



10:30 AM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2023

WELCOME!

PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*“Whether you are a seeker, skeptic, believer
or somewhere in between on life’s journey, you are welcome here.
We are grateful for your presence and invite you to participate
in worship and service of Plymouth Church.*

PLYMOUTH UCC PURPOSE

Growing people of faith who participate in God’s work in the world.

PLYMOUTH UCC VISION

Plymouth Church UCC is a Christian Community open to the transforming Spirit of God.



Thank you for worshipping online with us today. Please like and send us a greeting on
Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



The church office will be closed during concerns about the coronavirus.

Check PlymouthChurchSeattle.org for updates.

All pastoral care will be via telephone or other electronic means.

If you have personal concerns, you may contact a minister or member of the Pastoral Care Team
via e-mails below, or call the pastoral care line, **206.639.7739**, checked daily.

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For administrative needs, or other non-pastoral care questions, please email:

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FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

*When you enter Plymouth Church UCC,
may you feel the peace, intimacy, belonging,
acceptance and refuge of Sanctuary.*

*Worship with Plymouth Church UCC begins with meditation.
The quiet of this place is meant to encourage and deepen your own inner work.
Thank you for entering this place, this hour, by honoring the spirit of worship.*

PRELUDE *Improvisation*
Dr. Lee Peterson, piano

CALL TO WORSHIP Rev. Kevin Bechtold
(Inspired by Psalm 148)

One: Praise God in the heavens! Praise God among us!
Praise the Holy One!

**Many: Praise God who vindicates us! Praise God
who sustains us!**

One: Praise God from the depths! Praise God in all
circumstances!

**Many: Praise Creator who made us! Praise God
who shapes us!**

One: Let all praise the name of the Holy One!

**Many: The glory of God reigns in heaven and on
earth! Praise the Holy One!**

CAROL *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come, and behold Them, born the kin of angels!
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them, Christ, divine!
Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them, Christ, divine!
Yea, God, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n!
Word of the Parent, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them;
O come, let us adore Them, Christ, divine!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION. Rev. Bechtold

**Sovereign God, you have been our help from age to age.
Remind us to turn to you when confronted with difficult
choices. Remind us that you strengthen us on the journey.
Remind us that our actions and attitudes impact our neighbors
and ourselves. Renew our minds and spirits as we strive to
follow your way of love and peace in the world.**

ASSURANCE OF GRACE Rev. Bechtold

Beloved, you are loved with an everlasting love by the Most High God. Know that each day is a new opportunity for faithful and flourishing life in the name and path of Jesus. Redemption is available, and God's grace is sufficient for transformation and new life. **Amen.**

WELCOME. Rev. Dr. Kelle Brown

Plymouth Church acknowledges that we occupy the unceded land of its first stewards, the Duwamish of the Coast Salish people. We vow our solidarity with the Duwamish in their honorable quest to become a federally recognized tribe.

Plymouth Church also offer a labor acknowledgement for the African American enslaved upon whose backs this country gained much of its wealth, as well as the work and lives of other minoritized peoples who emigrated to this country. In our journey to become more fully the church, we honor our social location of power and privilege, and our position to do justice within our church and in the world, and recognize that such a statement is only the beginning of the work to which we are called.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLERev. Donene Blair

*Prayer for the World (adapted), by Marianne Williamson
from her collection, *Illuminata**

On this final day of the year, we pray with all our hearts and souls to deliver our world into the hands of God.

Dear God,

We pray for this our world.

We ask that you remove the walls that separate us, and the chains that hold us down.

Use us to create a new world on earth, one that reflects your will, your peace.

In this moment, we recognize the power you have given us to create anew the world we want.

Today's world reflects our past confusion. Now, in this moment, we ask for new light.

Illumine our minds and stir our hearts. Use us as never before, as part of a great and mighty plan for the healing of this world.

May we no longer be at war with each other. May we no longer be at war within ourselves.

Let us forgive this century and every other, the evils of history, the pain of our common fears.

Remove from our hearts the illusion that we are separate.
May every nation and every people and every color and every religion find at last the one heartbeat we all share.

May we not hold on to yesterday. May we not obscure your vision of tomorrow, but rather, may your vision flood our hearts.

Flow through us, work through us, that in our lives we might see the illuminated world.

Create, sustain the world on earth, dear God, for us, for our children, and for all your children.

Hallelujah at the thought, praise God, for the possibility that such a thing could come to be, through you, O God, through your holy light that shines within us all.

So may it be. So may it be. And so it is.

With deep thanks for your great love, we pray.

Amen.

