

First Presbyterian Church Covington, GA



December 21, 2025
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



✦ You are invited to stand in body OR in spirit



Gathering As God's Beloved People

Gathering Music

The First Nowell Arr. Ethel Smith
Angels We Have Heard on High Arr. Dan Coat
Christmas Medley Arr. Albin C. Whitworth
Loucy Hay, piano; Alice Walker, organ

Invitation to Worship

Introit

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee Arr. Arnold B. Sherman
Handbell Choir

Prelude

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Arr. Ethel Smith
Loucy Hay, piano; Alice Walker, organ

Welcome & Announcements

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

The Puckett Family

In a world full of fear, where do you see the presence of love?

I see love all around us.

I see love when people hold open the door.

I see love in a warm embrace,

a homemade casserole,

a phone call after a long day.

I see love in random acts of kindness

and intentional acts of empathy.

I see love all around us.

You are right. Even in a fearful world, love is all around us.

Today we light the candle of love as a reminder of this good news.

May this flicker of light help us remember

that even in a fearful world, love is here.

Love is world-changing.

Love is shining bright.

We only have to look for it.

Thanks be to God for a love like that! Amen.

✠ **Call to Worship**

Here in worship—

we pray together,

we stand together,

we sing together,

we listen together.

Here in worship—

we are not alone.

So when life gives you reason to grieve, to fear, or to worry,
remember this moment.

We are not alone.

Let us worship our with-us God.

✠ **Praise Hymn 105**

People, Look East

BESANÇON

✠ **Call to Confession**

Pat Harper

✠ **Community Confession**

Pat Harper

When you were afraid,
did I stay by your side?
Did I offer my hand,
or did I leave you alone?
When you were afraid,
did I choose solidarity?
Did I see your fear,
or did I only see mine?

Friend, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes.

Fortunately, God offers grace, and we do too.

So take a deep breath, and let's start again.

Thank you.

Your mercy is a gift.

Now we must ask—

when you were afraid,

did we stay by your side?

Did we offer our hands,

or did we leave you alone?

When you were afraid,

did we choose solidarity?

Did we see your fear?

Or did we only see ours?

Friends, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes.

Fortunately, God offers grace, and I do too.

So take a deep breath, and let's start again.

Thank you.

Your mercy is a gift.

We accept your grace and would love to start again.

May it be so, with God's help.

Alleluia, amen.

✠ Assurance of God's Love & Forgiveness

Water: Layla & Vincent Sullivan

Church, we are forgiven!

We are free to try again.

✠ Hymn of Response 106

Prepare the Way O Zion BEREDEN VAG FOR HERRAN

Prepare the way, O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!

Let every hill and valley a level way appear.

Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.

O blest is Christ who came in God's most holy name.

*He brings God's rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven above.
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.
Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.
O blest is Christ who came in God's most holy name.*

✠ **Passing of the Peace**

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you!



Proclaiming the Word

Wondering with God's Children

Anthem

All Is Well
Chancel Choir

Arr. Lloyd Larson

Prayer for God's Wisdom & Understanding

Scripture Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

Pew Bible page 1

Message

When You're Afraid, Give Me Your Hand

Rev. Neeley Rentz Lane



Responding to the Word

✠ **Response 88**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

*O come, O come, Emanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

✠ Affirmation of Faith

The Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of the People & the Lord's Prayer

**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 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.**

Offering Our Gifts: An Invitation to Generosity

You are invited to “Text to Give” your offering! Text* FPCCOV followed by your donation amount to: 73256 and follow the link to give online, or scan the QR Code to visit the giving page! Select “2025 Pledge” if you made a pledge during last year’s stewardship season. Select “Non-Pledge” for a general offering.



Offertory

O Holy Night
Janet Carmichael, solo

by Adolphe Adam

✠Response 128

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

W ŻŁOBIE LEŻY

✠Prayer of Dedication & Gratitude



Being the Church in the World

✠Sending Hymn 110

Love Has Come

BRING A TORCH

✠Charge & Benediction

In a fearful world, may you look for God’s spirit.

