



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
December 20, 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: [Sussex Carol Piano Arrangement](#) by James Griffin

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

Centering Ourselves for Worship¹:

[Join John Nicholson and Candy Tiner, 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,

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: And like all new parents, she didn't really know what she was getting into, but she just wanted to love her baby

All: And Mary said, God has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

Leader: O the power of the Baby! Let us see your Star come from heaven to show us the Way. Let Mary's Little Baby lead us. Let the mountains quake in His presence and the persistent, impatient car horns fall silent in adoration. Show us your Son through the clouds of our confusion and desperation and exhaustion. Let us experience His power.

All: And Mary said, according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Leader: We're waiting, like our parents and grandparents before us. There are days when we think we've just missed the train to get us where we need to go, or missed the opportunity to right a wrong. But the Baby promises there will always be another chance to love God and love our neighbor.

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 John Nicholson, Candy & Tony Tiner, Barbara Haskell-Higgins and Donna & Peter Bretschneider. [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 challenging times in our family as well as yours, knowing that we will pull through with the help of each other.

Lighter 2: We now light the candle of peace in spite of anger, depression and addiction.

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).

Lighter 3: We now light the candle of joy in spite of missing so many things we thought were essential to a merry Christmas and finding new ways to celebrate with our extended families.

Lighter 4: We now light the candle of love even when many things dim our sparkling, like not being with our loved ones for the holiday and the global health pandemic.
Emmanuel, God be with us in the week to come lighting hope, peace, joy and love on the wick of our lives, so that we may shine on our world your unconditional welcome to all. Amen.

Leader: God's love illuminates hatred and a compassionate heart and brightens the path to the birth of Christ.

Hymn: *Advent Wreath Prayers – Week 4* 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.](#)]

Let us join our voices with Mary,
who celebrates God's greatness and sings of God's blessing
for all who are poor and oppressed.

Eternal God, we pray for the world,
that our warring ways may be overturned, even now,
through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ;
for nothing is impossible with you.

We pray for the mission of your church,
that we may proclaim the good news of the age
as we rejoice in the gift of our Savior.

We pray for all who suffer,
for all who are weighed down with concerns.

We pray

For Amy & George, still healing up from Covid-19. Georgie is pretty much back to normal.

For Marcia and Clarence, not feeling so great down at their place in Florida

For the staff person at Ledgewood who tested positive for Covid-19; may they recover soon

For Dan, Yifan's friend, who is serving as a helicopter pilot in Afghanistan, may he remain safe

For Helen, Carol's friend, who has tested positive for Covid

For Bob & Rhoda, Barbara's relatives; Bob's in the hospital and Rhoda can't visit in person, which is tough when someone is really not well.

For Andrea & her family, Barbara's daughter, an in-law passed away and it's hit the extended family hard,

For all those who will be spending Christmas alone this year because of Covid

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

For the folks we can't comfort with our presence at the moment, may they know how much we love them

We pray that we may feed the hungry and lift up the lowly through the power of your holy and life-giving Spirit.

We pray for those lifted up with joys.

We pray

For 23 years of teaching, mostly 3rd grade, Barbara loved her job and made a difference in kids' lives

For Bob's birthday, celebrating being healthy

For the Charlie Brown Christmas special, a tradition to settle in with

For Mark, John's brother, who is home from the hospital. Mark lives with their mom, so she might appreciate some prayers.

For making time to rest, so we can be renewed

For Robin, the winner of the Firepit Raffle, long may her family enjoy the light and heat it brings.

For being pulled away from our normal life enough to catch a glimpse of the assumptions that may be limiting us

We pray that the joy they have will build up the love in this world
So that all may see the love that you intend for us.

We pray for your creation,
that we may safeguard its well-being
from generation to generation to your honor and glory.

We remember before you those who have died
and pray for those who will die today,
that they may rest with you eternally
in your kingdom where there is no end.

Through Christ, with Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
we magnify you, almighty God,
forever and ever. **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: *The Thrill of Hope* by Christy Nockels

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

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

[Isaiah 9:2-7 [read for you](#)]

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

I love a good plan.³ When I was younger, I fought pretty hard to keep things from going off my patently brilliant plans. But as I've gotten older, I've gotten much wiser to the value of a good plan when things go awry. With a good plan, I can figure out what needs to shift around when the world changes.

