Do You Hear What I Hear?"*

**WE HEAR THE WORD**

**FIRST READING**

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Dana Williams

**GOSPEL READING**

Mark 13:24-37

**ADVENT MESSAGE**

*"How Can We Have Hope?"*

**WE LIVE THE WORD**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*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.*

**INVITATION TO GIVE**

**\*DOXOLOGY**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise God all creatures here below.

Praise God for all that love has done.

Creator, Christ, and Spirit, one.

*(Note: The First Church honors the diverse languages of faith. Please sing with words that are meaningful to you. Other versions of the Doxology are found in our hymnal, #776-781.)*

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**We thank you, God, for this season of gifts. Bless these gifts that we offer in the hope that they will sustain this community and increase our ministry. Bless the gifts we give to one another, the gifts of time, care, and listening. And bless the gift of this season that prepares us for the ultimate gift, your child incarnation on earth. Amen.**

**\*HYMN** “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” vs. 1&2 #345

**Repeat verse 1 of Advent Hymn**

## SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

### Invitation

Come to the open table! **Here we receive gifts of love.**

Here we consume the food of spirit! **Here we become one.** Come to the open table!  
**All are welcome here.**

### Communion Prayer

We give thanks to you, O God, for this journey of life that is filled with blessing. Our hearts are enthralled by the beauty of creation, the night and the day, the dark and the light, the depths of the seas and the height of the mountains! But most of all, we are grateful for love, the love that weaves all beings together and connects us firmly to you.

We thank you for the One who showed us how to love, for Jesus, who held nothing back as he walked this earth. He granted everyone a place at the table, the marginal, the hated, the distrusted, the stranger, the mentally ill, the physically challenged.

He called us all together to share this table of abundance.

The night before he died, he met with friends and said:

**“Take and eat all of you. For this is my body.”**

And then he took the cup, gave you thanks, blessed it and said:

**“Take and drink. For this is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me.”**

And so we do this in remembrance of that inclusive table, at which we all become one in Christ

“Come Holy Spirit, pour your life into this bread and your wisdom into this cup.”

*(Bread is Broken. Cup is poured. Meal is shared.)*

### Prayer of Thanksgiving

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” vs. 1&2 #116

## BLESSING, SENDING, and POSTLUDE