

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. We continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

Celebrations / Joys & Concerns

God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.

God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Call to Worship

We come as worshippers

Ready to worship Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit!

We come as listeners

Ready to hear the voice of the Spirit moving in this community!

We come as participants

Ready to tend to the new life that is springing up!

We come as children of God

Beloved, embraced and free!

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Holy God of amazement and wonder, you are the God of the Universe made known in Jesus Christ. You are the source of life and hope, the Creator of all things. We praise you for your creative power, your endless love and your peace that passes all understanding. You breathe life into your creatures, and we breathe every breath for you. We marvel at the intricacies of the natural world, the human body, the cosmos – you made all of these, and you tend and care for each element of your creation with a love that is so perfect, so all-encompassing. And so, we worship you as the one who created us, who loves us and who guides us.

Generous God, you have invited us to love as you have loved. As much as we try to imitate you, we fall short. The earth suffers because we have not treated it gently or with compassion. Our neighbours are hungry and lonely, and we cannot summon the courage or the energy to help. Despite our awe of you, we pretend that we have all the answers. Your peace eludes us, because human beings seem to prefer violence and war. Your whole earth groans in labour, waiting for you to do something new. Raise up

¹ PWS&D Sunday 2024 Worship Resource written by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis

newness within us – within ourselves and within our community, so that we might find fresh life, and a renewed Spirit. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen

Jesus Christ was born, lived, died and rose again. All so that we could understand how much we are loved. In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. May we go forward to tend new life in our midst.

□ **Great is thy faithfulness**

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Prayer for Understanding

God of light and life, we seek your wisdom to guide us into this new year. Open our ears to your Word calling to us. Open our eyes to your Word at work in the world. Open our hearts to renew our commitment to follow Christ, your living Word. Amen

Scripture **Exodus 1: 15-21** (OT 49)

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, *“When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”* But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

So, the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, *“Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?”*

The midwives said to Pharaoh, *“Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”* So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

Romans 8: 18-27 (NT 158)

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message video sermon from the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis

Every December we reimagine the nativity story –

Bringing it to life in pageants and with songs.

There is a set cast of characters – Mary, Joseph, baby, donkey.

Angels, shepherds. Livestock.

Sometimes the magi are included, somewhat prematurely, in the scene.

There is one character, however, that is never included. Never mentioned.

In fact, we don't even know for sure that she existed.

But surely, in a little town like Bethlehem, there would have been a midwife.

When Mary's labour began, it is easy to imagine that Joseph's first action would have been to seek help.

And who would he have been looking for except the women in the village –

the ones who knew about birthing,

the ones who would know how to bring comfort into the piercing pains and darkest night.

We'll never know if she was there or not,

but if she was, she witnessed the beginning of something new, unforeseen, impossible.

She witnessed the incarnation of God – the God-with-us of Jesus Christ.

Midwives always bear witness to new life.

They do other things – like tend to the needs and comfort of the birthing person –

they look for signs of trouble and know when to call for help,

they educate and resource young families about how to feed and care for their new child.

Midwives participate in the work of bringing new life but they don't do the work.

It is the birthing person who does the work of labouring.

The midwife is a skilled presence who calms and minimizes the discomforts and dangers.

Childbirth, after all, is dangerous – in any era.

And in every era, women have been accompanied by midwives.

Shiphrah and Puah are midwives, working under the shadow of Israel's oppression in Egypt.

They would have done the same things that midwives have always done –

using tradition and the technologies of the day to tend new life as it emerges.

They did this in an intolerable environment,

made impossible by a vicious king who was threatened by the rapid growth of the Hebrew population.

To reduce the threat, he commands that all baby boys be killed.

Front and Centre are the midwives – they are the ones who attend the births.

They are the ones that know who has a boy and who has girl;

they are the ones tasked with deciding and acting.

These midwives find themselves in a horrible position.

But they are not without choices.

They are women who fear God –

this does not mean they are afraid of God,

rather they are women who have a healthy and obedient relationship with the covenant God.

These are women of faith.

And they must weigh their allegiances and limitations –

will they be faithful to the God of Israel or to Pharaoh?

And do they have any choice?

These women, however, true to their calling, and true to their faith

refuse to take part in genocide.