However, I did not plan for a pandemic. All my plans for this year have gotten blown up. Once I accepted that those were dust, all my plans for what I would accomplish during the pandemic got blown up too. To be honest, I'm a little annoyed that my plans haven't worked out. And there's a part of me that's annoyed with God when I see how many people's plans and more than that, whole lives, have been thrown into chaos because of this pandemic.

The Israelites had a plan. They would let the prophets guide the people to pick the right family to be the rulers. Then they would wisely guide the people to prosperity. Their faith would keep them on a virtuous high road which would keep them from being conquered by other countries. They would trust in God and the covenant would keep them safe.

It was a good plan. Except that David committed adultery, which led to civil war with his sons. Then David's son, Solomon worshipped other gods, which caused more problems. Then Solomon's son Rehoboam was a tyrant. The nation split, with the northern part deciding to find another family to be the rulers.

In the early part of the book of Isaiah, where today's reading is from, the political storm clouds are gathering over the southern part of Israel. Disaster has not struck yet, but Isaiah is convinced that Israel is going to get pulled into war if the current ruler doesn't come up with a better plan than choosing between one of two bad allies. Isaiah is arguing that relying on God is the way to go; much better to stay out of the political fight brewing between a world super power and two small local states who want to rebel. The king dithers. Isaiah says that God will send a sign. A baby won't even grow into a man before the whole problem disappears, if the king will just rely on God rather than on earthly allies. That

³ Corrine Carvalho laid out this wonderful argument about plans in "First Reading: Commentary on Isaiah 9:2-7", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for December 24, 2017, Christmas Eve: Nativity of Our Lord", <https://www.workingpreacher.org/?print-all=29510%2C29512%2C29513%2C29511> (accessed 14 December 2020).

doesn't feel faithful to the king. You have to have a plan you can work towards. You shouldn't put God to the test (Isaiah 7:12). And that means earthly allies.

The king and Isaiah both want Israel to be at peace. It's just that the king wants to get there by joining with allies to be militarily so powerful that no enemy will win a war against them. No enemy will even be tempted to engage in battle. We are all descendants of the War to End All Wars and the wars after that. We all know how the king's plan turns out.

But we don't know how God's plan turns out. And that is what Isaiah is telling the king and the rest of us. For humans wanting an end to war, the solution cannot possibly be that the warriors' boots need to be burned, that their battle gear needs to go up in flames (Isaiah 9:5). And yet, God's plan includes that the rod of oppression will be broken (Isaiah 9:4), not transferred from one hand to another. God's plan is wonderful, mighty, and everlasting (Isaiah 9:6), and centered around a baby. Which makes no sense to our way of thinking, since babies are the most vulnerable and the most dependent.

And there it is. God has a plan. And it's so much bigger, so completely different from anything we could come up with. We may not understand all the parts of it. We may not understand any of the parts of it. But that doesn't make the plan wrong or bad or worth getting annoyed with. God is inviting us to be a part of God's plan. By loving our neighbor and loving God and accepting that not everything will make sense or feel good right now.

I know many of you recognized this passage. It's usually read on Christmas Eve. But I wanted to pull it away from the passage from Luke that describes Jesus' birth, so we could see it separately. In this year of having our human plans blown up again and again, it's a clear reminder that we can end up in places we can't imagine, with hopes fulfilled that we couldn't begin to describe, but we have to follow God's plan. Following God's plan will let us work together to tackle the human systems that are failing to provide justice and righteousness. As someone who loves a plan, I know how hard this will be. But after a hard year of all my plans getting broken by reality, I guess I'm willing to try another way. Because I'm ready for the great light in the land of deep darkness (Isaiah 9:2). I'm ready for joy at the harvest (Isaiah 9:3). I'm ready for the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Let's go with God's plan and see what changes. Amen.

Hymn: *His Name is Wonderful* by Chris Tomlin

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

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

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

Joining Mary's joyful song,
our souls proclaim the greatness of the Lord,
and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior.

Holy God, your love is magnified in the gift of your Son,
whom you so freely share with us.

