



ADVENT 2025

PREPARING THE WAY

Christmas Eve

SERVICE TIMES

10 AM		5 PM		7 PM		10 PM
*		*		*		*
FAMILY		★ CONTEMPORARY		TRADITIONAL		COMMUNION



Happy Advent First Pres!

Our theme for this Advent is “Preparing the Way”. Throughout this season we are going to be working through portions of the book of Matthew. Not only will we reflect on how we participate in preparing the world for the light of Christ, but we prepare ourselves as we await his arrival. Advent is a tricky season because it truly is about waiting, and waiting is hard. I think about the Magi who travelled from far far away, and how long it took them to finally arrive where Christ was born. They heard the good news, and they had to wait to finally see the coming King. I think about the shepherds in field who saw the great light and heard the news of the Jesus’s birth, but they too had to wait and see what would come about. I think about Herod who waited in fear that this king might take his throne and usurp his power. And, I think about Mary and Joseph, especially Mary, who waited on the birth of the child she didn’t intend to have, but God did. And, not only did she wait, she had to travel a long distance to have this baby in Bethlehem. Waiting was hard for those in and near Jerusalem, and waiting is hard for those in and near West Chester. But, waiting is a discipline, it’s a spiritual practice, and we know throughout scripture that when we wait on the Lord, the Lord will indeed arrive.

We wait and prepare during Advent in hopeful anticipation that hope itself, that God Himself, will arrive. Thanks be to God that two thousand years ago God, Immanuel, arrived in the person of Jesus. This Advent we prepare our hearts for Christ’s birth, and we remind ourselves that two thousand years later, Immanuel is still with us.

With Hope and Anticipation,

Pastor Andrew

**This is the one of whom
the prophet Isaiah
spoke when he said,
“The voice of one crying
out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the
Lord,
make his paths
straight.’ ”**

Matthew 3:3

Dear First Pres:

Advent is a time of preparation in every sense of that word: we prepare ourselves for Christ's birth, and that preparation is often tucked into the many tasks and to-do lists that arrive this time of year. Depending on where you find yourself, preparation may involve carols, choosing presents, baking, decorating, volunteering, or doing the impossible work of preparing one's heart to get through Christmas without a loved one. Sometimes we pastors make the mistake of encouraging people to push all of it (the good and the bad) away during Advent in order to better appreciate the gift of Christ's birth. But I don't think we humans have the power to push away life, nor do I think Jesus's presence depends on the absence of something else. Part of the message of Christmas is that Christ bursts – or more accurately, whispers – into our days as they are, whether they're full of cinnamon and glitter, overly quiet rooms, or ever-lengthening to-do lists. If we're not careful, finding Jesus becomes one more task we add to our plates, rather than simply allowing ourselves to see all the ways that he shows up right in the middle of the (often literal) messiness of life. My hope this Advent is that wherever we are, we'll have eyes to see how Christ makes himself known in this season, and throughout the year to come.

With abiding hope,

Pastor Caroline



In our Prayers and Celebrations

Birth:

Felix Norris Howard, born October 29, 2025, child of Kate and Max Howard, grandchild of Adriana and Dennis Park.

New Members:

Nic and Hillary Antolick; Andrew Becker; Pete and Ashley Darlington; Michael and Erin Hazley; Holly Humphrey; Jessica Keogh; Peter Maganas

Baptism:

Sylvie Quinn Guidone, child of Jonathan and Ashley Guidone

Deaths:

Patricia S. Townsend, John W. Pinkerton, Barbara G. Colby

Holiday Happenings

Community Thanksgiving

On Wednesday, November 26, we'll celebrate our Third Annual Community Thanksgiving during the usual Wednesday Lunch time (11:30-1). Come on your own or with family, invite friends, and bring a dish to share...or just come hungry! We'll have great food, good fellowship, and kick off the season together. To sign up, please [click here](#) or visit the sign-up tab on the website.