They resist the orders they have been given to throw the baby boys in the Nile –

they are canny and smart – telling the King that the Hebrew women

are so quick in labour that the midwives can't get there in time.

So little lives are allowed to continue.

Midwives bear witness to life as it emerges even in the midst of tragedy.

They are necessary for the safety and well-being of parents and child.

Not all birth stories are happy stories.

Even today, with our advanced medical technologies,

the lives of both babies and mothers can be in danger.

This is especially true in places where medical care is less available.

The presence of midwives, skilled helpers and village maternal health committees, make a significantly positive difference in maternal and child mortality rates.

In Malawi, safe motherhood committees support the health of communities by raising awareness about the resources that are available before, during and after birth.

One of their goals is to encourage locals to attend professional health clinics, where they can be cared for by trained attendants.

Village safe motherhood committees, which are an aspect of PWS&D's maternal, newborn and child health programming,

teach people in the Mulanje catchment area about what services are available to them before, during and after birth.

Women are encouraged to attend checkups and deliver at a local health facility, and they may even receive a fine if they do not attend.

These committees encourage male participation, so that dads may be involved in the care of the child and the mother, and so that men encourage and do not hinder pregnant women as they access health services.

The influence of village safe mother committees means many pregnant women have been saved from preventable deaths—an impact felt for generations, As more children can grow up with the loving presence of their mother. For example, in Bwanali village, the work of the committee has resulted in there being no maternal deaths for over a decade, in a country where the average maternal death rate is almost fifty times that of Canada.

Reflecting on the difference they are making, this group of dedicated advocates shares that without their involvement, “There would be a lot of home deliveries and possible maternal deaths, women and children would not be receiving essential health services like vaccinations and antenatal care. The results would be disastrous.”

As it partners with local organizations in Malawi, PWS&D is acting as a midwife – supporting, encouraging and celebrating the emergence of new life. Through its partner agencies, PWS&D bears witness to the ways that God is moving in the world to bring about change, growth and resurrection. Like the midwives in the Exodus Story, we are called to be faithful to a covenant God. For us, it is the God of the Universe made known in Jesus Christ to whom we are obedient – and we renounce the powers of evil and oppression in the world – and like those midwives, we choose to participate for good rather than ill. We choose those things that are compassionate, sustainable and just. And like midwives, we tend and protect those delicate spaces where good news is just beginning to flourish.

Remember, the midwife does not produce new life. In the realm of creation, it is the Spirit of the Living God who creates new life. We are invited to do our small part in tending new life wherever it springs up – in faithfulness to a God who is always faithful. In partnership with communities around the world, we gather and listen to the groaning of creation – something is happening here! Life itself emerges from the grave – new life springs up all around us! Thanks be to God for what God is doing through PWS&D and its partners. Thanks be to God for opportunities to bear witness to new life, to tend it, and nurture it. To silently, and reverently give thanks for this precious life which is a gift beyond measure. To loudly proclaim the miracle that life continues even amid the fear and loneliness.

To sit and wait, gently, with those who are struggling for hope or freedom or safety.
To watch, with eyes wide open, as the morning dawns
and earth opens its mouth and cries out the birth of a new day.

So be still and listen to the groaning of creation.
Listen to the voice of the Spirit calming and urging.
Listen for the cries of new life as God revives the earth.
To God be all the Glory. Amen.

□ *All the earth is waiting* 109

Offering and Prayer

Scripture reminds us that when we give generously, abundant gifts will pour out upon us with overflowing measures. Let us give to God with hearts of thanksgiving and praise for God loves a cheerful giver.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Generous God, all good and perfect gifts come from you. With joy and thanksgiving, we have come to return to you a part of the gifts you gave us. As Jesus blessed the bread and fish and it multiplied, we pray that you will multiply our gifts and bless us with wisdom and direction from the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Apostles' Creed 539

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Invitation to the Lord's Table (adapted from Jerie Lukefahr)

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. The prophet gave us many names to use when we speak of Jesus.

Friend. Disciple. Neighbour. Beloved. Jesus gives us many names to use when we speak of each other.

Communion. Eucharist. Heavenly banquet. The Lord's Supper. This meal is known by many names, but only one person prepares it, and invites us to partake of it, and that is Christ, our brother, our saviour and our friend.

