

**WORDS**  
FOR THE **BEGINNING**  
— HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK —



“Joseph’s Dream” by Lauren Wright Pittman  
Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25

## THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 22, 2024 • 10:00 AM



*an Open & Affirming congregation*

## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*Adopted by the Council - 2020*

The Guiding Principles of First Congregational Church of St. Louis describe the values that guide our church and its members throughout our faith journey. We will...

### **Practice Extravagant Welcome**

- Invite and honor the contributions of every member, quirks and all.
- Be grateful for the gifts and time that each of us dedicate to FCC.

### **Demonstrate Faithful Leadership**

- Value people and our faith community over money and material things.
- Share concerns with the appropriate person and keep discussions and comments of others confidential.
- Celebrate successes, own mistakes, and fail faithfully together and in community.

### **Engage in Inclusive Decision-Making**

- Be thoughtful, respectful, and transparent in our decision making.
- Value building consensus and move forward faithfully once a decision is reached.
- Listen to one another and debate with respect; honor the contributions of every member.

**Overall, we will be guided by FCC's mission to**

**Know God's Word,  
Do God's Work,  
and Live God's Love.**

# WELCOME

**to First Congregational Church of St. Louis!**

*an Open & Affirming congregation of  
the United Church of Christ*



**If you are visiting with us**, we invite you to share your contact information on a Connect Card, found in each pew. You may give your card to an usher or place it in an offering box at either entrance to the sanctuary. You may also scan the QR code on the card to access the digital version.

**Restrooms on the main level** are located at the back of the sanctuary and in the office. An accessible restroom is downstairs in the Fellowship Hall.

**Changing tables** are located in the Nursery on the main floor and by the restroom at the back of the sanctuary.

**Offering Boxes** are located at each sanctuary entrance.

**Children** are always welcome in worship, either in the pews or at the Prayground at the front of the sanctuary. We have Sunday school each week for elementary-aged children downstairs in the Purple Room during worship.

**\*An asterisk** is an invitation to rise, in body or spirit.

**Bolded text** is an invitation for the congregation to read or sing in unison.

# THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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## Prelude

“Meine Seele erhebet den Herrn”  
(My Soul doth Magnify the Lord)

*J.S Bach*

## Lighting the Candle of Love

Henry Madden, 2024 *Confirmand*

Leader: In a weary and worn world, how do we begin again?  
Where do we start?

**People: Let us begin with tenderness.**

**Let us begin with our hearts on our sleeve.**

**Let us begin from a place of vulnerability and hope.**

**Let us begin with love.**

Leader: Yes, let us start with love. Today we light the candle of love.

**People: May the warmth of this light be our cornerstone.**

**May the truth in this light help us begin again.**

Leader: May it be so! Amen.

## Introit

“E’en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come”

*Paul Manz*

## \*Call to the People

Leader: In this weary world,

**People: we sing of joy.**

Leader: In this fragile world,

**People: we look for God.**

Leader: In this tender world,

**People: we hold onto hope.**

Leader: This is the invitation of faith. So in this time of worship,  
may we sing, lift up, look for, and hold onto our with-us God.

**People: With hope in our hearts, amen!**

**\*Hymn** #107 “Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn” *New Century Hymnal*  
*Tune: REJOICE, REJOICE*

## **\*Passing of the Peace**

### **Announcements**

Suzy Besnia, *Council Member at Large*

### **Anthem**

**“Soon and Very Soon”**

*Rossetti/Schroeder*

*Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King...  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We're going to see the King.*

*No more dying there, we are going to see the King...  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We're going to see the King.*

*Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King...  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We're going to see the King.*

### **A Story for the Ages**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

Robyn Wiens

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

### **Reflection**

Rev. Mia White

### **Prayers for the Community**

#### ***The Lord's Prayer***

**Our Mother, Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

*What’s to love?*  
she asked.  
I understood the question.

I’ve seen the riot gear,  
the tear gas,  
the names of children  
wiped from this  
war-stained world.  
I’ve seen the spray paint Swastikas  
and the Proud Boys with their flags.  
I’ve heard grandmothers at church  
pray in urgent, desperate whispers.  
And I’ve watched young mothers cry,  
because teachers carry guns.  
I’ve felt the tremor of an earthquake.  
I’ve felt the heat of climate change.  
I’ve seen the temple curtain tear in two.

