

# Conference Worship Service - December 27, 2020

*Theme: New Life*

**Prelude: Jazz Guitar - Jimmy Patton and Adam Ferrara (Vista UMC)**

## **Silent Meditation:**

“You can’t really know where you are going until you know where you have been.”

Maya Angelou, Poet, Memoirist, and Civil Rights Activist

“And suddenly you just know it is time to start something new and trust the magic of beginning.”

Meister Eckhart, 1260-1328 German Theologian, Philosopher and Mystic

## **Prayer of Invocation: Pastor Ruben Torres (Escondido UMC)**

Brothers and sisters, receive this prayer of invocation.

God of Grace and new life in Jesus Christ, we ask that You turn Your face to us now in this time of worship. Favor us with Your grace. Warm our hearts and stir our spirits. May this time glorify Your Name and prepare us to move forward into Your future until, one day we see Your will done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## **Opening Song: “Some Children See Him” – Performed by Michael Morgan (San Diego First UMC)**

## **Call To Worship: Rev Moonyoung Lee, Hawaii District Superintendent**

## **Scripture Reading - Psalm 148 NIV - Mark Nakagawa, West District Superintendent**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. <sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. <sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created, <sup>6</sup> and he established them for ever and ever— he issued a decree that will never pass away. <sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, <sup>8</sup> lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, <sup>9</sup> you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, <sup>10</sup> wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, <sup>11</sup> kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, <sup>12</sup> young men and women, old men and children. <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. <sup>14</sup> And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.

## **Reflection: Rev. Dr. Ken Walden (Holman UMC)**

Reflection/Meditation in response to Psalm 148

We find the Psalmist reminding us to praise the Lord, to say, Amen; to say, Hallelujah! It’s an important message for us to remember on this important day. We need to Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.

Now I know the enemy would like for us to become fixated on complaining. The enemy wants us to look at every cup half empty rather than half full. And, trust me, I am not relating to you in a Polly Anna kind of way. I am not naïve to the serious challenges that you and I have encountered and face daily. I’m aware that COVID-19 pandemic has taken and impacted lives in very serious ways. And, God’s blessings upon our country and the world, and that’s dealing with the tragic realities of that disease. But, I am so glad that God’s love and God’s presence, in God’s comfort, cannot be stopped by COVID-19 pandemic. For the Psalmist reminds us that, even amid pandemic, that God’s love, care and grace is still with us.

Now, I know that the enemy would like us to complain about the political instability and the polarization that is taking place across our country and across the globe, but the Psalmist reminds us that God’s love, that God’s power, it endures past and beyond political term limits. God’s love and God’s justice, it reigns over any politically perceived dynasties. The Psalmist reminds us to praise the Lord. During this season, may this Christmas season

become a new season in all our lives. And, I know that we praise a lot of things, for the Webster's Dictionary informs us that praise can be described and defined as 1) giving honor, 2) giving a compliment. And, when, as people of faith, we give honor and compliments to a lot of different things. For we at home at the UMC in Los Angeles, CA, we have given some praise, compliments and honor to our Los Angeles Lakers for winning the basketball championship because we are proud of that team. We've given some praise and honor to the Dodgers for winning the World Series. And, we joined millions of other people from around the country and globe lifting those teams.

But, my brothers and sisters, wherever you are, don't forget about giving praise and honor to our God. Wherever you are, don't forget about lifting up the Name of our God, especially, in the form of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For our Lord deserves the honor, our Lord deserves the praise. Just think about where you were 20 years ago. Wasn't God good? Think about where you were 10 years ago? Wasn't God good? Others of us can think of where we were, not a decade ago but one year ago. Some of you are thanking God for what He did for you, not one year ago, but one month ago or a week ago.

The singer and song writer once wrote the melody, "What a difference a day makes." What a difference our God makes in our lives. What a difference our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, makes in our circumstances, in our situations. There is a new day, a new theme, and a new season. I pray God's blessings upon new beginnings in your lives. And, let our beginnings start and end with praising God. God's blessings upon your life, God's blessings upon your journey and wherever you are during this Christmas season, may it include praising God. Hallelujah God! Thank You for what You've done, are doing and what You will do in our lives and in the world. So, God's blessings upon you.

