ADVENT IV - December 20

Tusting God: Angel Gabriel visits Joseph
Preacher: Amy McCullough  Scriptures: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 and Matthew 1:1, 18-25

A virtual Gingerbread House Decorating Party – 2-3:30 via Zoom
sign up online via Enotes or call the church office

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

4:00 p.m. - Join us on Facebook or YouTube
Featuring members of the Children’s and Chancel Choirs
organists David Brock and Chris Schroeder
and selections from the 2020 Holiday Brass Concert
recorded at Grace

CHRISTMAS EVE - December 24

Drive-By Nativity from 2 - 3 p.m.
Enter from N. Charles Street and exit onto Northern Parkway
Holy Communion will be offered during the nativity scenes

Also on Christmas Eve, the sanctuary will be open for prayer from 2-3:30. Chris will be playing at the organ and those entering will be directed into the sanctuary, decorated for Christmas for a contact-less/touch-less time of silent prayer. Please sign up for a time slot as we will limit entrance to 10 persons at a time.

9:00 p.m. Christmas Eve
Festival Worship
Please join us on Facebook and YouTube as we welcome the Christ Child in a prerecorded service
CHRISTMAS I - December 27
Worship will be led by the Bishop and Cabinet of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in a pre-recorded service on YouTube at 10 a.m.

Preaching for January Worship
January 3 - Epiphany - Pastor Dane Wood
January 10 - Baptism of the Lord - Rev. Amy McCullough
January 17 and 24 - Rev. Amy McCullough
January 31 - Pastor Dane Wood

ALTAR FLOWER SPONSORS FOR DECEMBER 2020 and JANUARY 2021
The flowers on the altar are given to the glory of God and . . .

December 6  in honor of her husband Paul on his birthday by Janet Ander, and in loving memory of William O. White by his wife Mary and family
December 13 in loving memory of George Getschel and Marian and Karl Mech, MD by Constance Mech and Laura and Buzz Getschel, and in honor of David and Annette Beachler’s anniversary by Lynn Beachler
December 20 in memory of her parents by Katie Buffington, and in honor of Margaret, Stephen and Kaleb Redmond by Kristin and Rex Turner
December 24 & 27  in loving memory of Norma and Jack Danz, and in celebration of the birth of our Savior by Vicki and Al Saxon

Urns: The poinsettias in the urns are given in memory of Robert Raymond “Fraz” Frazier by Sue and Thom Rinker, and in memory of their parents Jean and John Strahan, MD by their daughters Dr. Susan Strahan, Dr. Nancy S. Blackstone and Sally Matthews.

Organ Bays: The poinsettias in the organ bays are given in memory of June and George Kahl, Jr. by their children June, George and Stuart

January 3  in loving memory of John A. Franklin Jr. by his sister Dr. Doris Franklin, and in honor of the anniversary of Beth and Thurston Vargas by her parents Janet and Paul Ander
January 10 in loving memory of his mother Adelaide W. Gough by her son Lee
January 17 in loving memory of Marian J. and Carl F. Wallace by their daughter Susan
January 24 in honor of those I miss sharing the peace with each Sunday by Kitty Allen
January 31 ______

FOR FEBRUARY 2021
Please contact Claire Greenhouse at 410-337-7407 with any additions or corrections

February 7  Chris Schroeder (1 or 2) and _________
February 14  Kathy Cosgrove (1 or 2) and _________
February 21  Bonnie Caster and _________
February 28  Jeaneen Wingate (1 or 2) and _________
Last week a series of persons worked here in the sanctuary to prepare us for Advent. Tim retrieved the Advent wreath out of storage and attached it to its wire. The beautiful wreath, hung from the ceiling as if brought down to us from God on high, was a gift to Grace Church from Bruce, in memory of his mother. Claire slipped in one morning, swapping out the green altar cloths for the blue ones. These paraments were also a gift, given in the late 1980’s from two sisters, Kay and Marianne. They are no longer with us on earth and yet their gift lives on. This morning I placed our empty manger on the altar, a more recent tradition at Grace and one that typically occurs during the children’s time on Advent’s first Sunday. The bare manger becomes another visual reminder of the space we are to make inside ourselves for the Christ who is coming. It is a different Advent, I know, but the candles, the color, and the empty cradle endure . . . as does the faithfulness of God, whose promise of presence will not fade.

In this different season we are focusing each Sunday on a central figure within the Advent story. Four Sundays, four different characters, each who plays a pivotal role in making space for Christ. These familiar figures remind us that memory helps sustain us when the future feels uncertain. Advent wreath. Blue cloths. Empty manger. Light the candles. Lay the cloths. Hold the empty space. These truths upon which we stand have not changed. Nor has the voice that cries out to us from the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord.

