

# The Ascension

DECEMBER 2020

WWW.ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



## Advent 2020

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. -Is. 9:2

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# Advent at Ascension

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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Greetings in the Name of the Lord.

**W**ith all we have been through in this past year, many of us are longing for a reset. While the struggles, hardships and losses of this year have been enormous (and likely will continue), the Church offers a timely invitation for recalibration – Advent.

Advent is a season of waiting and longing, anticipation and hope. It looks back to the first coming of Jesus in the incarnation and looks forward to the second coming of Jesus for the culmination of all things – when God’s justice, mercy, and love will be seen for all peoples and all creation.

The pandemic has certainly caused deep yearning and longing. Almost no one has been untouched. Perhaps this Advent, even as we lament, we can also long with eager anticipation and great hope for Jesus – the one who was born in time and who will come again in victory. The lamenting and longing are vital parts of the Advent journey. The liturgical new year, that begins with the Advent promise of the Messiah, may be exactly what we need, now more than ever as this very difficult calendar year comes to a close.

In the wake of the loss, uncertainty and despair of 2020, we can take our stand and reaffirm that “Jesus is Lord!” We set our hope on him.

Hope is powerful. Hope in Jesus turns darkness to light. In this season of Advent, we have an opportunity to give ourselves more fully to reflection and contemplation. One thing you might do as you look back on 2020 is to ask yourself, “Where does hope in Jesus touch my soul?” and

“Where does my hope in Jesus bring light and love into the world?”

In addition to these questions, we have a variety of reflection and contemplation resources for you to use as you enter into the rhythms of Advent this year:

- APP - Advent Prayer Project (see article on pg. 7)
- The Daily Prayer App (see article on pg. 10)
- Morning Prayer recordings on Ascension’s YouTube channel
- An Advent devotional produced by Trinity School for Ministry (available online at [www.tsm.edu](http://www.tsm.edu) with hard copies at church)
- Advent Wreaths (see article on pg 5. )

One beautiful part of Advent is that many of the daily readings focus on the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah, almost more than any other prophet, expresses depths of yearning alongside expectation and hope for deliverance. For example, Isaiah 40 reads:

*“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God...” “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

My Advent prayer for each of you is that God will meet you at your point of deepest longing and greatest need and that you will be able to rejoice in the greatest gift given – Jesus our Messiah. It is the birth of this child wherein lies our one true hope.

Jonathan +  
→



# Advent & Christmas Worship Services



## **Sundays in Advent (November 29; December 6, 13, 20)**

We will continue to livestream a 10:00 am service with walk through eucharist throughout Advent. In person worship, both in the Nave and in the Parish Hall, will continue to be offered and registration will be required. We will not have a Service of Lessons & Carols this year. However, we will have a time for singing Advent Carols prior to the service outside from 9:00 – 9:35 am. We hope to procure a tent for all of our Sundays in Advent so that socializing outside after services can continue come rain or shine!

## **LIVE NATIVITY on Sunday, December 20**

After the service on Sunday, December 20th, we are happy to announce that we will have a live nativity, replete with real animals (lambs, sheep, goats, a calf, donkeys and even something in the camel family!) Children (and adults!) are invited to come in costume. We do hope to see many shepherds and angels and other characters from Bethlehem on our church lawn. We hope to add outdoor caroling (with masks), fire pits and maybe even some hot food and drink, individually served. Details to come!

## **Quiet (tech-free) Services in Advent**

During Advent, we will offer a quiet and simple service of Holy Eucharist on Wednesdays at Noon. There will be a homily and instrumental music. Registrations in advance will be helpful. Visit the same registration tab on the website currently in use

for Sunday worship. Entrance will be through the red narthex doors. All COVID protocols remain in place.