May God's angels always surround you and may we always remember Psalm 148... "Praise the Lord," Amen.

**Prayers for the Community: Rev. Melissa Mackinnon, East District Superintendent**

**Special Music: Rev. Paul Tangonan (Crescenta Valley UMC)**

**Scripture Reading - Galatians 4:4-7 - Rev. Jim Powell, North District Superintendent**

<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,<sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.<sup>6</sup> And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"<sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

**Reflection: Rev. Trudy Robinson (San Diego First UMC)**

Galatians 4:4-7

If I were to say bacon, you'd say eggs. If I were to say ladies, you'd say gentlemen; hammer, nail; shoes, socks; peanut butter, jelly.

There are some words that just go together. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, puts two words together that don't sound like they go together, Law and Adoption. I suppose there is a law that says you cannot claim a child is your child without following the rules and procedures for an adoption. But that's about where the connection ends, so it seems. Law conjures up words like obedience, punishment, must, shall, do, don't. Adoption conjures up words like family, mother, father, baby, longing, belonging, love. Paul used the word child. But when he talked about law, he used the word slave. Slave should not be a child. A strange thing happened to my two daughters as they became adults. They became me, taking on some of my quirks and tendencies and habits. When they were young, I made them clean their rooms and write thank you notes after birthdays and Christmases because those were the rules. You have a room. You take care of it. You get a gift; you write a thank you note. They didn't like those rules. There were others things they'd rather do.

Now as adults, they keep clean houses and they write thank you notes. I'm very sure it isn't because I still hold some parental authority over their lives, they are 28 and 30 years old. I think they came to know that those rules helped create space for responsibility and order, helped to foster relationships and gratitude.

I suppose it was bound to happen that they became me. After all, I became my mother - and my dad, come to think of it! When I was younger, my parents made me go to Sunday school. They made me go to church, and that helped nurture a community for me where I belonged as I matured, that helped create space for mystery and love within a faith tradition that I grew to call and still call my home. I wonder if Mary had parents who made her follow some rules; write thank you notes after her bat mitzah; clean her room before the Sabbath; read the Torah, consider the prophets, say her prayers. She had to have obeyed some of those rules in order to create the space for her to receive God like she did. Those rules would have nurtured in her the hopes she sang about in her Magnificat.

I guess that's the connection between law and adoption, follow the rules and, doing so, creates something within you that changes who you are. And that's a big shift. It is a shift from doing things because you are told to do them and doing things because you want to. A shift from acting out of fear to responding because of love, a shift from obeying to belonging. It's a shift from slave to child. That shift most often doesn't happen overnight. It happens sometimes after years, in the fullness of time. No such shift is needed with God. There was never a time when I did not fiercely love my daughters even as I made them follow the rules. And God has always loved us with a fierce kind of love.

God said through the prophets, "I have written your name on the palm of my hand." The angel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid." Jesus said to the disciples, "What greater love is there?" Paul said to the church, "You are God's children." It's time for new year's resolutions, setting goals, naming those things we know we should do to become the people we want to be, but somehow haven't quite done those things yet. Maybe whatever new year's resolutions you make, you could consider doing some things that would nurture in you the fact that you are God's child.

It is the difference between law and adoption. Many people have said that is the difference between life ...and death. It surely is the difference between the kingdom of God on heaven ...and on earth.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Special Music: "How Great Thou Art" Pastors Dr. Monalisa (Cal-Pac Young People's Coordinator, Trinity UMC of Pomona) & Langi Lolohea (San Dimas UMC, Wesley UMC of Riverside)**

**Prayer of Confession and Lord's Prayer: Erin Hawkins, Cal- Pac Executive Director of Connectional Ministries**

Oh, great God of grace, in this moment before we can receive Your grace, we must confess that we do not come before You having earned Your favor by our good actions. We confess that we have not loved our enemies. We confess that we have not forgiven fully those who we feel wronged by. We confess that we think more about our own needs than the needs of others, especially those less fortunate than us. Trusting in Your love, we come before You now in silent confession to lift to You the burden of our hearts.