John the baptizer, as Mark calls him, appears as wild as the wilderness from which he speaks. His clothes are woven of camel’s hair. Locusts dipped in honey are on his fingertips. His hair is every which way. And his eyes can see beyond our carefully constructed appearances into our weary, sorrowful, seeking souls. John begins the good news of Jesus Christ. He is not the main event. Yet his voice forges the path we are to follow in order to arrive in Bethlehem. And in order to hear him clearly, we must turn our faces toward the wilderness from which he speaks.

John lived in the wilderness. He did not own a house in town or manage a store in the city center. One did not run into John at the grocery store, bump into him at the library or slide into the booth next to him at the neighborhood café. John made his bed on the rocky ground of a cave, tucked around a bend in the barren hillside, found only by those who had a map pointing the way. It was a good hike from the city gate. One had to put on hiking boots, carry a water canteen, and wear a hat providing good shade. John was found amid the shrubs, rocks, wind and sand. He dwelt in the wilderness.

Wilderness is not simply a material landscape. Wilderness is a state of the heart, a heart broken by loss, devastated by the cessation of everything normal, hardened by absence, numbed by trauma. God’s people find themselves in the wilderness at critical moments: when they escape from Egypt, when they are forced out of Jerusalem by a conquering army, when they are pushed out beyond acceptability by Herod, or Pilate or any Roman ruler. To dwell in wilderness is to be on the edge of survival, in the thin place between before and after, between despair and hope, between death and life. Each option is possible. Neither ending is certain. This wilderness place is where Advent begins.

John cries from the wilderness AND the people leave the city to go out into the desert to listen more closely to his words. Who does this? Who inclines their ear to the one speaking on the margins and then searches in uncomfortable places for such a voice? Those who are desperate, who are frightened, empty and searching for more. Those who are sense in the reverberations a holiness, their own hearts hungry for God.

This year’s Advent is an advent of wilderness, as we are exiled from cherished routines, numb to the months of living separated from family, community, or sanctuary, heart-broken that the waves of infections continue, aware in our bones that the toll of the year has accelerated all types of vulnerabilities. We, then, go out beyond the edge of the city,
past the spectacle of normalcy. We abandon the pretense of decorum and meet John in his rough clothes, harsh voice, crazy hair and knowing eyes, to hear about a path being laid for the coming Lord.

Prepare the way of the Lord, says John. Gather around the wreath, light the candles, dig through your decorations and find the creche. Let the manger be empty for a few weeks, so to deepen your hunger for the coming One. John’s voice is a voice of hope. His hope is not mere optimism. The optimistic person says, “I get that the weather forecast reports a 90% chance of rain, but I’m going to plan for sunshine.” Shallow optimism, asserts Peter Gomes, too often requires looking away from the horrors of the world. It asks us to continue in self-deceptions. Hope is different. It is an act of imagination and courage. It is, says Valerie Bridgeman, “based not on the belief that humans will get it right but in the trust that God will help us live into God’s vision for all creation.” Prophetic hope looks at the desolate scene and imagines the mountains being laid down, the valleys rising up and the rocky steps being made smooth. The entire cosmos rearranging itself so that the glory of God can be seen for thousands of miles across the horizon.

The voice of optimism tempts us to ignore the grim numbers, close our eyes to the brutality, look away from the emotional and economic impact of 2020. Just focus on staying cheerful. Soon everything will be all right. Hope looks directly into hospital hallways, the protests on the streets, the empty places at the tables and confesses, I do not know the way nor do I have the power to get there by myself, but I know God. I trust God, who is the way, has the power, and offers life. John the prophet exists on the edge. He sees in the hunger, need and terror and says God is . . . coming.

John wants us to be ready when God comes. For in addition to the wreath needing to be brought out, the cloths needing to be hung, and the manger awaiting its place, we have other work to do. The work is harder than finding a tree, hanging the lights, ordering the presents. It is the work of naming sin.

What do you think of when you hear the word sin?

- An angry word, a temper lost, an estrangement of decades,
- A pile of money unlawfully accumulated, greed upon greed while others are hungry,
- A mountain of selfies, photos comprised solely of self-references, reflecting an ego out of control,
- An enormity of wildfires and hurricanes, signs of creation in peril,
- A knee upon a neck, a life ended, centuries of horror not yet accounted for?

Naming sin entails confessing how lost we are, how deeply we have erred, how defeated we really feel. Acknowledging all the sins that have accumulated forces a reckoning with the forces – internal and external – that have defeated our good intentions. Never has this work felt more urgent than it does right now.

John beckons us out into the wilderness to confess these sins. As we utter the words, tell the stories, the pathway forward gets clearer. Here in the wilderness we can feel the cold winds, notice the solitary shrubs and realize we have no path to trod except the one created by the painful yet beautiful truth of how much we need God. So make your confession. Let the space be cleared. As we do, the candles burn, the blue cloths beckon. In the weeks to come the manger will get a blanket as well as expectant parents hovering nearby. Bit by bit our hearts will stir, starting to make room. The Lord is coming.

