

**WELCOME**

Good morning! I am Rev. Kelley Becker, the Senior Minister of Disciples Christian Church. It is my privilege to welcome you to worship on this first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting and preparing. During this time we wait, some of us impatiently, for Christmas to come. While we wait, we prepare. We prepare to tell and hear the story of Jesus' birth once again and we make space to wonder anew what this ancient story means to us today.

This year, our Advent theme is "Close to Home." The scriptures for this season are rich with home metaphors and imagery. John the Baptist prophesies about the one who is to come and reminds us that we are still wandering far from God's dream for creation; his message hits close to home, especially for the ones experiencing inequity and oppression.

After receiving the angel's news, Mary retreated to Elizabeth's home, seeking comfort and safety. And then Jesus is born amid a journey home, in a crowded dwelling amid livestock and his first visitors were shepherds. In these texts, home is both physical and metaphorical, something we seek and something we are called to build. Ultimately, God is our home and resting place. Through each one of us, God draws near and makes a home on earth—sacred ground is all around us.

Whether you are here in-person or online, I invite you into this season to experience the hope, peace, joy, and love found in the stories we tell and in our gathering together. I recognize that even as we begin this series titled "Close to Home," many of us feel a bit homesick; we feel alone and isolated for a lot of reasons: COVID, grief, division in our families, and trauma. Some of us have the sense that we are wandering with no clear path forward. This first week acknowledges the deep longing for our heart's true home. Our hope rests in the truth, that God is present, even in a world that is homesick for wholeness, healing, belonging, and real love. You may have noticed that the nativity scene behind me looks a bit bleak this morning. It is just an empty stable; no straw, no animals, just a bare structure. For us this morning, it is meant to be a metaphor for the emptiness that homesickness elicits in us. But also, I want it to remind us that the story doesn't end with an empty stable, just as our story does not end with us forever wandering around, searching for home. Home is here. God is present and you are loved. Welcome to Advent.

**PRELUDE** *Medley: What Wonderful Love,  
Of the Father's Love Begotten, I Wonder as I Wander*

Lorelei Barton, Harp  
*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Can we be homesick for something we've never known?

**All: We are homesick for a just world—**

One: for peace like rivers, for the end of suffering.

**All: Yes, we are homesick—**

One: for joy that is contagious, for nations that feel like neighbors,  
and for hospitals that run empty.

**All: We are homesick for the world God promises.**

One: We are homesick, but we are on our way.

**All: God is here.**

One: God is still creating. Let us worship God who is our true home.

## **OPENING HYMN**

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

## **MEANING OF THE SERVICE**

The hanging of the greens service draws our attention to the symbols of Advent and Christmas, reminds us of their meaning, and causes us to spend time thinking about how we welcome other people into our homes and how we might welcome God into our hearts this season. There is a lot to do between now and Christmas Eve, but this morning we pause to notice the decorations that make this season beautiful, and we notice the people who make our lives beautiful and who make us feel at home in their presence. Will you pray with me? Holy One, thank you for this season filled with wonder, sparkle, and memories. We know our destination is Christmas, but help us savor the Advent journey. Be with us as we light our candles, sing our favorite carols, and see the excitement in the eyes of our children. Inspire us to take time to soak it all in and to make new memories. Make these decorations that adorn our sanctuary symbols of warmth, love, and home. Use them to remind us of our call to hospitality and our desire to follow the ways of the one whose birth reminds us that you never leave us alone. Amen.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLORS**

The way we keep time in the church is called the liturgical year. The first Sunday in Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year. Paraments, which cover our communion table and pulpit are something like drapes or curtains in a home. With the changing colors of the liturgical year, they attract our attention and point to the significance of the new season we observe. The traditional color for Advent is purple, a color that signifies royalty and God's authority. However, some traditions use blue, which represents anticipation and promise. In our sanctuary, you will notice mostly purple, but here and there, you will see some blue as well.

## **COMMUNITY JOYS AND CONCERNS**

**PRAYER SONG** *like a child*

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

God of the weary and waiting,

Scripture tells us that where two or more are gathered, you are there. So, we trust that you are here—listening to these words, drawing us close, stirring hope within us. And for that we are grateful. Today, we feel close to home when we hear beautiful music, when we sing familiar songs together, when the candles are lit, when we enter this space and someone knows our

name or asks our name. We feel close to home when our children are curious, when we find moments of true connection, when we are brave enough to be who you call us to be.

Even as we reflect on these close-to-home moments, we recognize that in many ways our hearts are not at home; we are homesick.

We are homesick for a world we have not seen. We are homesick for a world where oceans are clean, trees are green, and animals are not endangered. We are homesick for a life where days feel expansive and Sabbath feels possible. We are homesick for days where mental health is not stigmatized, time is not a scarce commodity, and self-worth is not diminished. God who never leaves us alone, we are carrying both hope and homesickness all at the same time. Hold these two sides of us gently. For we realize, hope is a gift and homesickness is a reminder that we need each other and we need you. Thank you for loving all sides of us. Amen.

## **ADVENT CANDLES**

Advent is a time of waiting and expectation. One way we mark time throughout Advent is by lighting an Advent candle each Sunday. The four candles provide us with a visual way to count off the four Sundays of the season, to keep track of our journey. The flame of each new candle reminds us that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season is not complete until all four candles are lit, along with the central Christ candle which is lit on Christmas Eve.

The tradition of the Advent wreath is traced back to an old Scandinavian custom that celebrated the coming of light after a season of darkness. In that day, candles were placed on the edge of a horizontal wheel. As the wheel was spun around, the lighted candles would blend into a continuous circle of light. We don't spin our Advent wreath around, but its shape reminds us that God's light and love never end.