## **Christmas Eve 4:00 pm Outdoor Service**

On Christmas Eve we will hold a one-hour family friendly service outdoors, on the big Ascension lawn, hopefully under a very big tent. We will sing the great carols of Christmas (with masks on), light Christmas candles, and enjoy a frosty eucharist together! Once again, children will be invited to come in costumes depicting the Nativity story. While we will be able to accommodate more people outside safely distanced, reservations will be required. This should be a service filled with light, joy, ambiance from fire pits, and those attending will be home for dinner by 5:30 pm or so.

## **Christmas Eve 8:00 pm Festival Eucharist with walk through eucharist to follow**

A great Ascension tradition is our Festival Eucharist. This year that service will take place at 8:00 pm and will be live streamed on our YouTube channel. Limited reservations for in person attendance will be available. If demand exists, we will also have overflow seating in the Parish Hall.

## **Christmas Day 10:00 am Eucharist**

A service of Holy Eucharist will take place at 10:00 am. Reservations will be required. This service will not be live streamed and thus there will be no walk through eucharist.

# Celebrating Advent at Home

By Jonathan Millard, Rector

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**O**ne of the ways we mark Advent in our services and in our homes is with the lighting of an Advent wreath. I encourage all households to purchase or make their own Advent wreath and light it each Sunday as you participate at home watching the livestream, or perhaps each evening when you are gathered for a meal.

Advent wreaths are a simple circle of four candles: three purple and one pink, with a white 'Christ Candle' in the middle. There are different understandings of the significance of the four candles which are lit on each new Sunday of Advent. One approach sees the candles as representing the Prophets, the Holy Family, the Shepherds and the Magi. Our Children's Minister, Catherine Slocum, will be distributing materials to the children using this theme. Another approach views the candles as standing for Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.

At the beginning of each of our Sunday services in Advent we will hear the words of "O Come O Come Immanuel" when the candles are lit, adding a different verse each week.

*O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

*O Come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree, free them from Satan's  
tyranny  
that trust thy mighty power to save, and give them victory  
o'er the grave.*

*O come, though Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by  
thy drawing nigh;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark  
shadow put to flight.*

*O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all  
mankind;  
bid thou our sad divisions cease, and be thyself our King of  
Peace.*

*REJOICE! REJOICE! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*



# An Advent Journey to Bethlehem

By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry

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For the last several years children's ministry has provided Advent bags that include An Advent Journey to Bethlehem guidebook, 5 beautifully scripted cards, a large purple ribbon underlay, a model of Bethlehem and votive candles. These materials are inspired by the Godly Play curriculum and help us to go deeper into the story of Advent to help prepare our hearts for Christmas. Each family is welcome to pick up an Advent bag from the Parish Hall beginning November 15th through the first Sunday in Advent, November 29th. For further information please contact Catherine Slocum [catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org)



# Advent Prayer Project

ADVENT  
PRAYER PROJECT



By Mary Martha Truschel (*Member of Ascension since 1981*)

**A**lmost all of us know someone who is up on all the latest technology, who unfailingly has the latest gizmo as well as the latest APP for his or her phone. These people often seem to be about 12 years old – but then most of the world seems quite young to me these days. I am not techno-savvy.

When I bought my iPhone, I took my nephews, Matthew and Michael (who would want me to tell you they are 27 and 24) with me to the Apple Store and said to the salesman, "I'll pay the bill, but talk to them." The lads had a time of it,

convincing the salesman, who was shocked and disappointed, that I did not need this, that, and the other APP on my phone, because I would never use it. They were completely correct.

For the past few years, I have used a different sort of APP to salutary effect. I call it the "Advent Prayer Project;" it is so low tech that it is available even to those who do not have a cell phone! It is free, and one need not even register. This is just between each of us and the Father. Here is how it works:

Pick a person or issue in need of prayer and take it on. Maybe the Father will

bring a person or a matter to mind for whom or which He would like you to pray. The Scriptures are replete with instances in which someone in the Body of Christ prayed and God answered in a mighty way. See, Acts 12:1-17. Who knows what God might do in response to your prayer?!