We are never closer to Christ than when we gather here together. The invitation is for each of us: all who are faithful – all who doubt. All who are fearful – all who are strong.

Come to the table – it may be familiar, or it may be brand new to you. This table does not belong to the church, it belongs to Jesus Christ – and it is he who invites everyone to share in the bread of life and the cup of grace. Come share this joyful feast.

□ *“Abba, Abba, hear us,” we cry*

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† Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving (from *enfleshed*)

The Holy One be with you.

And also with you.

Open your hearts to the One who is Love.

We open our hearts to you, O God.

Let us give thanks to God with us.

To the One who took on flesh, we give thanks and praise.

Creator of all that is, Mother of life itself, by your hand we were formed. You made us relational. You created us to thrive – not alone, but together. You shaped the entire cosmos so that every form of life depends on another. You never intended for us to power through these lives alone. You made us strong and resilient people, but equally vulnerable and dependent on you, the earth, and all our neighbors.

You gifted us with the need to rely on one another, bone of each other's bone, flesh of each other's flesh. In your wisdom, you created us with both desire and need to be in community. Therefore, we join our voices with your people on earth and all the company of the heavens, singing praise to you...

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!

In our longing for your presence with us, we often expect your arrival in traditional places of power. We seek our hope and salvation in the false promises of dominance and might. But instead, you brought us salvation through vulnerability. You too became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. God, in the form of a baby, you made yourself dependent on us. An infant, revealing the transformative power of giving and receiving love through human flesh.

Throughout the life of Jesus, we saw lives transformed by your willingness to make yourself vulnerable. And yet, that same vulnerability also came at a price. Though some fed you and raised you and befriended you, others persecuted you to the point of death. Seeking to eradicate their own feelings of vulnerability, those in power preyed on yours.

Still, today, we often crucify the ones who dare to risk it all on love.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples, saying: *“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying: *“This cup that is poured out is the new covenant.”*

In remembrance of all you have done to save us, we proclaim the mystery of our faith...

***Sing Christ has died, and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!
Sing Christ has died, and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!***

Pour out your Spirit on these gifts, O God. Give us a taste of resurrection hope that lasts through even the most challenging of relational betrayals. Meet us in this bread and this cup – hear the prayers of your people in this aching world. In collective longing for a taste of your Kingdom on earth, we join together singing...

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!
Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

Sharing Bread and Cup

The one who was first held by Mary, is held for us in this bread.

The one whose body was laid in a manger, is cradled in this cup.

In these gifts God comes to us so that we may come to God.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving.

Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.

If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.

We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Juice, wine, and pre-packaged elements are available.

Prayer

God of Joseph and Ruth, Deborah and Simeon, you are our God and we give you thanks for the new life you raise up every day, every moment. In every generation you have been faithful to your promise to bring newness and hope. You have given us the eyes of midwives to witness and tend new life wherever it arises. Renew our skills so we can perceive the role we play in bringing about your new creation. You, O God, are

the source of all life and we witness to your glory. You call us to participate – to bring our energies and our gifts to the work of announcing the life we have seen.

O God, we can hear creation groaning. We know these pains bring about new life, but they speak of suffering in the here and now. May we be midwives who wait patiently – noticing the signs and being ready for action. May we be compassionate – giving what we can to help those who are most in need. May we be hopeful – knowing that your nature is to recreate, renew, resurrect – and this newness is available to us.

We ask that you grant courage, energy and vision to the staff of PWS&D and its partners. You are causing new life to spring up all over the world in partnership with your people. We give thanks for PWS&D's projects, including those that support the perinatal experience and make birth safer for mothers and babies. We give thanks for those who support the work of PWS&D in so many ways.

As we participate joyfully in your ministry, we are filled with gratitude that we are enabled to bear witness to such good news. We are present at the birth of a fresh reality, and we are grateful to catch glimpses of a future free of suffering and pain. In Jesus Christ, you have promised us a new birth into a living hope. Bring that hope to life in us as we pray together, singing....

□ *Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats)* 469

Blessing

As you leave this sanctuary to continue your worship in the world, may you be blessed by the One who is able to bring about newness in every situation – Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

□ *Send me, Lord / Thuma mina*

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