



St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Odessa
Reaching Up Reaching In Reaching Out
Pastor Linda Ray, 406 Main Street, Odessa, DE 302-378-2420
www.stpaulsodessa.org, CCLI 11305346 and Streaming Lic. 21184487

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023 11:00 AM Service

WE ENTER GOD'S GATES WITH PRAISE

WELCOME WITH MUSIC AND IMAGES

Mark Holden & June Stemmler, Photographer & Curator

GATHERING MUSIC

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Handbell Choir

GREETING

*LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH:

Liturgist – Rick Pulling

One: We light the fourth candle on the Advent wreath as we draw near to the celebration of Jesus' birth. The Christ Child came in power, but his power was hidden in weakness. The baby who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger in Bethlehem is the "power of God and the wisdom of God."

Many: Holy child of Bethlehem, be born in us today.

One: We light these candles as signs of our shocking hope, our just peace, our fierce joy, and the love that transforms us. May Love grow within us, transforming us into bold witnesses of God's salvation with our voices and our lives.

Many: We wait as people who have encountered divine Love that disrupts the status quo and ushers us into abundant life marked by mutual love and peace that flows from the flourishing of all people.

All Singing: O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.

*OPENING HYMN:

Hark The Herald Angels Sing

Red Hymnal 240

*OPENING PRAYER (all praying): **Come to us, Promised One, in this season of waiting. Set our minds afire with the richness of your word. Open our eyes to the promise of your salvation, as you scatter the proud, pull down the powerful from their thrones, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty. Live in and through us this Christmas season, that we might be messengers of your grace and instruments of your peace. Reveal to us the secret of your ways; for you alone are wise, you alone are worthy of our thanks and praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen**

CHILDREN'S TIME:

He Is Born (refrain only)

Red Hymnal 228

He is born the holy child, play the oboe and bagpipe merrily. He is born the holy child, sing we all of the Savior mild.

Adrienne Dillard shares a blessing with our children!

FIRST LESSON: 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16 (CEB)

When the king was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "Look! I'm living in a cedar palace, but God's chest is housed in a tent!"

³Nathan said to the king, "Go ahead and do whatever you are thinking, because the Lord is with you."

⁴But that very night the Lord's word came to Nathan: ⁵Go to my servant David and tell him: This is what the Lord says: You are not the one to build the temple for me to live in. ⁶In fact, I haven't lived in a temple from the day I brought Israel out of Egypt until now. Instead, I have been traveling around in a tent and in a dwelling. ⁷Throughout my traveling around with the Israelites, did I ever ask any of Israel's tribal leaders I appointed to shepherd my people: Why haven't you built me a cedar temple?

⁸ So then, say this to my servant David: This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel. ⁹ I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I've eliminated all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great—like the name of the greatest people on earth. ¹⁰ I'm going to provide a place for my people Israel, and plant them so that they may live there and no longer be disturbed. Cruel people will no longer trouble them, as they had been earlier, ¹¹ when I appointed leaders over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

And the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make a dynasty for you. ¹⁶ Your dynasty and your kingdom will be secured forever before me. Your throne will be established forever.

HYMN OF PREPARATION: *Star Child* vs. 1,2,5 Black Hymnal 2095

*GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 1:26-38* (CEB)

²⁶ When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" ²⁹ She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. ³¹ Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. ³³ He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. ³⁶ Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. ³⁷ Nothing is impossible for God."

³⁸ Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

One: May this story inspire us all. **ALL: To walk in the way that leads to life.**

THE MESSAGE: "Be Born In Us: Bringing Power" Pastor Linda Ray

WE GIVE THANKS

OFFERTORY PRAYER: Loving God, your goodness and mercy are without limit. With thankful hearts, we bring our offering before you this day. Use these gifts to lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and bring hope to all who call on your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

THE OFFERTORY: Today's **Yellow Hat** mission offering supports **St. Paul's General Fund.**

CHORAL ANTHEM: *Mary's Song* Chancel Choir

*THE DOXOLOGY: Red Hymnal 95

GATHERING OF JOYS AND CONCERNS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: **Almighty God, so often we turn away from your Word and your holy will to follow our own desires and the temptations of the world around us. We fail to love others as we should. We have sinned against you in our thoughts, words, and actions. Have mercy on us and forgive us. Amen**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION: Pastor Linda Ray
Officiant Server- Janet Miller

Reader 1: The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

Reader 1: Lift up your hearts.

ALL: We lift them up to the Lord.

