

Order of Worship

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2023

Call to worship

Do not be afraid. God is with us.

Savior of the nations, come.

Call to Confession

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, let us confess the sins that have kept us from glorifying and enjoying our God.

Prayer of confession

Gracious God, we anticipate the birth of our newborn savior. Yet we are depressed by the suffering and despair of our world. Our hearts grow hard with hopelessness. What reason is there to rejoice? We question your power and doubt our faith. Emmanuel, help us resist the overwhelming forces that drag us down. Lift our spirits so we can experience your transcendent presence and incarnate grace. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (Psalm 103:17)

"The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting."
Know that you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

Prayer for illumination

Savior God, liberate us from the sins which distort our vision and disrupt our hearing as we approach your Word. Standing firm in your love, let us open ourselves to the truth you reveal to us today. Amen.

Scripture readings

Sermon

Affirmation of faith (Apostles' Creed)

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,



born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
he descended into hell;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand
of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Call for the offering

With joy and gratitude for all we have been given, let us offer our tithes and gifts to God.

Prayer of dedication

Gracious God, accept these gifts in grateful response for your generosity. May these gifts bring joy to those most in need of Christ's mission and ministry. Amen.

Prayers of the people and the Lord's Prayer

Savior God,

The season of Advent has led us to prepare our lives and hearts for the birth of your son, but we question the readiness of ourselves and our world. We know well what the poet Madeleine L'Engle writes:

"This is no time for a child to be born
with the earth betrayed by war and hate."

Yet, you, O God, risk being born in a world such as this. You risk taking on flesh that is fragile, vulnerable and new. Oh, wonder of wonders and joy of joys! Everlasting God, your promised presence is a stark reminder of hope.

As we find our way into pews and pulpit today, we come to give you honor and praise. We come grateful for all the good gifts with which we have been blessed. We come to pray for those who are especially in need of hope.

We pray for an end to the warring madness, for the people of Israel and Gaza, for the suffering in Ukraine, for the humanitarian crisis in the Congo, and for an end to terrorism across the globe. We pray for innocents trapped under falling bombs. We pray for peaceful, diplomatic solutions to age-old conflicts. May your kingdom come, Savior of the nations, and your will be done.

Gracious God, bind us together in faith and service. Enlighten us to the



needs and the needy in our communities. Organize us for action to solve systemic problems. Help us make room in our communities for weary travelers, people like Mary and Joseph, in need of a safe place to stay. You've given us abundant resources. Help us to share what we have, extend the table of fellowship, and make room for those who long to belong.

God of compassion, bless us and those we love. Heal those suffering from the illnesses of winter. Strengthen those undergoing chemotherapy, radiation or other painful treatments. Comfort those who have recently lost loved ones, those mourning empty seats at holiday tables. Renew those needing respite, grant them the blessing of holiday sabbath. As you reach out to us through Jesus Christ, help us reach out to those who suffer and struggle.

Mighty God whose Word we trust and whose Spirit enables us to pray, accept our requests and further those which will bring about your purpose for our world.

Finally, hear us as we pray together the prayer Christ taught us, "**Our Father....**"

Charge and benediction

Our Savior has come and is coming!

Believe in this good news and proclaim Christ's birth to all the world.

May the grace, hope, peace and love of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

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Liturgy written by Teri McDowell Ott and provided for free distribution.

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