May you reach for each other’s hands.

May you choose courage whenever you can.

And in all things, may you remember that good news is louder than fear.

In the name of the one who calls,

the one who sends, and the one who journeys with—

go in peace and be not afraid. Amen.

✠Postlude

Joy To the World
Loucy Hay, piano; Alice Walker, organ

Arr. Diane Bish



Advent Notes

What Do You Fear? Advent Series—Our 2025 Advent series “What Do You Fear?: Insisting on Hope This Advent” was created by the creative team at Sanctified Art. The following is their message on the series:

This Advent series takes seriously the angels’ message and trusts that Christ’s birth truly is good news of great joy for all people. Fear can divide and paralyze us and even be used as a tool for oppression. But what if we formed a different relationship with fear? Can we acknowledge fear without letting it rule us? Might we catalyze our fears into love and action? What if naming our fears helps us see more clearly how God is breaking in and where God is at work? As you journey through this season, may your hope become gritty and resilient. May you remember: hope that trembles is still hope. This season, let us insist on hope and trust that good news is greater than fear.

Worship Art—This week’s worship guide cover art is an acrylic painting with marker on canvas by Nicolette Faison titled “In Toop Deep” inspired by Matthew 1:18-25. The following is an excerpt of the artist’s statement:

My inaugural contribution to A Sanctified Art in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. After having a challenging pregnancy of my own, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies and how that special type of relationship benefits the community. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and time again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change with his new wife. Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think more often of what it would feel like for someone else to come in and try to fit into my established family system.

This made me think of a Joseph who can’t sleep well at night, as his mind is uneasy with the words of Gabriel in his ear. I wanted Joseph to have an uncomfortable sleep form with a clenched fist that shows us he is tense even while he dreams. His foot is raised up in a way that looks almost as if he could pop up at

any moment. Funny enough, this is how I slept throughout my own pregnancies. His hair, while luxurious, has flowy movement to it, leaning into the uneasiness. The soft spiral pattern in the background also implies movement. We don't see Joseph often in holy art. We receive the occasional holy family portrait, which is often not detailed, but Joseph does not really get his own place in the story. He is almost like the forgotten father after Jesus comes of age, so his time is really now. I don't think his position needs to be a cornerstone for the birth story; however, as my own life changes, I can appreciate the importance of his devotion and obedience to God.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness*. This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise. Why wouldn't an angel both resemble God and the people they are called to speak to?

The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is styled in an outfit that is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought." At that time Beyonce was pregnant with her twins, Sir and Rumi, and gave one of the most outstanding performances someone so far along could provide. Her full costume also included a golden headpiece that resembled that of an icon, a goddess even. How appropriate for a woman of faith carrying twins—performing a song from an album where she experienced betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation—to perform at this last supper-like table in such an outfit, knowing her marriage and pregnancy could have killed her. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated.



Worship Practices

Offering Cards—The offering is an act of worship! We encourage you to place something in the offering plate as it comes to you. Throughout the pews you will find a selection of “offering cards” which we invite you to use to share how you intend to be a good steward this week. *Connect* with us as a newcomer by sharing about yourself or your family. *Pray* with us by offering a prayer which will be shared with the pastor. *Serve* with us by telling us how you will use your time and talent this week. Or *Give* with us by placing either a card to represent your online gift or physical cash or check offering. These offering cards are an invitation to generosity!

End-of-Year Giving for 2025—As we approach the end of the fiscal year, some of you may be planning to make donations to the church for the 2025 tax year or to fulfill your pledge and giving for the year. If you wish your donations to be credited for this year they must reach the church or be postmarked no later than December 31st. Contact our finance administrator, Peni Kehoe, with your questions. *Peni Kehoe: (770)786-7321, ext. 1011 | peni@fpccov.org*

Accessibility—A limited supply of large print worship guides and hymns are available in the narthex. Please return the large print binder to an usher at the end of worship so it may be updated for next week. If you'd like to learn about connecting your Bluetooth hearing aids to our Sanctuary sound system we invite you to talk to our Tech Team.