Carol Sing

Do you have a favorite Christmas carol that you hope gets sung in church every year? Come to Wednesday Lunch on December 10 at 11:30 for a warm and cozy carol sing. We'll have cocoa, cookies, and Christmas treats along with a free, hot lunch. Come and enjoy an hour or so of festive singing together.

Poinsettias

A beloved First Pres tradition, poinsettias bring the sanctuary to life as we approach the sacred night of Christmas Eve. Each year worshippers are invited to donate a flower in honor or memory of a loved one. The names of these loved ones will be included in the Christmas Eve bulletin. The cost this year is \$20, and the deadline is December 7.

To give, [click here](#) and choose "Poinsettias" from the drop-down menu. You can also fill out one of the pew cards or email pgalloway@firstpreswc.com.

Candlelight Christmas Concert

Join us on Sunday, December 7th, at 4pm for our annual Candlelight Christmas Concert! [Click here](#) to reserve a seat.

Deck the Halls

On Sunday, Nov. 30, First Pres will be bustling with holiday fun! **There will be one worship service at 10 am that day**, and then immediately following, there are several options for you to enjoy the Christmas spirit!

Decorate the Church for Christmas: Every Christmas, the church looks festive with all the decorations that enhance our celebration of Christ's birth. This year church members and friends of all ages are invited to join in the fun of decorating. We'll be putting up the many wreaths, garlands and pine roping that will accompany us on our journey to Bethlehem. As the Decorating Team plans for the holiday weeks ahead, we are looking for magnolia, boxwood, and laurel clippings to enhance the decorations inside and outside our lovely church for Advent and Christmas. If you have access to clippings, please contact Beth Congdon-Martin to arrange for pick-up or delivery.

Kids Advent Party: Preschool - 5th graders are invited to gather in Social Hall for some start of the holiday season fun, including games, crafts and more. Parents are not required to stay with their children for this party but are welcome to join the fun if desired.

Christmas Wreath Making: This will be our fifth year of the popular wreath-making workshop. Adults are able to decorate a freshly made wreath from a tree farm in Downingtown. We'll have plenty of decorations for you to make a one-of-a-kind wreath that will last the season. This will take place in Fellowship Hall. Registration and payment (\$20) is required for this event; sign-ups are on the church website or by [clicking here](#).



Pizza and a Parade

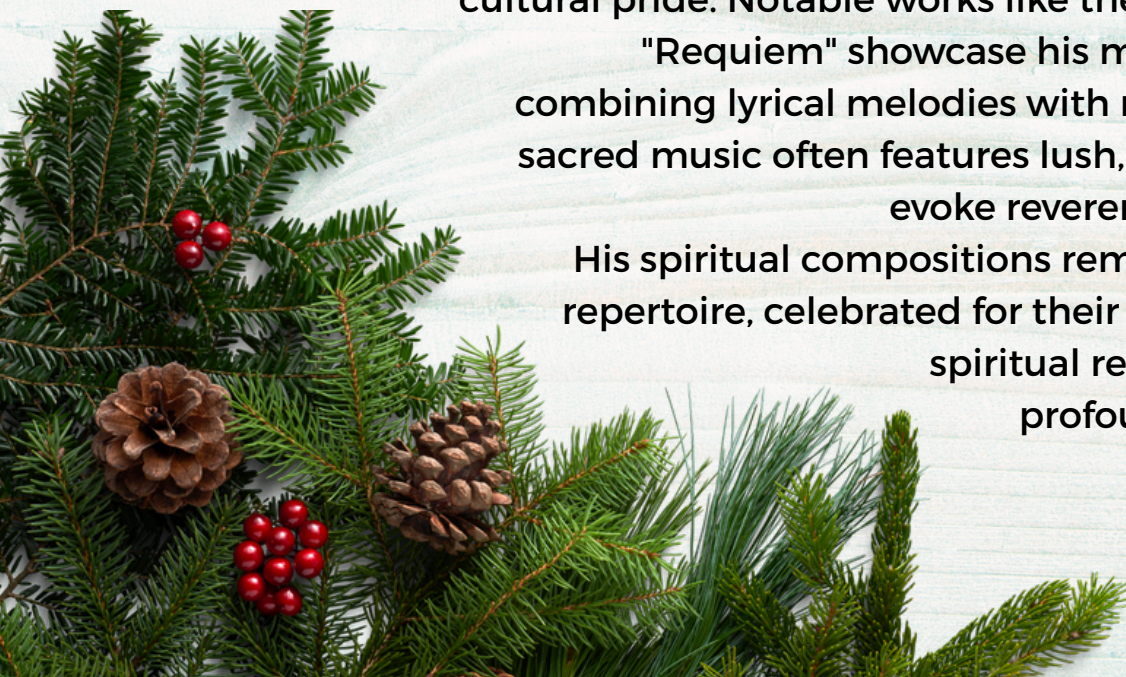
The popular West Chester Christmas Parade is on Friday, December 5 at 7pm. First Pres will be marching in the parade singing Christmas carols, and we'd love for you to join us! You can also plan to have a (free) pizza dinner at the church beforehand! We'll have pizza for First Pres parade-walkers and parade-goers, and also hot coffee and hot chocolate to go! Sign up through the website or by [clicking here](#) for the dinner and [clicking here](#) for marching in the parade.