This is not a forever commitment. Advent starts on Sunday, November 29, and ends Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24. That makes twenty-six days to take some particular person or matter to the Father every day. Please join me in this APP and let's watch for God's answers to our prayer.



# Coming Up...

## Christmas Tree Food Drive

This year Ascension's Christmas tree will be set up in the Narthex (main entrance by the red doors). We often use the tree to take family photos in our Christmas best. This year we want to use our beautiful tree to reach our broader Pittsburgh family through the provision of canned and dry goods. Will you bring a family favorite and add it to our collection under the tree? All donations will be given to a local shelter or to families we know of with a particular need. Thank you!

## Kids Christmas Special

Are your kids excited about Christmas? Salli Lolli is! We are happy to announce a Kids' Church Christmas Special that will air on Christmas Eve. Stay tuned!

## OWLS

Ascension's Older Wiser and Lively Saints will have an Advent Service of Holy Communion on Thursday, December 10th at 10:30am. Anyone who wishes is welcome to attend regardless of age. Entrance will be through the red narthex doors. All COVID protocols remain in place.



# The Smell of Christmas on Your Front Door

Church of the Ascension's Youth Group's Christmas Greens Fundraiser is happening once again this year! All the information you need to order and pay is found at <https://caygonline.com/wreaths>. Questions? Contact Alex at [alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:alex.banfieldhicks@ascensionpittsburgh.org).

Profits provide scholarships to support summer service projects. Orders must be made and paid for by midnight on November 29th. Pick up will take place on the Feast of Saint Nicholas, Sunday December 6th, from the tent outside Ascension on the front lawn.

Here's what's in stock this year:

(\$20) 30' of White Pine Roping

(\$25) Our most popular option - 20 inch Frasier Fir with Bow and Cones

(\$30) Our classy classic - the 24 inch Mixed Wreath

(\$40) Hanging Basket of Christmas greens



# Music and Worship Arts: Advent Happenings

By Chris and Elise Massa, Director and Assistant Director of Music and Worship Arts

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**A**dvent is traditionally a season with a very unique musical and artistic identity, with songs and practices that have become part of our fabric as a faith community. While the current pandemic is, inevitably, forcing some changes on us, Advent itself is still very much a season of longing and waiting, maybe this year more than most.

There will be no shortage of longings during this Advent, but in the midst of it all, we will labor on in hope. We believe that the arts can usher us into unique ways of doing this, so we are inviting you to partner with us this Advent through various collaborative and creative arts as we worship together, joining together as co-laborers of hope. What follows are some of those opportunities, and we'd like to encourage you to see these not only as things that will be happening, but things that you can be a part of. Rather than being a spectator, you are invited to get involved.

## More Than Hymn Sing

Every Sunday morning from 9am to 9:35am, weather permitting, you are invited to meet on the large lawn, lift your voice, and sing. Registration is required, so please check the church's announcement page or the Music and Worship Arts Facebook page (yes, we have a Facebook page) for the link to the sign-up form. Hymnals and song sheets will be provided. Masks are required.

## The Waiting Room: A Virtual Gallery for Advent

The Music and Worship Arts website (see <https://www.ascensionpittsburgh.org/serve/music-team/>) will feature a curated collection of work from Ascension artists during Advent. Artists of all ages and disciplines are welcome to submit

works for consideration - poetry, visual art, film, dance, songwriting, musicians, etc. Congregation members are then invited to "stroll" through the virtual gallery throughout Advent. For questions or to submit work, please email Elise. Submissions are due at the end of the day on Sunday, November 15.

## Congregational Poetry

Inspired by Kwame Alexander's crowdsourced poems from Morning Edition on NPR, Ascension-based poet Faith Thompson will be crafting a poem for each week of Advent from original poems submitted by congregation members - that's YOU! These poems will be read as the prelude for every Sunday during Advent. You are invited to submit short poems (20 lines or less) by the deadlines below using the following prompts as the opening lines below. Submissions are due to Faith Thompson ([thompsonfj1@gmail.com](mailto:thompsonfj1@gmail.com)) by the dates indicated.

