



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
December 13, 2020

Every part of worship has a video, so we've gathered them [together in a play list](#). [If you click on "Play All"](#), they'll play from the beginning of the service to the end! And you can just follow along, never clicking on another link. Or you can go through clicking on all the individual links – your choice.

Prelude: [O Come, O Come Emmanuel](#) by The Piano Guys

[An instrumental piece to help you get settled for worship]

Centering Ourselves for Worship¹:

[Join Susan and Russell Haight, today's lay leaders, [in our centering prayer](#).]

Leader: Let us remember the words of Mary, as she offered her magnificent song of praise

All: And Mary said,

Leader: And like all new parents, she didn't really know what she was getting into, but she wanted joy for her baby

All: And Mary said, God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

¹ Today's open and closing prayers were inspired Mary's Song of Praise or *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55 and Sherri Dobbs Johnson, *The Africana Worship Book for Year B*, (Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 25-26.) that appeared as the Advent prayer on the UMC's Discipleship Resources page for First Sunday of Advent, Year B - Liturgical Resources, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-liturgical-resources> (accessed 16 November 2020).

Leader: O the power of the Baby! Take the anemic joy that we have today and light a fire under it so that we will boil over with unrestrained giving of ourselves!

All: And Mary said, God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Leader: O the power of the Baby! Help us to see that joy is not something we stumble upon, but is something we make, something we give to other people, something we graciously receive, like a casserole out of the blue or an unexpected whoopie pie.

All: And Mary said so many things. Let us ponder the power of the Baby in our hearts. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath²

Several years ago Cláudio Carvalhaes, professor of worship at Union Theological Seminary, suggested that we lament before we light – naming those things which oppose or diminish hope, peace, joy and love. We name them and then claim the power of that light over them. Today’s Advent wreath lighters are Marjorie & David Drake, Jocelyn Jones and Bob & Linda Ashton. [Let us bring light to the darkness.](#)

Leader: In our homes, we gather around wreaths to pray our lost hopes, broken peace, limited joys, and love so hard to find and share, in this season of coronavirus. We affirm that our candles mean we claim the power to call this season Advent when God’s light comes into the world and nothing can overcome it.

Lighter 1: We light the candle of hope in the face of this pandemic that has kept us from enjoying time with our grandchildren and sharing long overdue hugs with our families and friends.

Lighter 2: I now light the candle of peace in spite of the uncertainty of the current college education process.

Lighter 3: We now light the candle of joy in spite of missing so many things we thought were essential to a merry Christmas, like going out with my golf friends and my old work colleagues, giving hug to the grandchildren and going to their school events.

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come, lighting hope, peace and joy on the wick of our lives so that we may shine on our world with a simple smile, an unexpected laughter. Amen.

Leader: God’s joy ignites embers under loss and sorrow and brightens the path to love.

² The advent wreath lighting liturgy was inspired by Maren Tirabassi’s “An Advent Wreath Ceremony for 2020,” Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted October 30, 2020, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2020/10/30/13204/> (accessed November 14, 2020).

Hymn: Advent Wreath Prayers – Week 3 by Dave Frincke

[[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.]

If you have a favorite hymn you'd like to include in our worship service, just send it along and I'll look for a good place for it.

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

[Rev. Cath [sharing our Joys & Concerns.](#)]

God who restores,
you have done great things for us and we rejoice!
So often you have filled us with laughter,
even turning tears of sadness into shouts of joy.
You send prophets, who point the way to justice
and show the way to you.
We thank you for sending good news to us
and repairing so much that we have devastated.

In this season of light,
we lift up in prayer so many who wait in darkness:
people oppressed by poverty and discrimination,
by political upheaval or dangerous rulers;
people imprisoned wrongly
and also those imprisoned justly.

We lift up those who are weighed down by concerns.

We pray

For Joe, Susan's cousin, who's doing well at the rehab hospital in Nashua
and trying to get back to his own home for Christmas.