Our Mission—First Presbyterian Church Covington is a Christian community existing to glorify God by welcoming all of God's children. We celebrate through serving, teaching, praying, eating, crying, singing, and dancing with the Holy Spirit. As works in progress, we seek to respond to God's presence in our church, lives, and community.

Use—One License #A-728728 authorizes the use of music printed in our worship guide and streamed online. *Messages and data rates may apply when using Text to Give. Message frequency varies. Text HELP to 73256 for help. Text STOP to 73256 to cancel. “What Do You Fear?” Advent Series | Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | “In Too Deep” by Nicolette Faison | Graphic design by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman | Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org



Serving Today

Usher Chair | Jodi Atkins

Tech Team | Kenny Compton, Laramy Wells

Liturgists | Pat Harper, Starr Puckett, Taryn Puckett

Acolyte | Lily Wells



**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
COVINGTON, GA

1169 Clark Street SW Covington, GA 30014

fpccov.org 770.786.7321

First Presbyterian Church Staff

Neeley Rentz Lane	<i>Senior Pastor</i>	<i>Nursery Staff</i>
Alisa Castilla	<i>Interim Dir. of Children & Youth</i>	Hattie Bellinger
Mark Fiddie	<i>Dir. of Music & Worship Arts</i>	Catrina Crowe
Denise Gabriel	<i>Dir. of Community Preschool</i>	Akeelah Fletcher
Peni Kehoe	<i>Finance Administrator</i>	Jahniyah Greene
Catherine Laseter	<i>Dir. of Communications & Operations</i>	Jordyn Williams
Alice Walker	<i>Organist CAGO, AAGO</i>	Sylvia Woods

Emergency Response Team

In the event of an emergency including tornado, fire, intruder, and medical emergencies, the Emergency Response Team will lead the church's response and may be identified by wearing yellow visibility vests. If these people are not present for an emergency secondary responders will wear ERT vests. Please follow any directions given by the following people in the event of an emergency:

Primary Point Person—Neeley Rentz Lane
Facility/Security Response—Kenny Compton, Stan Hall, John McCarthy
Medical Response—Nichole Howell, Pam Stillerman

Officers

Reaching Out

Sara Chini	<i>Witness (2026)</i>
Stephanie Scarborough	<i>Witness (2027)</i>

Engaging

Charles Ardis	<i>Faith Formation (2025)</i>
Krista Firkus	<i>Faith Formation (2027)</i>
Nichole Howell	<i>Worship (2025)</i>
Hardy Fortson Sideris	<i>Worship (2027)</i>

Belonging

Gary Boteler	<i>Finance (2027)</i>
Pam Stillerman	<i>Welcome (2026)</i>

Connecting (Deacons)

Cathy Dobbs	<i>Pastoral Care (2027)</i>
Denny Dobbs	<i>Pastoral Care (2027)</i>
Dana Hall	<i>Faith & Fellowship (2025)</i>
Darcel Tabb	<i>Faith & Fellowship (2027)</i>

More

Jodi Atkins	<i>Preschool (2026)</i>
Kenny Compton	<i>Facilities (2026)</i>
Jo Anna Fish	<i>Personnel (2027)</i>
John McCarthy	<i>Clerk of Session</i>
Danny Vining	<i>Personnel (2025)</i>

Advent Poinsettias



The poinsettias that are decorating the Sanctuary this Advent season were provided through donations in memory and in honor of the following people. Donations over the cost of flowers are divided and given to both CarePortal and FaithWorks.