- Advent 1 (due Nov. 15): "I wait for the Lord to..."
- Advent 2 (due Nov. 22): "Behind me and ahead of me..."
- Advent 3 (due Nov. 29): "The taste of laughter..."
- Advent 4 (due Dec. 6): "Where the Lord dwells..."

## Handbell Choir

We may not be able to sing together during our worship services, but that doesn't mean we can't make a joyful noise! An Ascension handbell choir is in the process of coming together, and there are still a few openings. No experience is needed, and an ability to read music isn't required but would come in handy. Rehearsals will be Thursday evenings, 7pm-8pm, in the Worship Arts Room, and masks will be required. Please reach out to Chris if interested.





# The Gift of Oneself

By Alex Banfield Hicks, Director of Youth and College Ministry  
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I was reading in 1 Peter this morning and was struck by Peter's call in 5:10; "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." It's a beautiful, humbling and emboldening reminder that we all have received gifts and that we can serve one another. We don't 'own' these gifts but are stewards of this varied grace from God. It belongs to Him, just as we do as his creation.

It connected me with another idea I heard the day before. The Barna Group's Mark Matlock described Millennials as a "generation who don't want to be consumers, they want to contribute." I have been encouraged by three recent examples of mentor-mentee relationships established between 20-something Millennials and high-schoolers. All girls in fact. Maybe that's not surprising.

All that to say, in this season in which Ascension's youth group can't do the big old gatherings in our basement, in which many people are socially isolated and 'living online', and in which the Porch Pods are getting chillier, the value of mentoring, chatting, praying with a real person seems greater than ever.

I remember learning in seminary that the ideal mentor is about ten to fifteen years older. That is close enough to still relate but far enough along the path of life to have some real insights to share. I remember fondly how much I looked up to and admired folks who invested in me, their wisdom and care shining brightly, and then I realized these esteemed mentors were younger than I am now!

So do pray that many of these mentor-mentee relationships will be established at Ascension and beyond, that Jesus will be using these pairs to help make disciples, and if you are interested in finding out more and getting involved as a mentor for someone in youth group, do ping me a text at 412-652-3137. Thanks!



# Fostering Prayerful Habits: BCP 2019 Daily Office App

By Benjamin Locher (*Ben has been attending Ascension since 2018*)

**I** published the web app [dailyoffice2019.com](http://dailyoffice2019.com) nearly a year ago to make it easier to pray the Daily Office on the go using the new 2019 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. Now it is also available as a fully-offline [iPhone/iPad app](#) and will soon be released as an Android app.

Regularly praying the Daily Office -- morning and evening prayer -- can bear so much fruit. It unites us with the church around the world as we pray using ancient patterns of daily prayer. It lets us hear God speak through his word, walking through the entirety of sacred scripture each year. It bookends our day, helping us make time for God when we might otherwise be too busy or too tired.

But for all of this to really work, the Daily Office must be a regular habit like brushing our teeth. It's that repetition that instills a habit of holiness.

The Daily Office website and app are designed to make that habit as attainable as possible.

For me, praying the Daily Office from a printed Book of Common Prayer with a Bible in hand and my phone silenced is always better. But more important is actually doing it. The app is great for when you are out and about without a book -- maybe on a lunch break, outside in a park, or even in bed at night when the lights are already out (it has a dark mode!). It's meant to be used at any time or in any place you may find yourself.

Therefore, the app is designed with several principles in mind:

## Faithfulness to the BCP

The app is designed to be faithful to the Book of Common Prayer, 2019, following the exact text and rubrics. You can pray interchangeably from the app or the book. Scripture is taken from the English Standard Version, the standard text of the Anglican Church in North America.

