

Countryside Community Church WORSHIP



Hope Like a Dancer, © Lauren Wright Pittman, Inspired by Matthew
11:1-11, sanctifiedart.org/

December 7, 2025
Second Sunday of Advent

Hearing the Word

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 43:19-21

Reader: Mark Draper

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

MUSICAL REFLECTION

Grant Us Peace

Joel Raney

Countryside Choir - Adam Witte, director

SECOND LESSON: Matthew 11:1-11

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

MESSAGE

Trembling Hope

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

Responding to the Word

PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your 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.

SHARING OUR GIFTS

Adam Witte

Please find the QR code on the back of your bulletin or at the Spotlight table in the narthex for more information about CIRA, Center for Immigrant and Refugee Advancement, Countryside's chosen community partner for December. You can also contribute to Countryside's annual mission spending plan (budget) by scanning the QR code on the back of your bulletin (also found at the spotlight table.) Countryside is 100% dependent on member giving to support the mission and ministries of our church. We are grateful for all the ways you give to sustain our vibrant and welcoming community!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (unison)

**Loving God,
bless these gifts,
and bless us in the giving,
that your hope might take flesh among us.
Amen.**

SERVICE OF COMMUNION

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

Invitation to the Table

One: The Lord be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: We lift them to God.

One: Let us give thanks to the God of love.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Words of Remembrance

As you are able, please come forward to receive the bread and cup. If you prefer to take communion in your seat, raise your hand and a server will bring the elements to you. At Countryside, we serve gluten-free bread and non-alcoholic grape juice to support a diversity of needs. Communion cups may be discarded in the basket as you leave the sanctuary.

Healing Prayer

Anyone is welcome to join Rev. Dr. Norman Pavey in the prayer corner in the rear of the sanctuary. You are invited to share a prayer request for yourself or others, and receive a prayer of blessing or anointing with oil as a reminder that God's presence with you.

Communion Meditation

Peace

Horace Silver

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give thanks, gracious God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us your presence. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sending

†SENDING HYMN

Hymn #119 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (vs. 1-2)

†COUNTRYSIDE BLESSING

Mark Draper

POSTLUDE

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Felix Mendelssohn / Charles Wesley

Countryside Choir - Adam Witte, director - Stan Harper, saxophone
Alex Ritter, organ and piano - Carlos Figueroa, drums - Steve Gomez, bass

Sunday Flowers This Week

Flowers were given today by De Schmierer.

Joys & Concerns

Join us as we pray for our congregation members and their loved ones who are on our Joys and Concerns list every week on Thursdays at 9 am in the Sanctuary. If you have someone who would benefit from prayer, want to share a joy or be included on the bulletin list, and /or be included on Countryside's Prayer Chain, contact the church office at 402.391.0350 or email office@countrysideucc.org.

Prayers of Gratitude for the following Joys:

We give thanks for **Renee Besancon's** niece, Claire, who had the splint removed from her ankle and now needs only a boot.

Christine Kasel is joyful for her friend, Jean Mason, who welcomed her baby granddaughter, Lilly, into the world on Thursday, Dec. 4!

For the snow that softens the world and reminds us of wonder—even when it's not everyone's favorite—we give you thanks. Help us find joy in its quiet beauty, patience in its inconvenience, and gratitude for the changing seasons that reveal your goodness in new ways.

Please join in praying for the following new and ongoing concerns:

Please keep **Dave and Jeri Lundblad** in your prayers after the recent, unexpected death of Dave's younger brother in California. He will be greatly missed, and long-distance arrangements have been complicated and frustrating.

Prayers for safe travels for **Alyssa Silhacek** as she and her mom travel to Thailand December to meet her adopted daughter (5-year-old, Rama). They will return with Rama December 24.

Prayers of comfort and sympathy for **Shirley Brown** whose sister passed away on December 2.

Please continue to pray for strength for **Gloria (Rich) Mannel** as she recovers in a rehab center after hospitalization.

Renee Besancon asks for prayers for her friend Suzie's stepdad and mom, Gib has been up and walking for the first time in several weeks and will be going to a rehab facility soon.

Heather Karstens asks for prayers for Patty, a recent widow who is struggling with grief and depression during this time of transition. Her family is concerned that winter in Minnesota may make it more difficult for her to access her support system.

the least of these

sometimes the Holy shows up
in ways that make you squint—
not because the light is too bright,
but because grace
is rarely dressed the way
we think it should be.

Jesus says even the least
can rise
in the wide-open kingdom he keeps naming,
and I wonder
how many moments I've looked past
because they arrived
quiet as a heartbeat.

maybe the miracle
is not the greatness
but the gentleness
that refuses to be measured.
maybe the kingdom
is the way a person becomes
a doorway for others.

by C. Kasel
Inspired by Matthew 11:1-11

This poem was inspired by the passage's quiet reminder that wisdom and strength often appear in unexpected, ordinary places. Rather than looking for grandeur or certainty, the poem leans into the idea that small acts of gentleness, honesty, and presence can reshape us in profound ways.



The Second Sunday of Advent **What do you fear?**

WHEN WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF HOPE, GOD IS AT WORK



Hope Like a Dancer

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 11:1-11

11"x14" Gouache, paint pens, colored pencils, and ink on paper

John the Baptist was thrown in prison after publicly questioning the legality of Herod's marriage (Matthew 14:3-5). He was not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the powerful, and perhaps he expected Jesus' ministry to look more confrontational and politically strategic. In questioning Jesus, I wonder if John sought a particular answer to hang his hope on, that maybe the Messiah would be how he'd imagined him. Maybe Jesus would bust him out of jail and take things straight to Herod, but Jesus offers something else. In this image, John sits in prison, letting the disciples' testimony settle in. People with hearing, visual, and physical impairments experience new senses and mobility. Those with skin diseases are cleansed. Those with little material comfort are offered irrepressible hope, and the lungs of the dead are filled with the breath of life. I decided to image this good news through the dancing light of a lantern¹ in John's prison cell. I chose dancing figures because dancing feels like a primal response to the radical healing taking place outside the prison walls. As these six dancers illuminate the cell, I imagine John, even if for a moment, breaking into a bit of laughter at the magnitude of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was quite literally doing the unimaginable. He was removing barriers so that the marginalized were no longer reduced to begging and sitting on mats, shoved to the edges of society. He was not only healing physical ailments; perhaps more importantly, he was restoring people to community. Out of all the miraculous actions mentioned, the news did not include "release of the captives" (Luke 4:18-19).² With this message, John would know that he was not going to be freed,³ and so, the number of dancers would remain one short of seven.⁴ As we know all too well, God's work isn't completed in Jesus' time. We are still woefully short of realizing the fullness of God's desire for all of creation, and the work is ours to see through. Until then, let us keep our eyes peeled for the glimmers of hope dancing all around us and work toward a day when all can join in that dance of wholeness. —rev. lauren wright pittman

1 The lantern has very simplified shapes representing each of the miracles (received sight: eyes opening; walking: footprints; cleansed: bowls; hearing: volume symbols; raised: butterflies; good news: jar and anointing oil drops representing the Messiah). 2 John's clothing includes open bird cages and birds taking flight, which represent how "release of the captives" is missing in the message he receives from Jesus. 3 Bonnie L. Pattison points this out in her commentary on Matthew 11:2-19 in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Volume 1*, edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 286. 4 The number 7 represents wholeness or completion. This podcast episode provides more information about the symbolic use of the number 7 in the Bible: bibleproject.com/podcast/significance-7/