

## WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,

to remind us of God's presence with us,

and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

## GATHERING MUSIC

"Waiting for You" - Christopher Grundy

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_bgcbZHFpqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bgcbZHFpqM)

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is

a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;

Southern California Nevada Conference of the

United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that

"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here."

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder in the back.

If there are any other announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat at this time.

We will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some cake or pie,

and something to drink such as wine, juice, or even water.

## SHARING OUR GIFTS

Most churches have a time of offering.

Making an offering,

sharing what you can in God's name,

is a spiritual practice.

That offering can be an offering of prayer, of presence,

an offering of work on behalf of the church,

or that offering can be of money.

If you would like to make an offering by participating in leading worship or social events,

or if you would like to become a member of this church,

let any clergy or staff member know.

If you would like to make a financial offering to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl by the door to the sanctuary,  
or you can go to our website:  
firstuccsl.org  
We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

#### ADVENT CANDLE - SECOND SUNDAY

On the Second Advent Sunday, we light two candles.  
We come to this season with those precious to us,  
gifts of peace God has unwrapped in our lives -  
family or friend, near or distant, living or remembered.  
We light a candle of our deepest hopes  
(pause, light)  
and a candle for the peace we have learned  
from one or more whom we trust.  
(pause,light)  
Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come.  
Touch a flame of hope and peace on the wick of our lives  
so that we may shine all around us.  
Amen.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,  
as a community,  
join our hearts together,  
to connect to God and to each other.  
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.  
If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,  
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at  
this time.  
As people share their prayers in text  
please read them prayerfully  
and hold this space as sacred and safe  
to open our hearts to God.  
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.  
Those voiced here today.  
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.  
Those for which we have no words.  
We lift them all to you, O Lord,  
with faith in your boundless love and grace.  
We pray all of this in the name of the one who came and comes to us as love,  
and who taught us to pray together:  
Our Father who art in heaven  
hallowed by thy name,  
thy kin-dom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and for give 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 kin-dom and the power and glory forever.  
Amen.

“Incarnation Song” – Chris and Thomas  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2xAD7hIS5w>

#### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

I’m going off lectionary this week,  
As we continue with a sermon series based on the book,  
“This Here Flesh,” by Cole Arthur Riley.  
Instead, we look again at what for me is the quintessential Advent text,  
The Annunciation to Mary, from the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke.  
Today’s reading is adapted from The Inclusive Bible,  
Except from one sentence, which I took from the NRSV,  
Which I’ll explain later.  
See if you can hear it fresh.  
The passage begins with “six months later,”  
Meaning six months after Elizabeth conceived her child,  
Another birth foretold by the angel Gabriel.  
He’s a very busy angel.  
Let us listen to the God speaking through the words of Luke, chapter 1, verses  
26-38.

#### LUKE 1:26-38 (adapted from The Inclusive Bible)

Six months later, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called  
Nazareth,  
to a young woman named Mary;  
she was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.  
Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary,  
“Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you!  
Blessed are you among women!”  
Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel’s greeting  
meant.  
The angel went on to say to her,  
“Don’t be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God.  
You’ll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus—‘Deliverance.’  
His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God.  
God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor,  
to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end.”  
Mary said to the angel,  
“How can this be, since I have never been with a man?”  
The angel answered her,  
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow  
you—  
hence the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God.  
Know too that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a child in her old age;  
she who was thought to be infertile is now in her sixth month.  
Nothing is impossible with God.”  
Mary said,  
“I am the servant of God. Let it be with me as you say.”

With that, the angel left her.

The Word of God for the People of God.  
Thanks be to God!

“Mother of God” – The Brilliance  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLao9yH0fFU>

“This Here Flesh”

Let us pray ...

Make no mistake,

The first chapter of Luke is all about bodies,

Luke, the physician, or so tradition says,

Grounds his gospel,

His story of the good news of Jesus Christ,

Firmly in flesh.

And the angel and the Holy Spirit flitting around the place

Just can't hide that.

First we get Elizabeth – whose body was thought to be unable to conceive,

Told her body will bear a child,

Then her husband, Zechariah, doesn't believe it,

And suddenly his body can't speak.

Now we get Mary,

Another who “should” not be able to conceive

Under the circumstances,

Told her body will bear a child.

It feels wholly (pun intended) appropriate that this story of incarnation,

Of God-with-us, God coming to us in human form,

Should begin with bodies.

Especially with women's bodies.

Before God was incarnated in the body of Jesus,

God was incarnated in the body of Mary,

That's how human conception and childbearing works.

Jesus is an incarnation within an incarnation.

And this is glorious!

Ours is an embodied faith.

How amazing, in the words of Cole Arthur Riley,

“that the creation of the cosmos would choose to rely on an embodied creation.

To be grown, fed, delivered—God put faith in a body.”

In a women's body. Mary's body.

“Mary's muscles and hormones, bowels and breasts.”

How ironic that religion and society often not only have discounted the importance of the body,

but turned it, and its natural processes, into a source of shame.

Particularly for women.

Cole writes:

“I have often wondered if Mary,

even with full knowledge and proclamation of the glory of her womb,

felt shame for it.

As her body changed and belly grew,  
Did she question if it was worthy to hold the divine?  
Was she embarrassed of the stories her body contained?  
The weakness, the inflammation, the smell.  
Or did she see her flesh for what it was—holy?  
Weak, powerful, human, holy. . . .  
And when Christ's body is broken and blood shed,  
We should hold in mystery that first a woman's body was broken, her blood shed,  
In order to deliver the hope of the world into the world."