For all those caught in the traffic accidents in Hollis & Brookline in
Saturday's storm

For Mark, John's brother, in the Lahey hospital, who could use some
prayers

For Lois, Amy's aunt, who's in the hospital and could use some healing of
body and spirit

For Ellie, a resident at Ledgewood, who lost her husband this week

For the friends and family of Jenna, Carol's cousin, especially her mom
Jenn and siblings Tyler and Kerrigan. Jenna was only 24.

For Amy, George and Georgie, who are all recovering from Covid-19.

For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, who are flying to see his parents, may
they all travel safely

For Luca, Amy's nephew, who is facing changes in his treatment

For the struggles to lay aside past wrongs when the present seems to be filling up with more

Right what is wrong among us and in us
and restore us to you,
to others,
to ourselves.

Make the brokenhearted whole again;
comfort those who mourn;
repair our ruined cities.

We lift up those who are singing with joy.
We pray

For Susan Haight's retirement!

For being able to decorate the tree at the nursing home in four shifts that let everyone participate

For the backyard musicians trying a remote recording and seeing what can come together on 23 separate tracks

For the Christmas "star", [a special alignment of Jupiter & Saturn](#) on 12/21

For continuing curiosity to discover the small moments of good in a tough season, that we may continue to learn where to look and what to see

For having the time to focus on God, to prepare our own way to come to Jesus

For Cheryl Corey's amazing soup that tasted like heaven

For the joys of friends and family who rally around when you're sick

Because joy in this world is something we all need,
Those who can share it are sharing something we all long for.
And we are grateful that joy is in this world.

In all the jostling and jingling of these days,
do not let us lose sight of you
or those whom you especially came to serve:
people who are in need of healing,
people who are overlooked or underserved,
the ones who are lost,
and the ones we have made to feel little and least.

Light of the world,
live among us always,
full of grace and truth. **Amen.**

[\[The Lord's Prayer\]](#)

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 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. Amen.

[For next week, please feel free to send me your joys & concerns and I'll include them in our prayers: minister@bccnh.org or call/text (978) 494-6953.]

Hymn: *Angels We Have Heard on High* by Love to Sing

[\[Click here\]](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.]

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

[Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 [read for you](#)]

The spirit of the LORD GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,

my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the LORD GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Reflection on the Scripture:

[\[The video of the reflection.\]](#)

Five centuries before the birth of Jesus, this poem was written, about the promise God had made, to the people who were spread across the Middle East, that they would get back to the life they were longing for, that the new normal would be full of joy. Indeed, the Hebrew that is translated *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD* is literally “joy, joy”,³ a kind of wonderful repetition that reminds me of a dog’s tail when you come home. Joy, joy.

There is a ton of joy in this poem. It’s a conversation between a human agent appointed by God and God, talking about what’s coming for the people of God. The relationship between God and the people of God is so intimate⁴ that they make plans together, they chat. The plans are so important to God that God has someone on site, a human being, who’s there to make sure that God’s justice gets done, that the recompense God intends for God’s people gets delivered (Isaiah 61:8). That’s joy, joy.

There’s a lot of work that needs to be done to get the new normal sorted out. God’s agent has been anointed and sent (Isaiah 61:1) by God. We hear those words and we know the agent is like David, the shepherd boy, the youngest in his family, who was anointed and sent to be the first King of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). David was a massive newness in Israel, so this human agent is going to affect a deep social newness.⁵

That is going to start where it is most needed *bringing good news to the oppressed, binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners* (Isaiah 61:1). And maybe we hear that list a little differently this year, because of all the Covid-19 restrictions. We’re already feeling a little oppressed, brokenhearted, captive and imprisoned, and we know that the worst is still ahead of us, that we have to get through the dangerous challenges of this winter.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 218.

⁴ Brueggemann, 212.

⁵ Brueggemann, 213.

