

COVENANT CHURCH

HOUSTON

A Service of Worship for the
Fourth Sunday of Advent
21 December 2025

“Beneath the Slow Stars - Approaching Solstice” by Jennifer Pratt-Walter

There in the uncandled night
something infinitesimal blinked and stretched.

She had a name but no one knew yet,
she was all potential, her newness was alive.
The moon kept her silence, all the stars
held their steady slowness above.
There in the deep sack of night, a tiny
Hope was born. She carried her sisters
called Peace, called Joy, called Love
along every byway and stream, through every
dwelling of every land, across every belief and
across those with no beliefs at all. Remember today,
my Beloveds, how out of smallness
comes the vast work, the staggering miracle
of life itself. Awaken your candle out of night’s
silence, then as you tend it in your heart, watch it
blossom to that fiery beacon from which Hope arises,
whether that hope is a child or a solstice, a feeling or
thought or something undefined, yet no less holy
for want of a name.

This is what I wish to place upon us all: that beneath
the stillness of the patient stars, we find ourselves at home
with Hope and all her sacred sisters.

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in love

Love be with you!
And also with you!

Ringing in the hour

Silence is kept

*Prelude

Donald Neuen
(b. 1933)

“The Joy of Mary”

*My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit doth rejoice in God my Savior.
For God that is mighty hath done great things
And Holy is God’s Name.*

Choir and congregation together:

(Read twice - second time getting softer and softer)

**God’s mercy is on them that love God,
From generation to generation.
Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For God hath visited and redeemed the people.**

My soul doth magnify the Lord...

Call to Worship

⁺Opening Hymn #12

Besançon

“People, Look East”

**People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the guest is on the way.**

**Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

+Please stand in body or spirit

**Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
One more seed is planted there:
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,
That in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the rose is on the way.**

**Birds, though you long have ceased to build,
Guard the nest that must be filled.
Even the hour when wings are frozen
God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the bird is on the way.**

**Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim
One more light the bowl shall brim,
Shining beyond the frosty weather,
Bright as sun and moon together.
People look east and sing today:
Love the star is on the way.**

**Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
With the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today;
Love the Lord is on the way.**

Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle
Response: "We Are Waiting" (please see insert)

Invitation

Scripture Lesson
These are our sacred stories.
Thanks be to God.

Luke 1:46-55

Time for Children

⁺ Response:

**Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.**

Moon Beams

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**Advent means we are waiting for something,
we are to expect something good and up-lifting
to make us feel better.**

And why not?

**We struggle so,
and we only want peace, security
and even a little happiness.**

We dream of it—

like a lost treasure in an empty desert.

**Then, in the very dying of the Autumn Season,
along comes Advent**

**with candles, prayers, songs
and promises of new possibilities.**

And, all tingling

**with excitement and expectancy,
we are seduced into hoping once again.**

Oh—thank God

for Advent—

**and its perennial promise—
pointing to a light
which never dies.**

Words of Assurance

+Please stand in body or spirit

“Magnificat”

I.

*Magnificat, Magnificat. My soul doth magnify the Lord!
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
For God hath regarded the low estate of this handmaiden.
For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

II.

*For God that is mighty hath done to me great things:
And holy is God's name.
And God's mercy is on them that fear God from generation to generation.
God hath shown strength with the arm;
and hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

III.

*God hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
God hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich hath been sent empty away.
God hath holpen the servant Israel, in remembrance of mercy;
As God spake to our forebears, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.
Glory to the Creator and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen!*

Silent Reflection

Meditation

+Response

Bring a Torch

**Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!**

+Please stand in body or spirit

Prayer

Offering

Offertory

“Still, Still, Still”

Paul Manz

(1919-2009)

⁺Prayer of Dedication

**Into this world Christ comes and proclaims a different peace:
the pax Christi.**

He proclaims liberation for the poor and a different Spirit.

**It is no longer the spirit of mourning and weariness, of divine resignation –
“as it was, so it will always be”
— but a new and different Spirit:**

“Where the Spirit of God is there is freedom!”