(Time of Silence to Offer our Personal Confessions to God)

**Words of Assurance:**

Through the unconditional love of God in the person of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! We are forgiven! Thanks be to God.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Scripture Reading - Luke 2:22-40 NRSV - Rev. John Farley, South District Superintendent**

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup> "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." <sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### **Special Music: "The Lord is My Light" Rev. Son Pom Ye (Borrego Springs UMC)**

#### **Reflection: Bishop Grant Hagiya**

##### ADVENT MEDITATION

*"The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." Luke 2: 40*

Remember for a moment: When someone affirmed you, not for something you necessarily did or performed well, but affirmed you for who you are – your personhood? If it has been too long, or you've never had that happen, call or email me, and I'll do that for you!

Now, think of how such an affirmation made you feel. Isn't that the most special of feelings, this being affirmed. Because it is so special, why don't we do this more often?

In the Luke text for today, the infant Jesus is brought to the Temple, as is Jewish law, to be presented to the Lord, and to be blessed. What a beautiful ritual! While there at the Temple, an unusual thing happened: A stranger to Mary and Joseph, the devout Simeon has a Kairos moment in that, all of his life, he has been looking for the Messiah, and, upon seeing Jesus, knows instantly that He is the Christ, and blesses first, God, then Jesus, and finally Mary and Joseph. Also, the prophet Anna, who lives night and day at the Temple sees the glory in Jesus, and again praises God and the Child, and then spreads this news to all she encounters. In this Scripture, Jesus is thrice blessed: First by God, then by Simeon, then by Anna.

Because of these blessings, the text ends with this account: "The Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him."

In some ways, Jesus became the Christ through these blessings, and countless more that would come His way.

We have a chance to do this very same thing by blessing and affirming those we come into contact with every single day. Growing up in the local church, I can vividly remember all the times people would come up to me and affirm me, mostly by saying, "Have you ever considered going into the ministry?" I would always put them off at

the time, but cumulatively these blessings added up, and as much as I wanted to run away from this calling, God was directing me ever so cleverly toward the ministry.

Now I was also blessed with many options of what to pursue after college: I had an opportunity to go to law school, I thought about the FBI academy, and finally centered on getting an M.A. and then Ph.D. and teaching at the graduate level. I was enrolled in a graduate program in Speech-Communications, when God intervened. The summer before I was to enter into that graduate program, I went to be a counselor at a UMC summer camp, and I was swept away by that ministry. The Dean of that camp, Rev. Peter Chen said to me, "Why are you messing around with that kind of career? Why don't you come to LA, and I'll get you into seminary, and give you a job as a youth pastor?"

Now, I never did anything in my life on a whim – everything was always well thought out for me, but for some reason, I said: "Okay." My plan was, I was only going to do this for year, check it out and then go back to my graduate program, as I made arrangements for delaying it a year. Well, one year turned into three years, and I ended up graduating and taking my first church.

As I think back to why this all came to be, it comes back first to God and God's affirmation, and then affirmations from my pastors, mentors, and all of you who became the Simeons' and Annas'. Never underestimate the power of affirming and blessing those who you meet on a regular basis!

Let me close with this: At the end of one of our annual conference sessions in the Pacific Northwest (Remember these?), two young teenage girls came up to me, and said, they would like to become Bishops of the church. I affirmed them and blessed them, but then asked: "Why would you want to become a Bishop?" One of them without missing a beat replied: "Well, we see what you do up there, and we can do that!" "For sure," I said, as they really could. I know someday they may fulfill that goal, but it all starts with God's, and then our, affirmations!

Who can you affirm and bless this coming week!

**Song of Praise: "Start a Fire" Faith Devotion Band (Faith UMC of Torrance)**

**Affirmation of Faith: "An Affirmation of Faith: For the Self-Exiled During the COVID-19 Pandemic" – By Glory E.**

**Dharmaraj, Ph.D. (Published on UM Insight, March 25, 2020, Used with permission)**

**Benediction and Sending: Bishop Hagiya**

**Postlude: Improvisation of "I Saw Three Ships" – Performed by Arron Shows (Pasadena First UMC)**