Chancel Choir

The Chancel Choir has been working on the D Major Mass by Czech composer Antonín Dvořák since September. The congregation has already had the opportunity to listen to the Kyrie and Gloria movements, accompanied by a wind quintet, during Sunday morning services this fall. The entire mass setting will be presented in concert as part of the 2026 Weekend with the Arts on Saturday, March 7, at 6:30 p.m.

Dvořák is mostly known for his symphony "From the New World." However, he also made significant contributions to sacred music repertoire, blending spiritual depth with Czech music traditions. His sacred music compositions include masses, motets, and art songs that reflect his deep faith and cultural pride. Notable works like the "Stabat Mater" and the "Requiem" showcase his mastery in choral writing, combining lyrical melodies with rich harmonies. Dvořák's sacred music often features lush, expressive textures that evoke reverence and contemplation.

His spiritual compositions remain a vital part of choral repertoire, celebrated for their emotional intensity and spiritual resonance, illustrating his profound connection to faith.





Kids Christmas Pageant

At this year's Family Christmas Eve service (10am on 12/24), the children of First Pres will present "Don't Freak Out," a lighthearted yet meaningful re-telling the Bible's Christmas story. Preschool – 5th graders will be preparing for the pageant during Sunday School in December. During the service itself, all children will be invited to participate, regardless of whether they attended the rehearsal times. We look forward to another great morning of being led by our children as First Pres celebrates the joy of Christmas together.

Advent Devotional

This year's Advent devotional, *Prepare the Way: Cultivating a Heart for God in Advent*, will guide readers through four weeks of prayer, reflection and action centered on the themes of peace, justice, fearlessness and faithfulness. Just a few minutes of prayer and reflection each day will help you keep your heart centered on the Lord as we move through the Advent season, preparing to celebrate anew the birth of Jesus. These Advent devotion books will be available in Fellowship Hall beginning Sunday, November 23. They cost \$6 each, as people are able to pay. Those who wish to share this Advent journey with others are invited to gather on Zoom on Wednesday nights during December starting at 6:30 pm. Based on the book's content, we will share the week's Scriptures, prayers and reflections while preparing our hearts together. Contact Sara Pantazes for more information.



The Giving Tree



Each year First Pres comes together to brighten the holidays for local families. This year the agencies who we partner with have asked us to take on additional gifts, and we feel confident that thanks to your generosity we can meet the growing needs of our community. The Giving Trees hold the wish lists of the additional organizations First Pres supports at Christmas: North Star, MCHC, West Chester Food Cupboard, the Domestic Violence Center, and Migrant Ministry. We will also have tags to support emergency housing assistance and our Wednesday Lunch Program. Thank you to all for your early gifts supporting seniors at the Pocopson Home.