In honor of:	Given by:	In memory of: (cont.)	Given by:
◇ The Elders & Deacons of FPC	<i>Bart & Ruth Frankena</i>	◇ Frank Colladay	<i>Neeley Rentz Lane</i>
◇ Debbie & Deborah -our sisters	<i>Stan & Dana Hall</i>	◇ Brenda Buckelew, Memaw	<i>Kim, Homer, Riley & Chloe McSwain</i>
◇ Mom, dad, sister, and brother	<i>Yvonne Hill-Davenport</i>	◇ J.C. & Helen Moon,	
		Billy & Betty Knight	<i>Joe & Cindy Moon</i>
◇ Memama	<i>Neeley Rentz Lane</i>	◇ Jim Stillerman	<i>Pam Stillerman</i>
◇ Our Children & Grandchildren	<i>Curtis & Carolyn Watson</i>	◇ Arnold & Bonnie Tingler,	
		Dale Tingler	<i>Roger & Tootles Tingler</i>
◇ Carol McGiboney	<i>The Weesners</i>	◇ Russell & Myrtle Vining,	
◇ Eleanor Scarborough,		William & Laura Miller,	
Sherri Bolton,		Doug Bolton	<i>Danny & Beth Vining</i>
Betty Bailey	<i>Miriam Wheeler</i>	◇ Jerry & Jackie Walden,	
◇ Miriam G. Wheeler		Gene Ensminger	<i>Dan & Perri Walden</i>
	<i>Miriam Witherspoon-Wheeler</i>	◇ Our Parents	<i>Curtis & Carolyn Watson</i>
In memory of:	Given by:	◇ Guy McGiboney,	
◇ Our parents:		Grady Daugherty,	
Clayton & Bernice Bailey		Barbara & Jack Weesner	<i>The Weesners</i>
	<i>Clay Bailey & Betty Bailey</i>	◇ Marvin Wells	<i>The Wells Family</i>
◇ Brenda Buckelew		◇ Penny Blakeney,	
	<i>Jennifer & Reid Buckelew</i>	Doug Bolton,	
◇ JoAnn Crews	<i>Tom Crews</i>	Jack Wheeler	<i>Miriam Wheeler</i>
◇ Michael Dobbs	<i>Cathy & Denny Dobbs</i>	◇ Jack Wheeler,	
◇ Ursula Kaminski	<i>Leonard Kaminski & children</i>	James & Miriam Gardner	<i>Miriam Witherspoon-Wheeler</i>
◇ Our Parents	<i>Larry & Day Kennon</i>	◇ Nana G	<i>Braden Woodham</i>

Christmas Eve

Wed. Dec. 24 at 6:00pm

IN THE SANCTUARY AND
ON FACEBOOK LIVE

FPC Office Holiday Schedule

The FPC Office will be closed Wed., December 24
through Thu., January 1.

Questions about end-of-year giving may still be sent to our Finance
Administrator, Peni Kehoe but responses may be delayed.

EPIPHANY STAR WORDS

Sunday, January 4th at 11:00am
in the Sanctuary & on Facebook Live

Come and receive your guiding word for
the year in this service that prepares us
for our journey towards new beginnings



Presbyterian Women

Elizabeth Ann Circle: Meets Jan. 6, Feb. 3, Mar. 3
1st Tues. at 10:00am in the Fellowship Hall & on Zoom!

Martha Circle: Meets Jan. 6, Feb 3, Mar. 3
1st Tues. at 10:30am in the homes of circle members!

Rahab Circle: Meets Jan. 7, Feb 4, Mar. 4
1st Wed. at 6:30pm in the Parlor. Childcare included!

Sunday, December 21 Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:45am Sunday School

11:00am Worship—Take My Hand

Tuesday, December 23 —Friday, December 26

Office CLOSED

Wednesday, December 24 Christmas Eve

6:00pm Worship—Christmas Eve

Saturday, December 27

9:00am Meals on Wheels Delivery

Sunday, December 28 First Sunday After Christmas

Diaper Drive

9:45am Breakfast & PJs

11:00am Worship—Fire for Justice

Monday, December 28 —Thursday, January 1

Office CLOSED

Sunday, January 4 Epiphany of the Lord

9:45am Sunday School

11:00am Worship—STAR WORDS

12:00pm Christmas Cleanup

Sat., Jan. 10 at 8:00am
Town House Café

Men's Prayer Breakfast



SAVE THE DATE: Feb. 27-28, 2026

Calvin Center Intergenerational Church Retreat

Join us overnight on Friday or come for the day on Saturday! A time of fellowship,
devotion, and play!