Bless these gifts
to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry
in your coming reign of justice and peace;
in Christ's name. **Amen.**

Hymn: *Good Christian Men Rejoice* by Village2Village

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

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

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

Leader: As we head back out into this Christmas week, let us remember the words of Mary and the power of the Baby. And Mary said, God has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

All: O the power of the Baby! Just when we think it's impossible to show any love in this world, a baby comes by in a stroller or on TV. And we remember how easy love is when we take ourselves out of the picture.

Leader: And Mary said, according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

All: O the power of the Baby! The light he brought into the world is shining still, shining on the many things we love. In this season when we will be distanced from so much, let us draw closer to the light and the love that the Baby has brought into today's world.

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: Haven't Seen It Yet arranged by Danny Gokey

[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 (12/20/20)

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 Amy & George, still healing up from Covid-19. Georgie is pretty much back to normal.
- For Marcia and Clarence, not feeling so great down at their place in Florida
- For the staff person at Ledgewood who tested positive for Covid-19; may they recover soon
- For Dan, Yifan's friend, who is serving as a helicopter pilot in Afghanistan, may he remain safe
- For Helen, Carol's friend, who has tested positive for Covid
- For Bob & Rhoda, Barbara's relatives; Bob's in the hospital and Rhoda can't visit in person, which is tough when someone is really not well.
- For Andrea & her family, Barbara's daughter, an in-law passed away and it's hit the extended family hard,
- For all those who will be spending Christmas alone this year because of Covid
- For the friends and family of Jenna, Carol's cousin, especially her mom Jenn and siblings Tyler and Kerrigan. Jenna was only 24.
- For the folks we can't comfort with our presence at the moment, may they know how much we love them
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

12/20 Household Prayer: Morning

Expectant God, Mary sings because she has new life in her, the promise of your salvation. Fill me with hope this day as I lift my life to you and seek to do your will. Look with favor on our world and all who are in need, that your love may be magnified as I follow humbly in your way. Amen.

12/20 Household Prayer: Evening

Lord, as I come to you seeking rest this night, I pray that all may find a home in you, be disturbed by no one, and be free of the afflictions of the evil one, for you, O God, are mighty to save. Amen

Christmas Eve Household Prayer: Morning

God of hope, peace, joy, and love, this day is so full! For children, this day is one of excitement and anticipation; for others, this day is filled with responsibilities and activity. Some are traveling this day to be with family or friends, while others spend the day quietly and alone. Be with us in all our varied circumstances and moods. I pray that I, and all those within my circles of care, will be especially attentive to the angels' good news: that you have come to dwell among us in Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. In this is our great joy. Amen.

Christmas Eve Household Prayer: Evening

Loving God, this night holds so much for me — people and places from long ago are brought near in memories redeemed; my present companions, as well as present cares, are held in tenderness. Lord, I would hold the whole world in my hands, turning it round and round, so that your light would shine everywhere on everyone with hope and peace.

As it is, I utter this prayer instead — my little light in the shades of night: Hold those I love and all the world in your sure and tender hands, as a mother holds her newborn child. Let your face shine upon us with peace. Gather up the past, the present, and the future into your eternity, where all is reconciled and you are all in all. In the name of him who was born this night, Jesus, who is Christ the Lord. Amen.

Christmas Day Household Prayer: Morning

Eternal God, as I celebrate the birthday of Jesus, may I sing of your love all the days of my life, for you have made me your child forever. In Christ I pray. Amen.

Christmas Day Household Prayer: Evening

Lord, I give thanks for the blessings of this day (which I now name), and I ask your forgiveness for the places where I have failed to reveal your love (which I now name). I give thanks that you have become one of us, that I may become more like you. As I sleep this night, may your goodness shape me to more lovingly reflect your light in the world. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Mary's song proclaims that God is lifting up the lowly while scattering the proud, and feeding the hungry while sending the rich away with empty hands. How does this change the way you think about God's coming reign of justice and favor? How does this change the way you live?

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

Jam Packed with Love

We have delicious homemade strawberry and apricot jam that is available for sale now until it's gone (\$5/jar).

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

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!

[The map is still available](#) so you can see where to visit!

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

Covid-19 Scams Targeting Seniors

The [NH Attorney General's office put out a press release](#) describing several scams that are targeting seniors. (Honestly, what are people like?!?). 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/>

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.