The deep, social newness is going to start where it is most needed, but look at who is going to bring that newness into being. The oppressed, brokenhearted, captive and imprisoned. The ones who were the most damaged by the old normal are the ones who are going to have the most say, who are going to build the new normal for the community. That's God's plan. Joy, joy.

There is a phrase in the project plan for the human agent that we may not hear quite the same way as those who returned from exile heard it. God's agent on the ground is going *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God*. That is another way of saying a sacred year of jubilee. In the Biblical jubilee years, debts were written off, slaves were freed. Every fifty years, the people of God were supposed to rebalance society, get people out of the pigeon holes they had been jammed into by debt. Literally, the wealthy folks who held the debts were just supposed to write them off, land was returned to the original owners, there was a great re-shuffling so the gap between rich and poor was reset.

Now human nature has not changed that much in 3,000 years. How well do you think that jubilee reshuffling plan went? Indeed, it went exactly as well as you think it would. Meaning it rarely happened and when it happened, it wasn't as thoroughly executed as the guidelines in Leviticus 25 laid out. But that was the plan. That debt would no longer imprison people, blind people, bind people, to a life that was leading them away from the people God intended them to be. So if the human agent in today's reading was anointed and sent to do something massively new, what could be more massively new than a true jubilee year, when financial obligations were no longer driving more and more people deeper and deeper into oppression, broken hearts, captivity and imprisonment? Joy, joy.

As Christians, we have a habit of reading Isaiah as some kind of theological "Where's Waldo?", seeing if we can spot Jesus in every turn of phrase. And on this page there's just Waldo all by himself, because Jesus quotes it in the start of his ministry in Luke (4:18). But by saying that Isaiah is just pointing at Jesus, it takes away some of the power in the message from the prophet.

When this message was written, the community was in an uproar. Everyone wanted life back to something better, something massively much better than what they had been living. Everyone wanted the new normal. And they were at a moment where such a thing was possible. God was inviting human beings to step up and say, "I am God's agent in this world, on this project." That's shocking.⁶ And we fail to recognize the shock of it when we think that Isaiah was only talking about Jesus. Because that invitation from God is still here, waiting for us to recognize it in our lives today.

⁶ Donald E. Gowan, "Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11". *Interpretation* 35, no. 4 (1981): 406.

The essential workers in our world were always there, in the ER and classroom and grocery store. They worked at the transfer station and the nursing home and to get the power lines back up when the tree limbs came down. But we didn't see them, really see them. And I doubt we really saw them as essential. But they were then and they are now and we're all much clearer now about that.

So if this wretched virus has brought home to us that we're part of the oppressed, brokenhearted, captive and imprisoned, then Isaiah has a message for *us*: we're part of God's team that's going to build the new normal. We have an opportunity to make sure that our essential workers are recognized for what they are, not just essential but valued. We should think about the jubilee year and figure out what financial constraints we can loosen. Inadequate health care, poor quality child care, unpredictable policing all have financial burdens that constrain us. Those are all things we can work on as a community. Now. Here. With each other. Because God invited us to. And we get to work and chat with God while we do it. Joy, joy.

Hymn: *Hymn of Joy* by Chris Tomlin

[[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.]

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

[[Let's pray together.](#)]

At this time of year,
the abundance of some and the needs of so many
stand in marked contrast.

As we bring our gifts to you this season,
may Christ's heart rejoice
and the needs of others be tended.

With our whole being,
spirit and soul and body,
we rejoice in you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

[[Let's pray together.](#) Thanks, Russell and Susan, for being our Lay Leaders this week!]

Leader: Let us remember the words of Mary and the power of the Baby. And Mary said, God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

All: O the power of the Baby! The joy we have is what we find in the world around us, like a baby sleeping in a manger. The joy we have is what we make, like a noise loud enough to wake the whole town that the Messiah is here.

Leader: And Mary said, God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

All: O the power of the Baby! The work of preparing the way for the Baby isn't easy, but it's work we get to do with other people. And they can be pretty joyful, when we get to making meals for folks, or lighting up the darkness around the church.