Four Hand, Two Piano Concert
Kathryn Locke and Chris Schroeder, artists
Friday, January 29, 2021

The concert will feature the beautiful Steinway piano in our sanctuary as well as the newly donated Steinway that currently resides in Fellowship Hall but will be moved to the sanctuary for this special program. Watch for details as to possible live-streaming with limited attendance and ways to enjoy it virtually.
For Christmas 2020, these gifts were given in support of our Weekend Food Bags Ministry

**BY**

Kitty Allen
David C. Brock

**IN MEMORY OF**

Loved Ones
Mr. and Mrs. Rufus A. Brock, Mr. and Mrs. Grady Allison,
Mr. and Mrs. Crawford Brock, Miss Margaret Allison,
Mr. and Mrs. Hugh C. Bradford, Mr. Stanley Byrd, Miss Louise Rogers,
Mrs. William H. Price, Jr., Mrs. Wilma Neil

Patrick Michael Cosgrove, Ron and Alma Froede, Bob Kehring

Our Parents

Mr. and Mrs. James W. Fitzgerald

Earl and Ruth Streeks

Our Parents

Nanny and Grandpop Simmons, Grandma and Grandpop Rambo

My dear friends, Jack and Norma Danz

Our Parents

Fred and Lora Spedalere, Laurence Buzi and Laurence Martin Buzi

Don and Mary Topper

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth F. Trofatter, Sr.

Mary Englar Tydings

John M. Workman

**BY**

Kitty Allen
Janet Ander
Claire and Walter Greenhouse
Kelly Jackson
Kathie Metz
Marge Penhallegon
Susan Schumacher
Glenn and Kittie Simmons
Ann Kaiser Stearns
Diane and Don Topper
Andy Trofatter and Jim Fitzgerald

**IN HONOR OF**

The Grace Staff, the Music Ministry
My Grandchildren Weston and Lily
Our Children and Grandchildren
Grace’s Clergy and Staff

Avelynn, Emory, Esme, Everett
Kitty Allen
Betty Blount, Eva Simmons
My Daughters and Granddaughter, Amanda, Ashley and Ava
Lynn Beachler, Tom Hicks, David and Annette Beachler
Chuck and Barb Starkey, Amanda Graham and Thomas Gaeng,
Dr. George Kim, Bob Brandell, Greg Ruff, Lisa Greenhouse,
David Brock and Jerry Neil, Kelly Jackson
The entire Grace Staff

Rev. Nancy J. Webb
Birthday Greetings
to those of our church family celebrating in January

1  Misako Fukushima, Kurt Hoffman
2  Kelly Topper
3  Mary Jane Demarest, Elaine Schaefer, Lyla Schmidt
4  Riley Schmidt, Arlie Shaw
5  Tom Gause, Ian Murray, Leigh Thomas
6  Abbey Murphy, Benjamin Murphy
8  Ben Holt, Maxwell Wiseman
9  Christopher A’Hern, Janet Ander, Cianna Ferrante
10  Nathan Arnold, James Scouten
11  Marianne Corry
12  Adrienne Hackley, Jacquelyn Meadors, Claire Stevens
15  Thomas Adolph, Wyatt Friar, Justin Hickey
16  Robyn McGowan, Matt Sinfield, Margaret Stuart, Kara Thorne
17  Bryan Howe, Samuel King, Milt Siglin
18  Edward Fields, Charles Starkey, John A. Tyler
19  Angus Everton
20  Michael A’Hern, Andrew Greenland
22  Carol Gamble, Cassandra Plitt
23  Jeane Santamaria, Trisha Wetzalberger
24  Carolyn Benfer, Eleanor Grasso
25  Wayne Schmidt, Alastair Valentine, Laird Wilhide
26  Tina Bathory, Barbara Danecker, Jeff Gamble, Mark Gruber-Lebowitz
27  Ken McCabe, Walter Stucki
28  Phillip Kessell
29  Lucas Calderon
30  Natalie Riddle, Alan Seitz, Matthew Strobel
31  Walter Hudson, Marilyn Workman

Office hours
The church office will be closed from Friday, December 25 through Friday, January 1. The office will reopen
Monday, January 4.
For pastoral needs during this time, please contact Rev. Amy McCullough,
[amy@graceunitedmethodist.org] who will be available as needed throughout the week.

GRACE BOOK GROUP
For its virtual meeting on Monday, January 11th at 7:00 p.m.,
the Grace Book Group is reading and discussing The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich.
New lovers of reading are always welcome. Contact Maureen Danz for the Zoom link
(maur.danz@verizon.net)

Stewardship Update
GRACE 2021:
FAITHFUL. GRATEFUL. BOLD.