Two trees hold gift card/financial donations only; one tree has specific gift requests.

Gifts (please wrap/bag) and gift cards are requested back by December 7th.

Service of Comfort and Joy

December 18 at 6pm in the Chapel

Advent is a time of waiting, but it can also be a time of grief as many feel the weight of the loss of family and friends who are no longer with us. Join us for a service of comfort and joy as we sing, pray, receive comfort from the Holy Spirit and one another, and rest in the joy we have that the savior of the world will meet us in our grief.



Explore the Enneagram this Winter

At first glance, the Enneagram is a personality profiling system. However, that description comes woefully short of capturing the Enneagram for what it truly is: wisdom. The Enneagram is wisdom about nine types of human character - nine types identified most accurately through an understanding of a person's primary motivation and how that motivation impacts behavior because of how they see, interpret, and experience the world.

This aspect of the Enneagram distinguishes its value to people because it offers a dynamic quality of movement rather than a static description of personality. Rather than simply telling a person, "This is who you are and who you have been and that is just the way it is," the Enneagram offers opportunity. As one learns its wisdom, a person comes to recognize how their Enneagram type invites them to let go of the unhealthy action, attitudes, and patterns of their false self in order to move toward the health & wholeness of their true self in Christ.

It is this movement toward our true self in Christ that causes the Enneagram to integrate beautifully into our faith formation as Christians. Knowing our Enneagram type offers us greater insight into the vulnerabilities that want to lead us away from Christ as well as well insights into what will particularly aid us in our experience of Christ and our growth in our faith and relationship with God.

We are excited to offer this 6-week program starting on **January 7, meeting from 6:30 – 8:00 pm on Wednesday nights** over Zoom. The program will be led by David Bell, a trained Enneagram consultant and founder of Enneagram Insights.

David also spent over 20 years in pastoral ministry and is currently the Executive Director of Circle City Fellows in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Have questions or ready to sign up? Talk to Sara Pantazes – spantazes@firstpreswc.com.



Looking ahead...

Night at the Movies – Monday, December 29

Everyone is invited to a fun movie night during winter break! We've reserved a block of seats at Uptown Theatre (226 N. High St, WC) on Monday, Dec. 29 at 7pm to see *Cool Runnings*. If you haven't seen this 1993 film, it's a classic: against all odds and ice, a fearless Jamaican team races for Olympic glory in this feel-good underdog story. Sign up through the website to reserve your ticket – it's free and includes popcorn!

School's Off Day Camp – Feb 16, 2026

First Pres will be offering a new School's Off Day Camp for elementary aged kids on Monday, February 16, 2026. We'll be leaning into what we think will be the main topic of conversation at that time – Winter Olympics! We'd love to see many First Pres kids and their friends join us for a day of games, crafts and fun all related to winter sports. A sign-up page will be advertised when the date is closer. If you are willing to help referee the fun that day, let Sara know!

Parents' Night Out – Jan 23, 2026

Join other parents of kids 0-18 for food, fellowship, and a low-key evening out!

Women's retreat – Feb 28, 2026

All women are invited to a one-day women's retreat on Saturday, February 28. We'll gather at Downingtown Country Club for a time to relax, explore faith and deepen our relationships with one another. Stay tuned for more information, or reach out to spantazes@firstpreswc.com to put your name on the list now.

Weekend with the Arts – March 6-8, 2026

Family Music Bingo Night – March 13, 2026

Men's Retreat – March 27-28, 2026

FIRST PRES

YOUTH

ADVENT & BEYOND

We're stoked for this Advent season and all that Christmas has in store for First Pres Youth! We can't wait for our annual Christmas party, and we're so excited to announce Winter Refresh 2026 back at Gretna Glen (sign ups out soon!). We hope to see you at Youth Group and Bible study through the month of December and as we move into the New Year, and we look forward to celebrating Christ's birth with you.





*Advent Blessings
Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year!*