Leader: And Mary said so many things. As we head back out into the coming week, let us ponder the power of the Baby in our hearts.

All: Amen.

[CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: # 839 "God Be With You Till We Meet Again; by his counsels guide, uphold you, with his sheep securely fold you; God be with you till we meet again."](#)

[The Music Ministry crew made this bit of video for us, so we could all sing together, with each other and our former selves!]

Postlude: [All is Well](#) by Michael w. Smith featuring Carrie Underwood
[Feel free to sing along and let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (12/13/20)

If you know those on this list, call on them & tell them we are praying for them. If you know others who should be added to this list please give their names to the minister or a deacon.

- Friends & family of Jerry King, Tre Rouse, Tasha Feller, Pat Tiner, Terry House, Rev. Tom Atherton, June Hoff, Barbara Thaxter, Earl Bosquet.
- Luca, Amy's nephew, as his new treatment appears to be having effect
- Those affected by the corona virus and those working to limit its impact
- Those suffering from domestic violence, who are caught at home with their abusers at a time of rising stress, that they might find safe havens.
- For everyone to stay as healthy as they can in the days to come
- For the friends & families of those who have died alone;
- For our church, that we remain patient with the process of re-opening;
- For Joe, Susan's cousin, who's doing well at the rehab hospital in Nashua and trying to get back to his own home for Christmas.
- For all those caught in the traffic accidents in Hollis & Brookline in Saturday's storm
- For Mark, John's brother, in the Lahey hospital, who could use some prayers
- For Lois, Amy's aunt, who's in the hospital and could use some healing of body and spirit
- For Ellie, a resident at Ledgewood, who lost her husband this week
- For the friends and family of Jenna, Carol's cousin, especially her mom Jenn and siblings Tyler and Kerrigan. Jenna was only 24.
- For Amy, George and Georgie, who are all recovering from Covid-19.
- For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, who are flying to see his parents, may they all travel safely
- For the struggles to lay aside past wrongs when the present seems to be filling up with more
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

Light of the world, you greet me this morning with new possibilities. Shine brightly, I pray, until I see into the dark places of this world, and into the dark places of my own life. I want to follow you in paths of justice, speak up with you for liberty, and bend with you toward the brokenhearted, even the broken places within myself. I trade in my faint spirit for your mantle of praise—and with my whole being I will rejoice in you. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Restore me, O God, from the rush of the day. Let me dream this night of all the great things you have done. As the darkness comes and these little lights in my house glow, I give thanks for the greater Light no darkness can overcome. To anyone who mourns or sits in prison or fears danger this night, bring the peace that only you can give. You are faithful, and I know you will do this. In Christ. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

John 1:6–8, 19–28 reminds us that we are not the light, but with John we are called to testify as witnesses to the light, who is Jesus Christ. The verb “to bear witness” occurs thirty-three times in the Fourth Gospel! How can you bear witness, in this season of lights, to the true Light who has come into the world?

Daily Awareness Reflection

At the end of the day, I’ve been asking myself the following questions. I jot down the answers and ask them again the next evening. I’ve found it helps me to remain centered as well as increasing my awareness of God in my life. It takes about 10 minutes.

1. Slow down. Stop. Prepare yourself to pray by becoming aware of the love with which God looks on you ...
2. Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks to God for them ...
3. Ask God that this be a time of special grace and revelation ...
4. With God, review the day. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, and your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which have not? What does God want to say to you about both? ...
5. Ask for forgiveness for failures/omissions, for healing from their effects ...
6. Look forward to the following day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God’s desire for your life ...

From Elizabeth Liebert’s *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), p. 31.

Announcements:

Please shop smile.amazon.com and choose Brookline Community Church as your charity to support the church. Thanks!

The church's financial obligations continue. If you are able, please mail your offering to: Brookline Community Church, PO Box 507, Brookline, NH 03033.

