**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, December 17, 2017, 3rd Sunday of Advent**

**Lighting the Candle of Joy Kevin and Nancy Mueller**

We light the candle of Joy as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

**In Christ there is life and light for all people.**

Now lift up your heads and rejoice: your redeemer is drawing near.

**Prepare the way of the Holy One! All flesh will see the salvation of God.**

Christ has come to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth!**

**Prayer of the Day**

Glory to you in the highest, Mighty God, Prince of Peace!

As Mary sang, magnifying you, let our worship today enlarge our image of you!

Even as the world toils in darkness, let us be filled with your light, your grace and your peace,

So that joy of which we sing and speak

Be made flesh and live among us:

Christ our Lord, the Light of the World. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 126:1-6 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord of glory, Savior of all who call on you,  
we pray for your people who are near to our hearts today.  
We rejoice with those who rejoice,  
whose hopes and dreams have come true today.  
Let our mouths be filled with laughter,  
and let us sing songs of joy,  
for you have done great things for your people.  
We give you thanks!

Merciful God, we also weep with those who weep.  
We call out on behalf of those whose lives are dry and barren,  
for all who long to be restored.  
Where there are tears, or suffering, or illness, or grief,  
may there be songs of joy once again.

We lift up the prayers of your people  
with longing and hope,  
trusting that you will bring forth a harvest of joy.  
We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Time Out for Teaching:** **Cantata Theology 3: Joy**

What is joy to you? A lot of things can bring us joy. But the joy of Christmas is something wholly other than the joy of a fresh-baked cookie. The joy we have at Christmas is the kind of thing that leads us to adore God, exult in God, thank God, recognize and glorify God for all that He has done to redeem the world. God has gone so far as to give His only-begotten Son who would travel the full distance to demonstrate His powerful love for us all.

One of the songs we sang at the Cantata program Friday night has become a favorite to many of us. Not a Christmas song outright, but the words do speak of the Spirit of Christmas. Let me read them to you.

Through Mary’s soul, God is magnified. It’s a statement and proclamation. The way this is said we could take it different ways. On its own, we might ask, 1) Is she intentionally magnifying the Lord? Or 2) Is God using her so He will be magnified, whether she wants it or not? Or, 3) Is she just stating a fact, proclaiming this thing as a happening that others should know about? The song that follows seems to be her own joyous response to this good news of being with child, for the song of praise appears to be magnifying the Lord.

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

1   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 brokenhearted,   
     to proclaim liberty to the captives,   
          and release to the prisoners;   
2   to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,   
          and the day of vengeance of our God;   
          to comfort all who mourn;   
3   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.   
4   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.

8   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.   
9   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.   
10  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.   
11  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.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

16Rejoice always, 17pray without ceasing, 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19Do not quench the Spirit. 20Do not despise the words of prophets, 21but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22abstain from every form of evil.

23May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

**Luke 1:46b-55**

My soul magnifies the Lord,   
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,   
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.   
          Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;   
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,   
          and holy is his name.   
His mercy is for those who fear him   
          from generation to generation.   
He has shown strength with his arm;   
          he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.   
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,   
          and lifted up the lowly;   
he has filled the hungry with good things,   
         and sent the rich away empty.   
He has helped his servant Israel,   
          in remembrance of his mercy,   
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,   
          to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

**Sermon: “Up Close and Personal”**

I remember when Santa came to our house. We were one of the lucky ones because we had a chimney. Every year, after the candlelight service, we laid out two of the prettiest cookies on a plate, poured milk into our Santa shaped mug and set them on the hearth, right where Santa would see them when he arrived. Then we were instructed to get on our PJs, “The sooner you go to bed, the sooner Christmas will be here!” Of course, Jason and I were blissfully oblivious that this meant our parents needed us out of the way so they could finish wrapping gifts. As we dreamed of sugar plums dancing in our heads, our folks toiled away in secret, then went to bed late.