## Flexibility

The app allows you to jump in and start praying without setting anything up. But if you have specific preferences, the Settings

page allows you to choose from nearly any option allowed by the Book of Common Prayer.

## Distraction-free simplicity

There are no page-flips, and there is no need to look up the calendar or readings. There are intentionally no inline options so you don't have to pause to figure out how to do it after you've started praying. (If you prefer different options, you can select them in advance.)

## Book-like

The app tries to recreate the feel of the book, including the font, alignment, and layout. One of the best aspects of the 2019 BCP is how easy and beautiful it is to read. (A page flip option is coming soon to make it feel more like a book or Kindle).

## Coming Soon

A bunch of new features are in the works: a Google Play/Android app, a smaller sized app for iPhone, the texts of the traditional language edition, a spoken audio version, optional chant notations for psalms and canticles, additional Bible translations, and more. There is an active Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/dailyoffice> where you can submit feature requests and bug reports. You can also email [feedback@dailyoffice2019.com](mailto:feedback@dailyoffice2019.com).





# International Ministry: Preparing for the Messiah

By LuAnn Pengidore, Director of International Ministry

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**I**n the International Ministry, some of our Bible studies are going through the wonderful stories of the Old Testament and recounting how the Messiah was promised 4,000 year ago. It is a perfect backdrop to Advent and preparing for the Messiah in our hearts. Meg Sateia and Josh Bennett, who co-teach a Bible class of 10 students on Monday morning, write the following:

*In our study of Jesus and the Old Testament this fall we have been pleased to see that our group has not been shying away from tough questions. They are not asking questions in an argumentative way, but simply being open to fully engaging with the text. We have also enjoyed their willingness to open up and share about their own lives in deeper ways than we expected. We believe the students are benefiting from having connection with each other during this time of isolation, and hope that they are also benefiting from digging deeply into Scripture both with their minds and hearts. Since we have people with various levels of familiarity with the Bible, some have been able to share their knowledge and wisdom and others have been able to share their fresh eyes, and the result is that we have all been growing together in our understanding of the Word. We feel humbled and privileged to get to study God's word with people from all different corners of the world.*

We are thankful for God's provision of leaders for the six Bible studies running weekly via Zoom, and the physical provision for field trips. We are also grateful that this fall we were able to watch thought-provoking movies (like Bella) here at the church, and to have some other fun events (like painting and drinking hot chocolate with Suzanne Werder in the parish hall!)

In October, fourteen internationals spent an amazing day at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. The scenery in the purple meadow where we ate lunch was breathtaking, and students commented on how grateful they felt to be on the trip to see the autumn leaves. Most importantly, outdoor trips like these

allow precious time to meet in person. We are thankful to Amy Holcombe, Carolina and Francisco Tufino, and the Bohn March family (all newcomers to Ascension this fall!) for driving to this event.

Later in October a smaller group of students biked along the rivers and learned about the historical significance of the Northside and enjoying the public art of Randyland. In early November we had an Autumn/Thanksgiving lunch outside with traditional foods and games on the lawn with teachers, volunteers and students—all feasting on Denise Bozich's cooking. Yum!



We are thankful for your prayers for this ministry and for those serving as teachers, assistants, conversation partners, Bible study leaders, and field trips leaders. We are most grateful for our 91 students from 12 different countries!

# Live Nativity: Sun. Dec. 20



After the service on Sunday, December 20th, we are happy to announce that we will have a live nativity, replete with real animals (lambs, sheep, goats, a calf, donkeys and even something in the camel family!) Children (and adults!) are invited to come in costume. We do hope to see many shepherds and angels and other characters from Bethlehem on our church lawn. We hope to add outdoor caroling (with masks), fire pits and maybe even some hot food and drink, individually served. Details to come!

**Worship Services** Sunday 10:00 am Live stream on [YouTube](#) with walk-through Eucharist from 11:30-12:30

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A Worshipping Community;  
Equipping God's People; Sharing  
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