Reader 1: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

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

Reader 1: : It is right to give you thanks and praise, Great God of the Coming Dawn, for in each new day you surprise the earth with splendor. Your Spirit moves across the face of the waters and brings forth life. At the dawn of all things in a garden you worked the earth. Made from the earth, made by your hand, we forgot who we were, we forgot who you were and we tried to remake ourselves. We rejected your love and fell into sin and death. Yet even in our darkness you continue to speak light and life. And so we who live on the edge of this land look across the waters to the horizon. We come to live on the edge of your new and promised day. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

ALL: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Reader 2: Blessed are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whose coming was announced by wilderness prophets and who arrived to the song of angels in the choir stall of a manger. In Jesus you not only took our name but our flesh. He was the One promised. He announced the new day and the acceptable year when blind folks would see and poor folks would rejoice, when captives would be set free and the oppressed would once more walk upright in liberty. In stories he spoke of waiting bridesmaids and prodigal sons. With tears and compassion, he brought a dead man to life and gave a woman at a well the living water she sought. With anger he overturned tables and challenged the powerful. On the cross he revealed the power of weakness and in the emptiness of the tomb he gave us a glimpse of your tomorrow that does not end in death.

(Lifting the bread) On the night in which he gave himself up for us he took bread, gave God thanks, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Reader 1: (Lifting the cup) When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to God, gave it to his disciples, and said "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

ALL: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again!

Reader 2: So we await your new day. So we call on you to send your Holy Spirit on us once more and on this parched and thirsty land, and on these elements of bread and cup. Let them be for us once more Christ's body and let us be for you once more Christ's body redeemed by his blood. Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes again and we feast at his table. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

ALL: AMEN. AMEN. AMEN.

Reader 2: Let us join our hearts and voices in the prayer that God continues to teach us:

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory Forever. AMEN.

(The congregation will come forward to partake of the bread and cup.)

PRAYER AFTER RECEIVING

WE GO IN THE SPIRIT!

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY AND SERVICE

SERVING IN WORSHIP TODAY

Liturgist: Rick Pulling

Audio/Video: Charlii Miller & John Littell & John Cate & Carlotta Cline

Communion Officiant/Server: Janet Miller

Ushers: Ellie & Dick Leuliette, John & Patti Harmer, June Stemmler, John Harmon, Denis Shaffer, Laura Widger

ASL Interpreter: Gail Garner

Director of Music Ministries: Thomas Maloney, Organist/Accompanist: Jin Kyung Seo

CONTACT INFORMATION

Rev. Linda Driver Ray, Pastor
Bonnie Valeski, Admin. Asst.
Alice Mullins, Financial/Treasurer
Duane Dillard, Minister of Music
Thomas Maloney, Director of Music
Jin Kyung Seo, Organist/Accompanist

lindaray@vaumc.org
bonnie@stpaulsodessa.org
stpodessa@stpaulsodessa.org
duanedillard@gmail.com
thomaseamaloney@gmail.com
jinksblue@gmail.com

(540) 207-1787
(302) 378-2420
(302) 293-9956
(443) 593-2470

ANNOUNCEMENTS - THIS WEEK AT ST. PAUL'S:

Sunday 12/24	Worship Services 8:30AM ASL & Livestreaming and 11AM, Adult & Children's Bible Study/School 9:45AM., Christmas Eve Service 7PM
Monday 12/25	Christmas Day
Tuesday 12/26	ODB, Cub Scouts 6PM
Wednesday 12/27	TOPS Mtg 6PM, Bell 6PM & Choir 7PM Rehearsals
Thursday 12/28	10AM Prayer and Praise Group, SPRC Mtg. 6:30PM
Friday 12/29	N/A
Saturday 12/30	AA Mtg 7PM

FINANCE: Stewardship 2023 for 2024 Budget, **TO DATE: 67 Pledges = \$190,006. AMAZING NEWS!** This represents approximately 3/4 of our congregation who are pledging their support of St. Paul's with their financial gifts.

BIRTHDAYS: December 17 – Vickie Spence; December 19 – Frank Fitzwater; December 21- Kyle Benjamin

ANNIVERSARIES: December 22 – Cheryl & Jeffrey Martin

PRAYER REQUEST BOX is available in the Narthex along with the prayer request cards. Just complete the form, fold, and drop in the box on the corner shelf located at the second set of doors into Fellowship Hall.

PRAYERS FOR: Noel Lukens, Sue Holden's sister, Betsey Snipes, David Dudgeon, Dorothy Dudgeon, Carolyn Akin, Jonathan Brooks, Mary Ingram's friend Maureen, John Guy, Maria Gregors, Levi Schrum and family, Matthew Smith, Marilyn Hendershot, Allison, Dennis Downes, Ty Somersshield – cousin to Don Mueller, Jeffrey & Cheryl Martin, Nancy- sister of Alice Rizzo, Nancy Judd, Doris Uhde, Liz Ravilious – Carl Ravilious' step-mother, Ethan Porter, Ann Newswanger, Louise Sommer, George, Dylan Green, John St. Jean, Chris Chappelle, Blain Shoun, Charlotte Smith and Adrienne Dillard.