The oldest Christians prayed for this Spirit.

**It defined their lives;
it determined their association with one another
and with the realities of existence.**

**Like us they often lived dull, dispirited, indifferent, mundane lives
and they prayed for a Spirit to strengthen them.**

“Come Holy Spirit, abide with us!”

⁺Doxology

Old Hundredth

Praise God the Source of life and birth.

Praise God the Word, who came to earth.

Praise God the Spirit, holy flame,

All glory, honor to God’s name! Amen.

⁺Affirmation of Faith

**Gracious God, we have sought you in high and holy places;
we are ill-prepared to acknowledge your presence
among the lowly and the poor.**

We believe you are profound, but we overlook your obvious truths.

**We are anxious about the unknown but we hardly consider
the realities immediately in front of us.**

**Turn us, incarnate God, by the simple wonders of your love,
to a rebirth of faith and hope and joy. Amen.**

+Please stand in body or spirit

⁺Closing Hymn

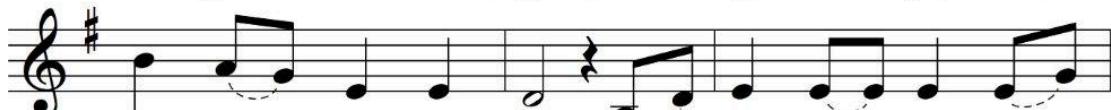
CANTICLE OF THE TURNING

STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN
Words and Tune Adapt. Rory Cooney
Arr. John Ferguson

Based on the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-58



Choir 1. My soul cries out with a joy - ful shout that the
All 2. Though I am small, my God, my all, you
All 3. From the halls of pow'r to the for - tress tow'r, not a
All 4. Though the na - tions rage from age to age, we re -



God of my heart is great, and my spir - it sings of the
work great things in me, and your mer - cy will last from the
stone will be left on stone. Let the king be - ware for your
mem - ber who holds us fast: God's mer - cy must de -



won - drous things that you bring to the ones who wait.
depths of the past to the end of the age to be.
jus - tice tears ev - 'ry ty - rant from his throne.
liv - er us from the con - quer-or's crush - ing grasp.



You fixed your sight on your ser - vant's plight, and my
Your ver - y name puts the proud to shame, and to
The hun - gry poor shall weep no more, for the
This sav - ing word that our fore - bears heard is the



weak - ness you did not spurn, so from east to west shall my
those who would for you yearn, you will show your might, put the
food they can nev - er earn; there are ta - bles spread, ev - 'ry
prom - ise which holds us bound, till the spear and rod can be



name be blest. Could the world be a - bout to turn?
strong to flight, for the world is a - bout to turn.
mouth be fed, for the world is a - bout to turn.
crushed by God, who is turn - ing the world a - round.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the
 fires of your jus - tice burn. Wipe a - way all tears, for the
 dawn draws near, and the world is a-bout to turn!

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Benediction

*Postlude

Eric Thiman
(1900-1975)

+Please stand in body or spirit

**Please hold silence and remain seated during the postlude*

Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Barbie McKittrick**.

The “Amen” banner was created by **Kay Duncan** and **Nancy Henry**.

The Call to Worship is “Advent Calendar” by Rowan Williams.

The Unison Confession is “Advent” by Edwina Gateley from *Soul Whispers* (2015).

Deacon Bridget O’Toole gives the prayer.

The Prayer of Dedication is adapted from *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* by Sharon Welch.

The Affirmation of Faith is by Allen P. Happe from *Touch Holiness*, edited by Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi.