	Actual Income	Actual Expenses	Income vs. Expenses +/-
November	\$89,821	\$77,906	\$11,916

No Christmas Faire in 2020

But we are doing some fundraising to help replace the money it generates. We have delicious homemade strawberry and apricot jam that is available for sale now until it's gone (\$5/jar).

We have a Firepit Raffle "Basket" that we will be selling tickets for starting Sunday, Oct. 18 (if you can help sell some tickets that would be great!). Tickets are 1/\$5 or 5/\$20. One or two sale items and one or two other raffle items may be added soon. The raffle ticket drawing will be held on Sunday, December 13th. Please [email carolcherian@gmail.com](mailto:carolcherian@gmail.com) if you have any questions or are interested in helping out.

Christmas Blues Service

Jazz Sanctuary service at First Congregational Church, Concord will offer a Blues Christmas service for this year which has so many of singing the Blues. It will premiere on [their YouTube channel](#) on November 15th, and be available after that to stream and enjoy.

Holiday Lights Extravaganza in Brookline, Dec 12th

The Brookline Women's Club and Parent Teacher Organization, with the support of Local Businesses and Members of the Community, have joined forces to present a socially distant Holiday Lights Display starting December 12th.

Together, homes and store fronts, will light up the chilly air with festive lights and holiday themed displays, for all of our local families to drive by and enjoy for free!

Want your display to be included in the Extravaganza? Visit www.bwc-nh.weebly.com or Brookline, NH PTO facebook page to sign up!

Seasonal Flu Vaccine Event, Dec 19th

Sat. Dec. 19 from 12 to 2pm (12-12:30pm for 60+) at the Brookline Fire Department. This is a walk-thru clinic only. Pre-registration is required: [click here](#). No cost, open to everyone.

Spreading the Christmas Spirit (& Helping Santa on his way)

After a tough year, folks are trying to safely share a little sparkle of magic, hope & togetherness. On Christmas Eve, at 6:00pm, head outside with a bell and ring it for two minutes. We'll be doing something together (and yet apart), and making sure Santa knows where to head next. Listen for the bells across your

community. If someone would like to ring the church bell, let Rev. Cath know and we'll make sure you can get in the church.

Help Lines

This time of isolation can be very difficult. You may know someone who needs some support beyond what you can provide. We're in this together.

- Suicide prevention: 1-800-273-8255
- Sexual assault: 1-800-656-4673
- Domestic violence: 1-800-799-7233

Brookline Food Pantry

Although we cannot be together physically at this time, Outreach is continuing to work with Rebecca Purdin through the Brookline Welfare office & CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) to address any needs in our community.

The Brookline food pantry is now open on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10-2:00 for drop-offs only. There is a list on the [Brookline Food Pantry's Facebook page](#) that is being updated as items are needed. In addition to Market Basket gift cards, this week, like last week, they're continuing to look for:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Applesauce | Flavored Oatmeal |
| Cup O' Noodles | Pancake Mix |
| Hearty Canned Soups | Syrup |
| Jello (any flavor) | Microwave Popcorn |
| Peanut Butter Crackers | Hot Cocoa |
| Pickles and Relish | Men's Deodorant |
| Jelly (any flavor except grape) | Laundry Detergent |
| Juice Boxes | Dishwashing Liquid |

If you know of anyone who could use some help from the Food Pantry, please let Rebecca or Amy know. We sense there's more need in the community than is currently picking up food.

Donations can be dropped off downstairs at the Town Hall during regular hours of operation. There are large boxes for donations if there is no one in the Food Pantry. There is also a drop off at the Brookline Post Office.

Thank you for your continued support to our church and our community.

Covid-19 Scams Targeting Seniors

The [NH Attorney General's office put out a press release](#) describing several scams that are targeting seniors. Please pass the word.

Covid-19 Information

If people want to know the latest status of Covid-19 in NH and the Emergency orders to date, go to <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/>