

New Scotland Presbyterian Church  
Worship for the First Sunday of Christmas  
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)  
December 27, 2020  
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Kling, Glöckchen” (Ring, Little Bells)

Introduction

*Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church.*

*This is the third day of the Christmas and we are sharing Christmas cards that you have sent in for the twelve days of Christmas. So if you haven't had a chance, put your card in the mail so we can share it this week!*

Call to Worship

Titus 2:11

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

Hymn

Choir

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice” #28 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

O God you call us to celebrate in fullness the salvation you have brought to us in Jesus, your Son. You remind us through the witness of Simeon and Anna that Jesus is our light and shows us your glory. Through Jesus you adopt us as your beloved children. But we have lived as those who belong to this world, not to you. Too often we seek our fulfillment in material things; we despair in the face of the world's problems; we try to control our lives instead of committing them to you; we expect little and hope for less. In our worship today, shed upon us the light of your incarnate Word, pour your grace into our hearts, and renew our hope, that we may believe and rejoice and share the good news of Christmas! We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: When we look into the face of an infant, we see God's great love for us. God's love is greater than our deepest flaws, wider than our understanding, more forgiving than our own forgiveness. We have only to see that little face to know that God offers us endless grace and the promise of new life and continual hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Luke 2:22-40

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup> and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit

rested on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup> "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### Kids' Time

*For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple for worship, and how Simeon and Anna recognized the baby is the one God had promised. They help us to know that God always keeps God's promises, and, even if it takes a long time for the promise to come true, it is worth the wait. Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}*

*Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks! We would also love it if you would send a Christmas card to the church so we can share greetings!*

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for telling us the good things you want for this world and thank you for keeping your promises. Help us to be faithful in listening for your promises to us. And help us to share your love in the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Hymn

Choir

"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" verses 1,2,6 #59 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

### Epistle Lesson Galatians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup> And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

## Sermon

Every Christmas we tell the stories of Jesus' coming into the world. For centuries there had been stories from the prophets of how the Messiah would be, and what the Messiah would do. On Christmas we heard the stories of angels describing the child, stories of shepherds and what they said when they saw the baby. This morning we hear the story of Simeon and Anna and their words about what this child would do.

Mary and Joseph clearly had many occasions to hear what other people had to say about their child, and they pondered, and wondered. What does it mean for God to come into the world in the form of this newborn child? What would it mean for their lives? What does it mean for our lives?

Very often we hear it said that Jesus came into the world to die for our sins. The idea is that human beings could never keep God's rules perfectly enough to deserve to spend eternity with God in Heaven. So Jesus came and lived the perfect human life and was sacrificed so that all the rest of us not-good-enough folks could get into Heaven. It is as though we were locked in a jail for our bad deeds, and Jesus came and paid our bail to set us free.

But Galatians gives us another way to ponder Jesus' life and what it means for us. In the reading we just heard, Paul says that God sent a son, born of a woman, so that we might receive adoption as children of God. It's as though God said, "Human beings do not really believe that they can live up to the ideals I have for them; they do not believe that they can truly resist the powers of greed and anger and retaliation and violence; they do not believe that they can stop worrying about storing up things to try to keep their future secure; they do not believe that they can be generous enough to care for people who are impoverished or are suffering. So I will show them a way. I will show them that their mortal life can be lived just as I have said. I will show them that they never have to give in to fear, or despair, or worry; I will show them that they can live confident in my promises. And then they will know that they really are my children."

And so God came, and lived this human life. God was born into the world, just as we are; raised by human parents, just as we are; ate and drank and went to worship, laughed and cried, learned a trade, worked and played, was loved and cared for by some friends, knew the pain of rejection and betrayal of other friends - everything we experience in this life, Jesus experienced, too.

So we ponder over this amazing story. We may be amazed at how much God loves us, that God would want to come and be part of our lives. We may be astonished at the freedom God gives us, to believe this story, or not; to invite God into our lives, or not.

We have a choice on how we see the reality of this world. There is light and dark. There is good and bad. There is generosity and there is selfishness. There is kindness and there is coldness. So, how do we want to live in this world?

That is a question for us to ponder as we stand on the threshold of another new year. We can ask ourselves: what truth do I want to live in the coming year? What path do I long to follow? To what reality do I pledge my allegiance?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Albert Schweitzer, noted that the ocean is a vast body of cold water that does not move. It is like one enormous puddle. Within the ocean, however, is the Gulf Stream, hot water flowing from the Equator towards the Pole. How is it physically possible that a stream of hot water continuously flows through

the waters of the ocean, which, is basically held within its banks. How is it possible that this stream of hot water moves within the still coldness – and it not deterred, is not cooled off, is not slowed down.

That's how it is with God. The love of God is a warm stream, continually moving through this cold world. The warm love of God flows through the coldness of human life.

Will we step into that stream this year? Will we let our lives be taken up and carried away by that precious and vital force?

What will we do in 2021?

It is worth pondering.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### Hymn

Choir

“The First Nowell” verses 1,2,6 #56 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

### Pastoral Prayer

Wonderful God, there is so much for to be thankful for in this special season. We remember loved ones from years ago, and those who are near and far away. We delight in the traditions that give us comfort and joy, and look forward to next year when we can do all the things we were not able to do this time. We give you thanks for the medical professionals who have worked so hard to bring a safe vaccine to those who are most vulnerable, and we pray for all who will be distributing the doses, and all who are waiting to receive them.

This season of lights and joy can also be a time of shadows and loss. So we lift up our prayers for those who are weary. Those exhausted and spent, who have praised you and blessed you, but in their serving others have found no time to care for themselves. We pray that they may find rest through these 12 days and into the new year.

We pray for those who are in sorrow, those for whom grief is raw and loss is great. We pray for those who are engulfed by despair, whose misery is made worse by the joy being proclaimed all around them. We pray that they may receive your comfort and peace bubbling up from wellsprings that seem too deep to find.

We pray for those mired in worry, for all who fret, for all whose to-do lists just get longer, for those who focus on what they have not accomplished, and cannot see what you have done by sending Christ Jesus into the world. We pray that they may accept your offer to relieve our burdens and take a lighter yoke.

Help us, O God, to see those in shadows and to reach out in care. Help us to be a beacon in the darkness that we may join together as one people, proclaiming to a hurting world: Fear not! For see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, the Messiah, who is the Lord.

So hear us as we say the Lord's Prayer:

### 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.

Hymn

Choir

“Go, Tell It on the Mountain” #29 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

As we consider the great gift God has given in us in the birth of this baby, we cannot help but respond in the way God hopes we will, sharing our joy, and reaching out in kindness to give to others.

*We give thanks for the many gifts God has given us -our finances, our abilities, and our relationships - there are so many ways for us to be connected to one another and to lift each other up. Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries of doing God’s work in a broken world. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can offer is prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. We are blessed to share our gifts and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!*

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

*These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, you heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Christ the Word in flesh born low;  
Praise Holy Spirit evermore;  
One God, Triune, whom we adore.

Benediction and Blessing

As our worship ends: Go forth, to be God’s presence in our world, to bring the light of Christ to dark places, to journey with those who need to know that they are not alone. And know that God - the companion of the sojourner, the friend of the sinner, the comforter of the lost - will be with you wherever you go. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

“We Three Kings”

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

“Kling, Glöckchen” (Ring, Little Bells)