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The Covenant Singers

Soprano	Alto	Tenor	Bass
Thelma Jean Goodrich*	Charlotte Bowers	Sebastian Alexander	Stephen Caldwell*
Emily Ramsey Holien	Joyce Courtois	Eric Avera	Lewis Garvin
Karen Kline	Heather Laureles	Robert Carter	Drew McDiarmid
Sabrina Neff	Laura Mitchell	Jay Hooker	Ken Parker
Nancy Preston	Kiersten Scott-Collyer	David Reeves*	Perry Primm
Susan Reeves*	Lisa Sparkes*	Shannon Stewart	David Ramsey
Sharron Sanborn*	Dale Thomas	K.T. Tilford	Frank Shonka
Liz Turner		Jeff Turner	Van Wheeler

**Not singing this Sunday*

About Today's Service

Rory Cooney, the composer of "Canticle of the Turning," writes:

"In setting [the Magnificat] for my [congregation], I decided that I wanted to use music that suggested the revolutionary spirit of the canticle, that cosmic tables are being turned over, as it were. The idea of 'turning' in the title was both a nod to the inner conceit of 'revolution,' (derived from the Latin *volvere*, which means 'to turn') and to the message of Jesus's preaching in all three of the synoptic gospels, the core message of which was, 'Repent, and believe the good news.' 'Repent' translates a Greek verb, the noun form of which is *metanoia*, that is to say, a complete change of the self, of mind and heart, which might also be rendered as 'turn around.' [...] The "revolution" is both interior (a change of heart-self) and corporate and visible (a new way of living together). It is, in fact, against the prevailing set of values in society, a revolution. **But I want to emphasize that it is a peaceful revolution, a revolution of action, persuasion, and justice.** In the spirit of Miriam of Egypt, Hannah, and Miriam of Nazareth, 'Canticle of the Turning' invites us to sing around the fire in the darkness while we await the new world's dawn."

This hymn makes me cry. I'm thankful to be a part of introducing it to Covenant.

–Jason Steiner

Announcements

There will be a congregational business meeting after worship today, December 21.

Christmas Eve Worship will be at 5:30pm.

We are assessing interest in a knitting / needle-craft circle at Covenant, starting monthly in January. Please talk to Jason Steiner if you are interested.

The Young Adult Group will volunteer at Montrose Grace Place on Monday, January 5. Please talk to Jason Steiner for more information.

Children and Youth Announcements

December 21 - Youth Fellowship after church.

Saturday, January 17 - CCSC Family Service Day, 12:00 -1:15 p.m.

Calendar

Mon. December 22	7pm	Insight Meditation Houston, 2nd floor of Huff Fellowship Hall building.
Wed. December 24	5:30pm	Christmas Eve Worship, Sanctuary.
Thurs. December 25	10am	Community Group, Zoom.
Sun. December 28	9:30am	No Adult Education. Enjoy Christmas break!
	11am	Worship with Unpopular Christmas Hymns, Sanctuary.

Information

Childcare: Childcare is provided in the children's area beginning at 9:30 a.m. Children aged 2 and under are invited to the nursery. Children aged 3 to 9 are invited to the children's area after the Time for Children.

All-Gender Restrooms are located in the Huff Fellowship Hall building.

Covenant Recycles: If you do not wish to keep your order of worship, please recycle it by placing it on the stand located in the narthex.

Office Hours: The Church Office is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 8am-3pm, and Tuesday from 1pm-5pm.

Helpful Links: Scan here for digital Visitor and Celebration & Concern Cards; any sign-up forms mentioned in the Announcements; and other useful information.



Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.

We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations, all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.

We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond to God's call to ministry in her or his own understanding of God's all-encompassing love.

We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging and contemporarily relevant.

We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.

We value participation so that we might hear many approaches to our shared faith.

Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation

Members of Covenant, Ministers

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

Trena' Jamison, Director of Children and Youth

Heather Laureles, Director of Administration & Communications

David Lee, Director of Music

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jason Steiner, Organist and Associate Director of Music

Raymond Stubblefield, Minister of Congregational Life

Brendon Young, Moores School of Music Artist in Residence

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Covenant Church recognizes the laws of the State of Texas and the rights of its citizens. Consistent with this acknowledgment and with respect for the values of our Church, we also acknowledge that our congregants and visitors seek a safe and comfortable space for worship and celebration. In that spirit, we request that all firearms be left in a secure place outside of the Church. We thank God for providing us with the opportunity to worship together and to continue to respect each other as human beings.