I was caught by The Inclusive Bible's interpretation of verse 32,  
"his dignity will be great," not just "HE will be great,"  
But "his dignity will be great."  
"Dignity," meaning "the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect."  
Cole writes that "the origin story of the world  
And the dark and stars that hold it  
Is one of dignity.  
The divine is in us."  
That's incarnation, right there.  
And it goes back to the beginning of creation.  
We are made in the image of God.  
We - We are made in the image of God.  
It takes, Cole writes, "a diversity of people to reflect God more fully.  
Anything less and the image becomes pixelated and grainy,  
Still beautiful but lacking clarity."  
We all bear the image of God.  
In our bodies, in our very cells.  
It's a very "physical bearing," not dis-embodied.  
It is not only the immaterial, invisible, unseen that is holy.  
"How," Cole says, "could you expect me to believe this when I've met a God who drank  
from the breast of his creation?"  
The spiritual is so intertwined with the physical the physical that we cannot say  
where one ends and the other begins,  
Indeed maybe "there is no such place."  
"The chasm between the spiritual and the physical  
is no greater than that between a thought and a word.  
They cannot be disconnected."  
Though the powers and principalities of this world,  
Including those of religious institutions,  
Have certainly tried.  
And yet, the central ritual of the Christian religious tradition is the Eucharist,  
Holy Communion,  
where the physical and the spiritual are literally baked together,  
in the bread that represents the body of Christ.  
The communion elements come from the earth—grain, fruit—  
that we take into our bodies in a tangible, physical way.  
In-carnating it ourselves.  
We see, touch, smell, taste the elements.  
Our knowledge of the spiritual deeply entwined with all of our senses.  
Cole observes that "the Bible talks of knowing God as though it's closer to dinner

and a movie than any three-point sermon.”  
When I led confirmation classes at my church in Texas,  
I would take the class out to the park for the day,  
And we would enact the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness.  
When we got to the part about God providing manna to eat,  
I used pastries from a local bakery.  
We would sit on the ground in the Texas heat,  
And drink water, and eat sweet pastries.  
And it was as holy a communion as any with bread and wine.  
One class decided that for Confirmation Sunday we should serve those same pastries  
as the communion bread in worship.  
An older girl who was helping set up looked at the pastries set out on the table and  
said to me,  
“I’ve never been hungry for communion before.”  
Amen and Amen.  
As Cole says, “God’s supposed to taste good.”  
It even says it in the Psalms:  
“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”  
And so, Cole says, “if I make it to the table of God,  
I hope it has cornbread stuffing and comfortable chairs.  
I mean no offense to the desert mothers and fathers eating locusts and honey and  
itching with camel hair,  
But I hope God knows how my cousin’s baked mac and cheese tastes.”  
And as we come to the Lord’s Table  
And take the elements that embody the divine presence and memory  
into our bodies,  
We remember too that there is no place that God is not,  
And that includes within us.  
In “this here flesh.”  
Amen.

“These Bodies” – The Many  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ch1Qvyv1WgQ>

SHARING THE LORD'S TABLE  
STATIONS OF THE CRECHE COMMUNION FOR ADVENT  
(adapted from Maren Tirabassi)

- 1) Come to this table, for you are welcomed by a star,  
that guides even those who feel lost,  
even those who feel distant from the oasis of “church,”  
and those who need someone to receive their gifts.
- 2) Come to this table, for you are welcomed by an innkeeper,  
who recognizes that no “room” always means  
finding another kind of space,  
and who can do magic with life’s leftovers  
to feed hungry, tired shepherds.
- 3) Come to this table, for you are welcomed by a manger,

friendly beasts in the story – cow, dove, donkey, lambs,  
any holy memory of a companion animal you’ve known.

4) On the Advent journey, we remember a family said, “yes” –  
Mary, who would feed the Child of God,  
as we are fed by this sacrament,  
and Joseph, who loved her,  
and built tables like this one for a whole town,

5) On the Advent journey, we remember  
Elizabeth who sheltered Mary  
in a time of rejection  
and Zechariah who learned silence,  
as they carried their own God-given child,  
We let Communion  
nurture our hope and teach us love.

6) On the Advent journey, we remember  
the Magnificat,  
how Jesus lived that song in ministry  
and the indiscriminate love  
of a Passover bread and cup for all.

7) Let us pray.  
Word made flesh and gift divine,  
who offers us hope, peace, joy and love,  
all the year long,  
we pray for your Spirit  
of starlight and Gloria,  
upon these gifts which are ours and yours,  
even as our lives are yours and ours,  
today and always.  
Amen.

#### SHARING THE ELEMENTS

8) This gift is more precious than gold – eat this bread and be rich inside.  
[pause to eat bread]

9) This gift is poured out like myrrh – drink this cup and know you are precious in  
God’s sight.  
[pause to drink]

10) Gracious God, we give thanks for your messages that feel like angels,  
care that is like a shepherd,  
and the joy to the world in gathering around this table in this season of waiting.

11) Strengthened by this meal,  
may we notice and care for all those who are rejected, unhoused,  
or fleeing for their lives from danger without and within.

12) As we go forth, O Holy One, may it truly be by another way.  
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over,  
Our ministry to the world is just beginning.  
The world is waiting.  
Go in peace,  
come again in hope.  
Amen.

“Beautiful People” – Chris Brown  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2oRqyn7ToQ>

GO IN PEACE.