There is also symbolism in the colors of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize Jesus' family of origin, the royal line of David. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent and symbolizes joy. This morning, we will light our first candle. The candle of Hope.

We hope for a world where all are fed.

We hope for a world with more bridges than walls.

We hope for a world with wide open doors.

We hope for a world with contagious laughter.

We hope for a world where trees grow tall and creeks run clean.

We hope for a world where all people feel at home—in their bodies, in the church, in their physical homes.

We long for that world.

We are homesick for that world.

So today we light the candle of hope because hope keeps our hearts alive as we wait.

May this light be a reminder that the wait is always worth it.  
We are close to home. May we carry hope with us. Amen.

**HYMN**                      *As We Light the Candle*

### **EVERGREENS**

The most striking and most universal Christmas decorating tradition is the use of evergreens in churches and homes. Among ancient Romans, evergreens were an emblem of peace, joy, and even victory. The early Christians placed them in their windows to indicate Christ had entered the home. Holly and ivy, along with pine and fir are called evergreens because they never change color. They are ever – green, ever – alive, even in the winter. They symbolize the unchanging nature of God and the promise that we are never out of reach of God’s love. Traditionally, families called obtaining the evergreen branches, “Bringing home Christmas!”

**HYMN**                      *The Holly and the Ivy*

### **LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIAS**

In the past two hundred years, a new element has found its place in our Christmas celebration. This tradition comes to us from our neighbors in Mexico. In the very early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an American who served the United States as an ambassador, spent time working in Mexico. He admired the dramatic beauty of the bright red poinsettia that grew rooftop high and bloomed profusely at Christmas. He was awed when Mexican Christians told him why the bright red poinsettias were a part of their celebrations of the birth and life of Jesus.

There is an old Mexican legend about how poinsettias and Christmas come together; it goes like this: There was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who had no present to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve service. As Pepita walked to the chapel, sadly, her cousin Pedro tried to cheer her up. 'Pepita', he said "I'm sure that even the smallest gift, given by someone who loves him will make Jesus happy."

Pepita didn't know what she could give, so she picked a small handful of weeds from the roadside and made them into a small bouquet. She felt embarrassed because she could only give this small present to Jesus. As she walked through the chapel to the altar, she remembered what Pedro had said. She began to feel better, she knelt down and put the bouquet at the bottom of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers, and everyone who saw them was sure they had seen a miracle. From that day on, the bright red flowers were known as the 'Flores de Noche Buena', or 'Flowers of the Holy Night'.

**SPECIAL MUSIC**    *A la puerta del cielo - New Mexican Lullaby*

Alex Rivera

### **CHRISTMAS TREE AND CHRISMON ORNAMENTS**

The Christmas tree, like other evergreens, is a symbol of peace and life. The lights of the tree represent God's presence in the world. The ornaments that will be placed on the tree are called Chrismons. The word Chrismon is a conflation of the words Christ and monogram. The ornaments are Christian symbols and vary from one Christian community to the next. Chrismons are always white and gold, symbolizing the innocence and magnificence of Christ. Although Chrismons have been used in the United States since 1957, many symbols of Christianity have been handed down through the ages. Early Christians often worshipped in

secret to avoid persecution. They developed certain symbols that were used to communicate with other believers and direct Christians to secret places of worship. Symbols that signified the believers' faith often adorned doors and buildings and were included on items such as jewelry and household utensils.

We have quite a variety of Chrismons for our tree. There are bells, symbolizing the sounding forth of God's word. There are Chrismons with a chalice and wheat on them. These ornaments remind us of the wine and bread used for communion.

And there are Chrismons with shepherds' hooks, reminding us that Jesus is sometimes called the "Good Shepherd" because he taught about God's love and care for all people. God cares for us as a shepherd cares for the sheep. There are also Chrismons with an image of a Bible on them. The Bible contains stories, songs, and poems which reflect the ways in which our faith ancestors have understood God and God's interaction with human beings. There are many more symbols. Make time this season to look closely at all of them. They tell quite a story!

#### **HYMN**

*All Earth is Waiting*

#### **CHRISTMAS CANDLE**

Long before the celebration of Christmas, candles were used to signify the light of Christ in the world. In medieval times there was a legend, which said that on Christmas Eve the Christ child wandered throughout the world, looking for places where he would be welcomed. Those who loved him, hoping he might find their homes, placed lighted candles in the windows to invite him in. It became customary for devout Christians to welcome into their homes all who knocked

at their doors on Christmas Eve. To turn someone away may have meant rejection of the Christ child. During the Advent season we remember that the Christ child is wandering along our streets. Will he come to us an immigrant? A child who struggles to sit still? Someone with whom we disagree politically? It could be anyone. It is everyone. We light the Christmas Candle as a symbol that this church is a safe place for all people and everyone is welcome.

#### **HYMN**

*One Candle is Lit*

#### **COMMUNION**

**SPECIAL MUSIC** "Interlude" from Ceremony of the Carols

Lorelei Barton, harp  
by Benjamin Britten

**Announcements:**

Love in a Pantry

Wisdom Elders Light Tours: Thu, Dec. 9 and Thu., Dec. 16

Advent Devotionals and Family Advent Calendars

Sunday, December 12-Love in a Sack with Caroling-Everyone is invited to carol.

**CLOSING SONG**      *Come, O Long-Expected Jesus*

**BENEDICTION**

**POSTLUDE**