More details to follow! Send questions to Neeley!

In Our Thoughts & Prayers

Most recent prayer requests

Requests will be moved to "ongoing" after three weeks unless the office is notified.

- ✦ Mark Wells, family of Lily Wells
- ✦ Bob Woodham, family of Angie Woodham - recovering from a fall

Ongoing prayer requests

Requests will be removed after six weeks unless the office is notified.

- ✦ Norma C. Couch, friend of Starr & Taryn Puckett - awaiting a heart transplant
- ✦ Glen Kitts, friend of Chris Martin - in hospital with collapsed lung
- ✦ Dan Walden - bone marrow transplant
- ✦ Kayla Legg, friend of Kim Lindsey - praying for a healthy pregnancy
- ✦ Bill Loeble, friend of Billy Wade - cancer
- ✦ Nancy, friend of Mark & Jennifer Fogarty - stage IV pancreatic cancer

- ✦ Donald Vining , brother of Danny Vining
- ✦ Virginia, mother of FPCP teacher Tammi Welch
- ✦ James Eason, grandfather of Hannah Freeman
- ✦ Ricky, friend of John Leavitt - colon cancer
- ✦ Jill Chandler, sister of Brad Hawley - cancer
- ✦ Katelyn Jackson, niece of Kim McSwain - stage 3 breast cancer
- ✦ Patrick Carmichael
- ✦ Austin Belknap, friend of Angie Woodham - breast cancer
- ✦ Parker Ford, friend of Angie Woodham - cancer

Independent and Assisted Living

- ✦ Reid Buckelew - Prema at Ashton Hills
- ✦ Jean Elder - Florida with her daughter
- ✦ Dot Fincher - Madison, GA

- ✦ Louly Hay - Presbyterian Village Athens
- ✦ Carol McGiboney - Prema at Ashton Hills
- ✦ Jon Paschal - Annandale Village
- ✦ Louise White - Prema at Ashton Hills

Military Service

- ✦ Koen Ardis - Navy

Celebrations

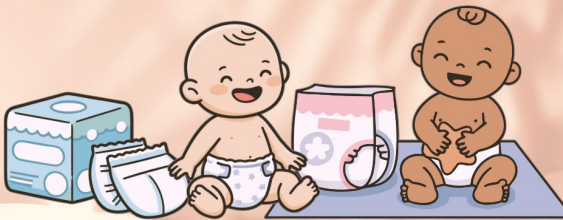
- ✦ We are joyful to announce that Alisa Castilla will serve as our Interim Director of Children and Youth from January through May 2026. We are excited to welcome former seminary intern Alisa back to FPC! You are invited to send her words of welcome to her new email with us: alisa@fpccov.org

Prayer requests and updates may be given the pastor, put in the offering plate, or emailed to catherine@fpccov.org

DIAPER DRIVE IN WORSHIP ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28

We couldn't bring gifts to baby Jesus himself, but we CAN support and care for babies in our community!

All are invited to bring diapers to worship on Dec. 28 as gifts to celebrate the birth of Christ!



Donations may be placed in the narthex or brought to the front during worship!

JOIN US FOR BREAKFAST & PJS ON SUNDAY, DEC. 28

All are invited to bring a breakfast dish to share to the upper elevator hallway and kids are welcome to wear their PJs as we enjoy a potluck breakfast at 9:45am!



Sunday School will not be held on the Sunday after Christmas



The Witness Committee is collecting donations for the Warming Center. A collection bin is in the Narthex. The following items are being requested:

- instant oatmeal
- instant grits
- granola bars
- pop tarts
- bottled water
- backpacks
- new underwear (adult)
- new gloves
- new socks
- baby wipes
- gloves
- hats
- microwaveable cups of noodles/soup
- travel size toiletries

Help us "Clean Up Christmas" at the church!

We will be packing up our Advent and Christmas decorations following worship on Sunday, January 4th as we prepare for the year ahead! All are welcome to help out, many hands make light work!