Afghan Family (Supported by Plymouth), Michelle J. Bennett (Sister of Dawn Bennett), Walter Bethel (Friend of Karen Clark), Marilyn Bumpas, Susan Carter (Mother of Heather Banks & Kathleen Bernard), Bruce Chittick & family (Friend of Karen Clark), Mike Correy (Friend of Karen Clark), Sue Ellen Daniel (Friend of Barb Laski), Mykesha Davis (Daughter of Michael & Elizabeth Gordon), Mark & JT Edwards, Diane Folkert (Mother-in-law of Ara Lawrence), Sally Galliher (Cousin of Doug Stultz), Marni Good (Friend of Ricky Powell), Floyd Gossett, Carrie Gossett (Mother of Floyd Gossett), Lucian Guthrie, Joanna Lemly and Family (Sister of Hayden McManus), James McDowell (Cousin of Jerry Rice), Barbara Miller (Friend of Barb Laski), Shirley K. Shelley (Aunt of Ricky Powell), Dr. Maxine Mimms, Ian Nelson (Son of Diane Nelson), Paula Orrego, Mary Margaret Pruitt, Jose Robles and Family, Jaime Rubio Sulficio, Charon Washington (Sister of Michael & Elizabeth Gordon), Irene Wall (Friend of Ruth Williamson)

We are with Mike & Britt Stanley on the one-year anniversary of the passing of Mike's father, Bill Stanley.

Our hearts are with Gary Magnuson and family on the one-year anniversary of the passing of his mother, Mary Magnuson.

We grieve with Jerry Rice and family on the passing of his cousin-in-law, Duane Whittle McDowell.



PRAYER OF JESUS

**Our parent, who is among us, blessed be your Creation.
May your loving presence be a reality here on earth.
May we become more interested in building your kingdom
here and now than in waiting for it to come down from above.
Let us share our bread with those who hunger.
Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness.
Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil.
For ours are the eternal blessings that you pour upon the earth. Amen.**

SHARING OF PEACE “Peace be with you”

Those online are invited to put greetings in the chat on the website or on YouTube.

CALL TO OFFERING June Hayakawa-Fung

Let us rejoice in the God of salvation through our giving. May
we embody the generosity modeled by Jesus Christ, who came
to serve, heal, and to restore.

OFFERING MUSIC *The First Nowell*

1 The first Nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
born in a manger, Emmanuel.

2 They looked above and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

[Refrain]

3 And by the light of that same star
three sages came from country far,
To seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.

[Refrain]

4 This star shone bright in the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
And there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay.

[Refrain]

DOXOLOGY

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost! Amen!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Ms. Hayakawa-Fung

Generous God, we thank you for every good and perfect gift you have given to us and through us. Use our offerings this day for the benefit of creation, the redemption of humanity, and your glory. Amen.

CONTEMPORARY VOICE

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our [God] one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

“That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

“That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States.”

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a

fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our [God] one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States...

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as [enslaved] within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE Luke 2:25-38
(Dr. Wilda Gafney Translation) read by Dr. Brown

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, waiting to welcome the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit, she rested upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Most High God. Led by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under that which was taught, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“You release now your slave in peace, Master, according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s mother and father were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign provoking contention; also, your own soul a sword will pierce so that the true hearts of many will be revealed.”

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God, and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

CAROL *Jesus, Jesus, O What A Wonderful Child*

Jesus, Jesus, oh, what a wonderful child.
Jesus, Jesus, so holy, meek, and mild;
new life, new hope the Child will bring.
Listen to the angels sing,
“Glory, glory, glory,” let the heavens ring!

MESSAGE

A Sign Provoking Contention Rev. Stephen Guantai

CAROL *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled
Joyful, all you saints arise, join the triumph of the skies
With the angel host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”
Christ by highest heav’n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time the Savior comes, offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased on earth with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”

Hail the bearer of God's peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life our Savior brings, ris'n with radiant, healing wings.
Mildly laying glory by, born that we no more may die
Born to raise us all from earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the Christ-child bring!"

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION Rev. Guantai

POSTLUDE *Improvisation*

Dr. Lee Peterson, piano



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Plymouth Church Building will be closed Monday, January 1.

About Year-end Giving Final 2023 contributions must be delivered to the church (via offering plate or online) today, December 31. We give thanks for your gifts that sustain vital ministries to our community and the world.

Stand in Solidarity with Immigrants Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network urges you to join Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Day in Olympia February 7, 2024. Info and link to register (by Jan. 12) in news article at PlymouthChurchSeattle.org.

Plan Now to attend Plymouth's 154th Annual Meeting Sunday, January 28, 2024. The Annual Report will be reviewed, and your vote is needed to install new lay leadership and approve the 2024 budget for our church family.

Support Our Pantries The former reader signs outside our building are now pantries filled with food and other items for those experiencing homelessness or are under-resourced. Feel free to add food, or even notes to remind the reader that they are beloved.

Bring Clothing and Shoes Plymouth is a proud sponsor of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound. You can help by dropping off gently used clothing and shoes of any size at the church in the grey bin by the elevator on the 1st floor.

The Plymouth Church Library is open before and after worship every Sunday morning.

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart

—Howard Thurman

Believing that God's love transcends all human distinctions,
Plymouth welcomes people of all races and cultures,
of varied social and economic conditions
and regardless of sexual orientation.

We are open and affirming of all people,
and we call all people to the cost and joy of Christian discipleship.