Upcoming Yellow Hat Schedule for December 2023

12/03/23 El Ayudante Child, Yesprin
12/10/23 Neighborhood House
12/17/23 Love thy Neighbor Fund (Carole Harmon)
12/24/23 St Paul's General Fund
12/31/23 Neighborhood House

Please make sure ALL checks are made payable to St. Paul's UMC, including checks for the Yellow Hat missions, writing the organization's name on the memo line.

All donations are collected, recorded, entered in the system, and deposited into the Church's operating account on a weekly basis. Also, on a weekly basis, a check is mailed to the specified yellow hat organization for the total amount collected.

It is very important that donations be placed in the offering plate, yellow hat or mailed to St. Paul's UMC. You are also welcome to drop off donations in the grey box just inside the side door to the Church, making sure it is secured in an envelope with your name on the front. This is to guarantee acknowledgement of your donations when the yearly contribution statement is sent for tax purposes.

Thank you all for your continued support for St. Paul's as we are growing in our faith through generosity.

Alice Mullins, Treasurer



ST. PAUL'S
United Methodist Church of Odessa
Reaching Up, Reaching In, Reaching Out

St. Paul's Mission Statement

Reaching Up to praise God in vibrant worship

God calls us to live out our discipleship grounded in Christ's awakening us to the glory and majesty of God in all creation, and we respond together by worshiping God with our gratitude and praise. Standing or lifting our hands high are both ancient postures of worship, and so our dance of discipleship involves reaching up with our hearts, souls, and bodies, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalms 100:4-5 (NRSV)

Reaching In to deepen our spiritual walk with Christ

Christ accepts us as we are, and then calls us to follow him and learn from him, growing in our spiritual walk-through practices the church calls spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, meditation, studying God's Word, individually and with others. As we grow in the knowledge of God, we discover more about the extraordinary plans God has for our lives.

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

John 8:31-32 (NRSV)

Reaching Out with acts of love and compassion

Here's where it all comes together! Assured of God's eternal love, strengthened by the grace and knowledge of Christ, we are ready for the Holy Spirit to kindle a fire in our lives, gifting us for the labor of love God has prepared for us to accomplish. Having fallen in love with God, we love and serve our neighbors.

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

MISSIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

WEEKLY GATHERINGS – CHURCH BUILDING

OFFICE HOURS Tuesday -Thursday, 9 AM-2 PM

- Boy Scouts –Mondays 7-8:30 PM
- Cub Scouts –Tuesdays 6-8 PM

- TOPS Meeting – Wednesdays 6 PM.
- St. Paul's Prayer and Praise Group Ministry – Thursdays 10 AM @Carole Harmon's Home
- St. Paul's Handbell Rehearsal – Wednesdays 6 PM
- St. Paul's Choir Rehearsal – Wednesdays 7 PM
- AA Meeting – Saturdays 7 PM

MONTHLY GATHERINGS

- Finance Meeting – 2nd Monday 6:30 PM
- Trustees Meeting – 1st Monday 6:30 PM
- SPRC Meeting – 4th Thursday 6:30 PM
- Leadership Meeting – 3rd Tuesday 6:30 PM
- PFLAG Meeting – 3rd Thursday 6:30 PM
- Reconciling Ministries – TBD

Adult Bible Study 9:45AM--hybrid

Children's Sunday School 9:45AM.

Flowers for Worship

If you are interested in honoring a loved one with flowers at the altar on a particular Sunday, we are asking you to contact Alicia Blackwell, from Wildflowers by Alicia to place your order. Alicia can be reached at (302) 593-9884. Also, please email the church office so we make sure the information is added in the bulletin.

Compassionate Card Ministry

The Compassionate Card Ministry is made up of 20 dedicated members of our congregation who create hand-made cards and encouraging messages to those in our directory, within our congregation, those on our prayer lists and others who are brought to our attention. Our purpose is to spread kindness and love to others through uplifting and personalized sentiments on hand-made cards. If you are not in our directory and would like to be added to our list, or if you know someone who would benefit from the blessing of a card, please contact Nancee Bleistine, nbleistine@yahoo.com or 609-217-1924.

Prayer and Praise Group Ministry

Carole Harmon hosts a prayer circle, currently Thursday mornings at 10 AM - in person. Please contact Carole if you are interested in joining the group or have a special prayer request. You can also find prayer request cards and box on the corner shelf in the Narthex.

