



First Presbyterian Church

of Raleigh, North Carolina

Serving Christ from the heart of the city to the ends of the earth with love, faith, and action.

December 14, 2025

3rd Sunday of Advent

We Gather in God's Presence

Gathering Music

Chiming of the Trinity

Welcome and Announcements

The Rev. Dr. Tara W. Bulger

Introit

In Terra Pax

Gerald Finzi

The lyrics to In Terra Pax may be found on the back page of the bulletin.

Lighting of the Advent Candle and Call to Worship

(8:30) Visitation Team (11:00) Sloan Family

The LORD, our God, is in our midst, rejoicing over us with gladness, exulting over us with loud singing, renewing us in divine love. With joyful hearts, we sing of God's praises together.



We light this candle as a sign of joy and an act of trust, even as we pray,
Come, God of Salvation, come!

*Hymn 88

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
Sing stanzas 1, 2, 3, and 7

VENI EMMANUEL

Prayer of Confession

The Rev. Judy Pidcock

Loving God, we confess that we are often too preoccupied to notice your presence among us, to share the wonder of your indwelling, and to proclaim the mystery that is the coming of salvation. Forgive us for being centered on our own concerns, our imagined crises, and our inability to deal with life's challenges. Bring us back to you, our life and our savior.

(Let us continue our confession in silence)

Welcome to Worship!

Some notes about the service:

*An asterisk denotes standing, in body or spirit.

Words in bold are read aloud by the congregation.

Today is the third Sunday in Advent. Advent is a season of hope and joy, anticipating the fulfilment of the rule of God in Christ' coming in the future.

Our introit, In Terra Pax, is a miniature masterpiece that combines a poem by Robert Bridges and a passage from Luke. This juxtaposition of texts transports that "first Christmas of all" directly into the present. The music is written to be performed straight through without stopping, but today we will share it in two sections to better serve the order and experience of our worship together.

Assurance of Pardon

Response to Pardon

Friends in Christ, in response to this gift of God's grace, how then shall we live?

With gratitude, following after the Lord Jesus Christ, who calls us to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves.

This is the way of Jesus, in whom we find life!

*Response of Gratitude | Hymn 113 Angels We Have Heard on High

Refrain: Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

GLORIA

We Listen and Respond to God's Word

Children's Moment (11:00)

Beth Thaxton

After the Children's Moment, children ages 4 - 2nd gr. are invited to the Library for Children's Church and will return to their pews during the hymn following the sermon.

Prayer for Illumination

Lee Corbett (8:30) and Lucy Weicher (11:00)

Scripture Reading

Psalm 146:5-10

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Anthem

In Terra Pax

Gerald Finzi

Scripture Reading

Luke 1:46-55

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

A World Turned Upside Down

The Rev. Dr. Tara W. Bulger

Silent Reflection

*Hymn 129

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

ES IST EIN' ROS'

Canon by Melchior Vulpus

The text of our Response of Gratitude echoes the words of the heavenly host at the birth of the Christ child.

Our scripture from Luke is an extended statement of praise from Mary that is in the form of song. Often called the Magnificat, the first word of the Latin translation of her statement, the song comes in response to her relative Elizabeth's Spirit-inspired words which confirm what the angel Gabriel promised Mary, that she will bear a child she will name Jesus.

*Affirmation of Faith

The Rev. Laurie Taylor Weicher

We affirm that Jesus was born of woman as is every child, yet born of God's power as was no other child. In the person and work of Jesus, God himself and a human life are united but not confused, distinguished but not separated. The coming of Jesus was itself the coming of God's promised rule. Through his birth, life, death, and resurrection, he brings about the relationship between God and humanity that God always intended. Amen.