But despite it all,  
the bell that wouldn’t stop tolling,  
the words that won’t stop clanging through my heart,  
are, *so much*.  
There is so much left to love.  
So much left to hope for.

**Anthem**

“People, Look East!”

arr. Susan Rucker

*People, look east, the time is near of the crowning of the year;  
Make the 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!*

*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!*

*Stars, keep the watch! When night is dim, one more light the bowl will 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 the blessed feast: He is coming from the east!  
Set every town and village humming with the news the Lord is coming!  
People, look east, and sing today: Love, the Lord, is on the way!*

## **\*Blessing**

Leader: As you leave this place, may you have the wisdom to lean on one another.

**People: May we have the courage to hold onto hope,  
the compassion to do the good that is ours to do,  
and the confidence to trust that God sees us as a blessing.**

Leader: For in a world full of dead ends, Advent invites us to begin again.  
So start here.

**People: We start now. We start with love and begin again.  
In the name of Christ, our new beginning, we go in peace.**

## **\*Hymn**

#105 "Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear" *New Century Hymnal*  
*Tune: JOSEPH LIEBERR, JOSEPH MEIN*

## **Postlude**

"Besançon"

*arr. Jerry Westenkuehler*

### **Thank you to those serving this morning:**

**Ushers:** Melissa Wurst, Suzy Besnia, Vic Richey

**Advent Candle Lighter:** Henry Madden

**Announcements:** Suzy Besnia

**Scripture:** Robyn Wiens

## **AFTER WORSHIP TODAY -**

**Coffee Hour** is down the hall in the Gathering Space, where we'll also have a fun time decorating ugly Christmas sweater cookies!





## **Christmas Eve Services - December 24, 5 PM & 10 PM**

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### **5:00 PM Family-Friendly Candlelight Service**

A service for all ages, including the Christmas story, familiar carols, and the singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight (or glow stick candles for the kids!).

### **10:00 PM Lessons & Carols Candlelight Service**

The Christmas story as told in the Gospel of Luke, interspersed with choir and congregational carols, concluding with the singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight.

## **Holiday Office Closure**

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The church office will be closed from Wednesday December 25-Monday December 30. We will be open on Tuesday December 31 and closed again on New Year's Day.

In addition, Pastor Mia will be out of the office on vacation until January 14 and will return to the office January 15. Valerie Jackson will preach the first two Sundays of January. Pastor Mia will also take the second part of her sabbatical leave during the month of February. Rev. Dr. David Greenhaw will preach and Valerie Jackson will cover pastoral care during that time.

## **December 29 Worship - Online Only**

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Our worship service on December 29 will be online only. We invite you to worship with us virtually through our facebook or YouTube pages or our website homepage. The worship video will premier at 10:00 AM on December 29 and remain saved on those platforms afterward.

## **2025 Stewardship**

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Thank you to those who have turned in your 2025 pledge cards, which helps us plan for the coming year. If you would like to make a pledge, there are extra pledge cards at each entrance to the sanctuary, and you can also complete your pledge online by scanning the QR code.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ST. LOUIS  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



## Our Ministry Team

**Bert Merrell**, Sunday Sexton

**LaBar Verner**, Custodian

**Mehran Moslehikhah**, Maintenance

**Tim Clark**

Minister of Music

([tclark@firstcongregational.org](mailto:tclark@firstcongregational.org))

**Joyce Haynes McCowan** (MDiv)

Minister of Faith Formation

([jhaynesmccowan@firstcongregational.org](mailto:jhaynesmccowan@firstcongregational.org))

**Hannah Rice** (MDiv)

Minister of Administration and Membership

([hrice@firstcongregational.org](mailto:hrice@firstcongregational.org))

**Rev. Mia White** (MDiv, MATS, CSD)

Senior Minister

([revmia@firstcongregational.org](mailto:revmia@firstcongregational.org))



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FCC News



Website



Calendar



Worship  
Volunteers

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