VANCO: Manage Your Giving Online

Giving online is easy and allows you to set up automatic recurring contributions and view your complete online giving history from anywhere you have access to the Internet. Simply follow these easy steps:

- 1) Visit the church website at www.stpaulsodessa.org and click on the VANCO Online Giving button to the left of the screen.
- 3) Click on the Link to Online Giving thru VANCO button, then
- 4) Follow the onscreen instructions to create an online profile and to schedule your RECURRING CONTRIBUTIONS.

Love Thy Neighbor Fund

Our "Love Thy Neighbor Fund" was created to help those in need in the MOT community. This fund may support a time in someone's life when he/she may need a little kindness and generosity to help endure and survive a challenging situation. If you can donate, please make checks payable to St. Paul's UMC and then write in the memo area it is for "Love Thy Neighbor Fund." Please note, this fund is SEPARATE from the Yellow Hat. Thank you, Love Thy Neighbor Committee

Deep Roots

Nadine Johnson & Karen Ellis continue to work with the “Deep Roots” mission. This group works with families who are disconnected through homelessness and provides transitional shelter and other services to families in need. They need your help as they continue to contact members of the church to help with making meals once a month feeding approximately 50+ individuals. Here’s hoping you will be able to help us with this very important and necessary mission. Thanks so much! Contact Karen Ellis at iluvbrmuda@gmail.com and Nadine Johnson at nadine.faye.johnson@gmail.com

Our Daily Bread Food Donations

214 N Broad St, Middletown, DE 19709

Volunteers Needed – day and evening hours and different areas of need, filling bags, handing out meals, etc.

Volunteer Opportunities can be found at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10COE4FAEA82CA3F5CF8-volunteer>. Contact Sue Holden, Missions Co-Chair, at 802-324-6167, susieq2951@aol.com., with any questions. Also, find information and volunteer sign-up forms on the website,

<https://www.ourdailybreadmot.com>. **On-line Training Coming Soon!**

ODB is most thankful to all who donate either monetarily or in kind. Your generosity helps ODB feed those in our community who are facing food insecurity. Listed below are the items needed to stuff our side bags and other items that are needed on a regular basis. Donations can be dropped off on Tuesday from 9:15 to 11:30AM

- Individual bottles of water
- Individual bags of salty snacks
- Individual packets of sweet snacks
- Individual fruit cups and/or applesauce
- Fresh fruit (apples, bananas, oranges)
- Boxes of breakfast cereal
- Boxes of mashed potatoes
- White bread
- Baked beans (large cans)
- Gallon size zip-loc bags
- Lg black garbage bags
- Cans of soup

Thank you for any and all kindness!

Neighborhood House

Neighborhood House really appreciates St. Paul's ongoing support in so many ways. At this point, we are low on some items in the food pantry. These items are especially needed right now in our food pantry, though all donations are gladly accepted with the inventory being low now.

Currently we are really low on personal hygiene products as well as some food items:

- 1. Bottled water**
- 2. Toilet paper, Toothpaste, Soap, Shampoo & conditioner**
- 3. Peanut butter & jelly (medium size)**
- 4. Pasta sauce**
- 5. Tuna/Tuna Helper**
- 6. Hamburger Helper**

These non-perishables are needed to keep our pantry stocked:

Chef Boyardee, beef stew, Spam ,pancake mix/syrup, snacks - cookies, crackers etc.

ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS ALWAYS A NEED FOR ADULT SIZED DISPOSABLE DIAPERS AS WELL AS FOR BABIES/CHILDREN IN SIZES 4, 5, AND 6, AND WIPES. WE HAVE NUMEROUS MOMS WITH BABIES AND TODDLERS WHO TAKE THEIR MONEY FOR FOOD AND BILLS TO BUY THEM.

Donations can be left inside the Church. We look forward to another great year working together to feed the hungry. Thanks to all, Marilyn Hendershot, Family Services Specialist, Neighborhood House, Inc.

PFLAG Meeting

Meetings are held at 6:30 PM on the 3rd Thursday of each month, presently via Zoom. Please join us if you would like to be supported or offer support and please spread the word to all corners of our communities. We are currently working on a system which will help youth who have been rejected by their parents, find families who will help them. Please contact Mark Holden, (Mark@maholden.com) or call 802-279-8100.

JOYS & CONCERNS: If you know someone, you'd like to add to our prayer list, please email the church office or visit the church website (www.stpaulsodessa.org) to complete a prayer request. **There is also a Prayer Box in the Narthex in which you can drop your completed request.** Please email the office when someone can be taken OFF the list. If you or a loved one needs a pastoral visit, please call or email the church office to schedule.