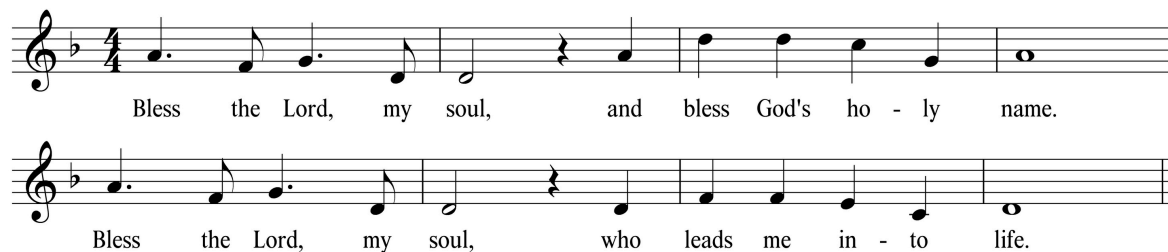
Joys and Concerns of the Church Family

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession and 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 debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Response to Prayer | Hymn 544

BLESS THE LORD (Taize)



An Invitation to Generosity

Offertory

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

arr. Alice Jordan

*Doxology | Hymn 609

LASST UNS ERFREUEN

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God all creatures high and low.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise God in Jesus fully known:
Creator Word, and Spirit one.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**

*Prayer of Dedication

We Carry God's Word into the World

*Hymn 105

People, Look East

BESANCON

Today's Affirmation of Faith is taken from the PCUSA's Declaration of Faith. The Declaration of Faith is one of our denomination's contemporary statements of faith and it is a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration.

Doxology, a Greek word meaning "saying of glory," is a brief hymn of praise. Doxologies have long been used by Jews and Christians to praise God. We honor and thank God, "all creatures high and low."

Today's Toccata:
 Felix Mendelssohn
 composed the melody
 which became the
 hymntune named for
 him
 (MENDELSSOHN,
 see hymn 119) as part
 of a larger work for
 men's voices and
 brass in 1840. The
 tune was first paired
 with Charles Wesley's
 text in 1856. After a
 brief fanfare, this
 Toccata treats the
 melody as did the
 Toccatas on the
 previous two
 Sundays: melody in
 the pedal, fast moving
 chords in
 the hands. The
 arrangement was
 written for a
 recording made by
 The Cincinnati
 Choral Society in
 1986.

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 ministries.



*Charge and Benediction

During the season of Advent, the congregation is invited to be seated for the Postlude.

Postlude

Toccata on MENDELSSOHN

Karl Zinsmeister (1960)

*Chiming of the Trinity

The Chancel flowers are dedicated to the glory of God and are given in loving memory of John David Wray, David and Ethel Wray, Butler and Olivia Prescott, Jo Ann and John McAllister, and in honor of Harley Cahen on his birthday, by Marion Prescott Wray.

The Advent stand is given in memory of Dr. W. C. Pressly by his family.

In Terra Pax lyrics

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) had an early life shattered by the loss of his father and three brothers before the age of eighteen. Finzi's music is beloved for its lyricism, melancholy, reflective nature, and subtle beauty. With Finzi's own early death from leukemia, In Terra Pax and its concluding words "and on earth peace, good will toward men", has been left as one of his final statements to the world.

A frosty Christmas Eve
 when the stars were shining
 Fared I forth alone
 where westward falls the hill,
 And from many a village
 in the water'd valley
 Distant music reach'd me
 peals of bells aringing:
 The constellated sounds
 ran sprinkling on earth's floor
 As the dark vault above
 with stars was spangled o'er.

Then sped my thoughts to keep
 the first Christmas of all
 When the shepherds watching
 by their folds ere the dawn
 Heard music in the fields
 and marveling could not tell
 Whether it were angles
 or the bright stars singing.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them,

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And all this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angle a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

But to me heard afar
 in was starry music
 Angels' song, comforting
 as the comfort of Christ
 When he spake tenderly
 to his sorrowful flock:

The old words came to me
 by the riches of time
 Mellow'd and transfigured
 as I stood on the hill
 Hark'ning in the aspect
 of th' eternal silence.

And on earth peace, good will toward men.

On the Calendar This Week December 14 – December 20

Today – Early Worship 8:30am | Sunday School 9:45am | Late Worship 11:00am | Christmas Caroling 4:00pm
Pathfinders & ROCK Stars Christmas Party 5:00pm | Youth Christmas Party 5:30pm

Monday, December 15 – Staff Meeting 1:00pm

Tuesday, December 16 – Enough for Today Podcast 8:00am | CDC Chapel 10:30am
Advent Bible Study with Laurie 7:00pm

Wednesday, December 17 – Early Birds 6:30am | Blood Drive 12:00pm | Session & Diaconate 7:00pm

Thursday, December 18 – Bible Study at Glenaire 2:30pm | CDC Christmas Concert 4:00pm | Choir 7:00pm

Friday, December 19 – No events or activities scheduled.