Thank you to all those who have made a financial pledge for the 2021 Operating Budget. The stewardship team thanks you for your generosity and faithfulness. If you have not yet made a pledge, we invite you to prayerfully consider supporting the ministries of God through Grace Church with a financial commitment.
The stewardship brochure can be found on our website under the drop-down tab. A printed version of the brochure may be requested through the church office.

A sacred summary
The simple shepherds heard the voice of an angel
and found their Lamb;
the wise men saw the light of a star
and found their Wisdom.

—Fulton J. Sheen
Grace Church is blessed with an abundance of leaders who give freely of their time and talents to shepherd the church’s work. This fall the Lay Leadership and Nominations Committee asked all current committee members who would normally be concluding their service and rotating off to extend their terms of service for an additional six months, through June 2021. This request came as a measure to provide continuity in Grace’s ministries amid the pandemic. Many current members were able to say “yes” to this request and the Lay Leadership team filled in all remaining slots. Thank you to all our current and incoming servant-leaders!

Nominations for Lay Leadership 2020

We seek to act so that God’s love is felt by all

**Church Council**
Chair: Marie Yeh
Vice-Chairperson: Thomas Gaeng
Secretary: Lyn Phelps
Lay Leader: Jean Smith
Finance Chair: Jane Benson
SPRC Chair: Michelle Riddle
Trustee Chair: Linda Cameron
Missions and Outreach: Wayne Schmidt
Worship Chair: David Brock
Children’s Ministry Rep: Amy Madsen
Reconciling Chair: George Kahl
Youth Representative: Kelly Topper
Lay Member to Annual Conference: Doug Schmidt

At large members: Mary Aikens Afful, Amanda Graham, Claire Greenhouse, Angeline Gullett, George Kim, Irene Moses, Karl Schillinger

**Staff-Parish Relations**
2020 - ext 6/21 2021 2022
Michelle Riddle, chair Valerie Adams Elizabeth Shaner
Chuck Starkey Suzanne Stevens Wendy Iglehart
Gordon Stetz David Haile Becky Farace
Lay Leader: Jean Smith AC Rep: Doug Schmidt

**Board of Trustees**
2020 - ext 6/21 2021 2022
Scott Stevens Barbara Bond Patrick Onley
Linda Cameron, chair Curtis Adams Ashley Davidson
Ed Caster Barbara Starkey Francie Keenan

**Finance Committee**
2020 - ext 6/21 2021 2022 2023
Jane Benson, chair Sue Williams Burt English Carl Armstrong
Mike McGuire Larry Griffith Al Saxon Priscilla Newton
Jim Heckman

Church Council chair and vice chair: Michelle Riddle, SPRC chair
**Investment Advisory Board**
Michael Madsen  Gordon Stetz (chair)  Robert McIntire  Mike McGuire
Katherine Allen  Charles Starkey  David Beachler  The Trustees

**Nominations and Lay Leadership**
Lay Leader: Jean Smith
2020 - ext 6/21  2021  2022
Lynne Sharpe  Heather Grandsire  Amy Madsen
Wendy Iglehart  Glenn Simmons  Andy Trofatter
Carl Hickey  Barbara Bond  Diane Topper

**Children’s Ministry Team**
Linda English  Jody Wiseman  Biz Shaner  Kristen McGuire
Michelle Riddle  Wayne Schmidt  Amy Madsen

**Hospitality Committee**
Vicki Saxon, chair  Diane Topper  Janet Ander
Steve Danz  Diana Gause  Sue Williams
Katie Spearman  Matt Sinfield

**Worship Committee**
Chair: David Brock
Claire Greenhouse (Altar Guild)  Barb Starkey (Chancel Choir)
Amanda Graham  Kevin Shaner
Burt English (Ushers)  Jean Smith
Deborah English (Communion Stewards)

**Outreach and Mission Committee**
Chair: Wayne Schmidt
Lynn Beachler  Jean Smith  Kelly Jackson
Diane Topper  Kristen McGuire  Barbara Bond
David Beachler  Deborah English  Doris Franklin
Wilma Starkey  Maureen Danz

**Reconciling Committee**
Chair: George Kahl
Kristen McGuire  Ann Dahl  Michelle Riddle
Doris Franklin  Barb Starkey  Doug Schmidt
Ellen Stokes  Andrew Trofatter  Anne Griffith
Andrew Trofatter  Chris Schroeder  Diane Lesman
Patrick Onley

**Shepherding Committee**
Coordinator of Prayer Ministry: Janet Ander
Visitation: Jack Danz, Bill Stacey, Bonnie Caster
Wishing all a Happy, Safe and Healthy New Year!

The Grace Church Clergy and Staff