Just a few hours later, the fun started up again, for there we were at their bedside asking them if we could go downstairs and see the presents and inspect the cookie situation. They’d mumble, “Go look in your stockings. We’ll be downstairs in an hour.” So Jason and I would thunder down the stairs, and exclaim with wonder that the milk and cookies were gone! We had evidence that Santa had come up close and personal. He came down the chimney, miraculously didn’t leave a spot of soot on the carpet, and filled up our stockings with good things. We knew he had lots of places to go and he didn’t forget to visit us.

What happens to us when we grow up? Do we lose that magic that caused us to believe? Or is it because of the stresses of being a grown up that don’t afford us time for childishness? Or maybe we’re embarrassed about looking silly? Maybe some of us are afraid to believe, afraid of disappointment, even though the Prophet Isaiah makes big promises that devastations shall be rebuilt, and those who mourn shall be like oaks of righteousness, planted to display God’s glory? Too good to be true?

I have had more than a few people tell me this year that it’s harder than past years to get into that “Christmas spirit.” I don’t think it has so much to do with our age as it does with the oppressive times we live in. Our distractions by grief or disease, painful political news, the continuation of racism and sexism and ageism, the horrors of addiction, poverty, crime in our backyards. Renewed fears about nuclear testing and upheaval in the Middle East. Should I continue to list out the things that threaten to take away our joy? They don’t quit just because it’s Christmas. Maybe the problem is that all that bad news and heartbreak feels a whole lot closer to us than our Lord Immanuel does right now. So I am here to tell you today that we have to fight it, we have to make it an intentional walk of faith, to magnify God in our own hearts and relationships. It is what we do in this season to prepare for God to come more fully into our lives. And if we must, we can break into song.

Mary, the mother of God, breaks into song, when she realizes that God has just come up close and personal with her, and is about to with the entire world. It causes her to sing a magnificent song of praise, proclaiming the hope of the nations for salvation, for judgment, and that God’s promises are finally coming to fruition after centuries of waiting. Remember that she herself was pretty much a child, probably no more than 14 years old. Young enough to be naïve but old enough to understand. She was probably scared, but excited, for she knew that what was happening to her was much bigger and more important than what others might think of her. Of all the ways that God should choose to bring the Messiah into the world, God chose her.

She carried God in her body. The same one of whom she sings who will humble the mighty, who shall bring justice to the oppressed. She was blessed by the extraordinary gift. To be God’s magnifying glass. No wonder she starts out singing, “My soul magnifies the Lord!”

Praising God does magnify the Lord, for in our praise, our ability to see God improves. We are able to enlarge our vision of God through songs of praise. And when we do, others can see God better too. Our songs of joy, when sung out loud only bless the ears and encourage others to share our joy. I am reminded of the legendary Christmas Truce of 1914. It happened when German and Allied soldiers were trying to kill one another along the Western Front. The Front extended for miles in Belgium and France, and it was an unending battle. In some places, the Germans and Allies were just a few yards away from each other, separated by barbed wire and hiding in muddy trenches. But it was Christmas Eve, 1914. The German soldiers, disobeying orders, started singing Christmas carols to the Allies across No Man’s Land. The Allies responded in kind. By Christmas Morning, soldiers rose from their trenches, from both sides, unarmed, to wish Merry Christmas to their enemies. They spent the day exchanging German cigars for English cigarettes, buttons from their coats and singing songs. They helped each other bury their dead. There was a soccer match.

Even though the next day they returned to making war, the few who survived remembered that truce with wonder. God was magnified on the muddy, bloody battlefield. And it began by laying down arms and singing. That is our call during. Lay down your arms, take in the music of Christmas, listening carefully to the words we sing. Even if you have trouble believing, give yourself a gift - a moment to soak up the beauty. There’s nothing wrong with a little nostalgia. The joy of which we speak is real. Immanuel means God is with us. Amen.

**Announcements:**

Today is potluck Sunday! Make sure you stick around and enjoy a Thanksgiving-y supper. All are invited.

Next Saturday, November 25th, beginning at 10:00AM at the Tucumcari Cemetery, we will say goodbye to Marjorie C. McKenzie, who has completed her life on earth and joined the Church Triumphant. Please join us in this celebration of her life, first at the cemetery, then proceed to the church for the worship and supper.