Saturday, December 20 – No events or activities scheduled.

Announcements and Upcoming Events

Today's Guest Musicians

Today we welcome a number of guest musicians into our worship service. Christopher Short, baritone; Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, soprano; Anne Leyland, Trevor Thompson, Nonoko Okada, and Molly Hines on violin; Matt Chicurel and Julius Adams on viola; Nate Leyland on cello, and Emily Rupp Buccola on double bass.

Christmas Caroling

You are invited to join this year's Congregational Christmas Caroling on Sunday, December 14, from 4-5:30pm. Participants will be organized into groups who will visit and sing for members of our church family. All ages are welcome. Each caroling group will make 3-4 nearby stops. If caroling isn't your thing, you can bake cookies to go into tins that will be given out by the carolers. To sign-up or if you or a family member would like to be caroled to, please go to fpcraleigh.org/events or call the church.

Hymn Sing

Join us on Sunday, December 21 at 10am in Memorial Hall for light breakfast snacks coordinated by Christian Education Committee, advent-themed mural art for children to partake in, and, of course, hymns! All are welcome! Bring a friend!

Christmas Eve Worship Services

We invite you to celebrate the birth of our Savior with us at one of our beautiful Christmas Eve services:

4:00 p.m. - Children & Family Service: A joyful service filled with bells, singing, and excitement for all ages! Perfect for families with little ones.

7:00 p.m. - Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols: Hear the Christmas story come to life through scripture and song, from prophecy to fulfillment. A rich and meaningful service for all.

11:00 p.m. - Candlelight Communion Service: Join us as we usher in Christmas morning with a peaceful candlelight service and the sharing of Communion. A holy and reflective moment to experience the true meaning of Christmas.

We would love for you to be part of this special evening. Bring your loved ones and celebrate the gift of Jesus together. All are welcome!

Red Cross Blood Drive

First Presbyterian Church is trying to help the Red Cross overcome a blood donation shortfall.

Please consider donating blood and providing a critical lifesaving need. You can make a difference!!

When: Wednesday, December 17th from Noon - 5pm in Memorial Hall

To register, go to <https://www.fpcraleigh.org/events> and scroll down to the Blood Drive event

PC(USA) Christmas Joy Offering

Each year during the Advent and Christmas season, we lift up past, present, and future leaders of the church. God has blessed the church with incredible leadership in every time and place, but those leaders often need to be supported by their communities as well. This Offering provides support for Presbyterian church workers and their families in their time of need and leadership development and education for communities of color at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. If you would like to contribute to this special offering, please mail a check to First Presbyterian Church with "Joy Gift" in the memo line.

FPC Shares Item for December

This month's FPC Shares item is Soup! Bring this item and/or your favorite non-perishable food donations to the church. There are FPC Shares receptacles on both sides of the Edge Lobby and in two places in the Lisa Ham Gathering Space outside the sanctuary.

Mission Highlight

Founded in 2008 by Regelyn "Reggie" Edwards, The Encouraging Place is dedicated to fostering racial harmony, empowering women, and creating spaces where every individual feels valued and heard. The Encouraging Place is a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change, built on love, unity, and respect.

Their journey began with a mission to serve as consultants to churches on Biblical reconciliation and to assist organizations in bridging racial divides. Today, they continue to expand their impact, working tirelessly to enrich local neighborhoods and foster an environment where diversity is celebrated and all voices are uplifted.

Reggie Edwards began serving in urban communities 30 years ago in Raleigh's Halifax Court, working alongside Helen and Freddy Johnson at Building Together Ministries.

The Encouraging Place has office space in the FPC Stock building across the Outreach lobby from Kathy Johnson. In addition to the above-mentioned work, The Encouraging Place also runs an annual Pride for Parents Christmas Store. FPC Raleigh has hosted this store for many years. The 2025 Christmas store was a great success and ended yesterday. FPC Presbyterian Women hosted a toy collection, as well as collected gift cards and money for purchasing needed gifts. And many of you brought toys the night of the Christmas pageant. Doug Redford and Charles Peacock helped to assemble new bikes for all ages. Many thanks to everyone for helping to spread JOY in the community!

For more information on The Encouraging Place, visit <https://www.theencouragingplace.org/>