

New Holland Mennonite Church

December 1, 2024 • Volume 69, No. 48

Fellowship: 8:30 a.m. • Sunday School: 9:00 a.m. • Worship: 10:00 a.m.



Gathering & Praising God

We Dream of a Turning (VT 209) Jenn Esbenshade
Call to Worship / Candle Lighting Pastor Dawn Ranck-Hower
Prayer for Illumination
Unexpected and Mysterious (VT 229)

Hearing God's Voice

Offering
Conversation with Children Jen Morales
"The Stranger" based on Luke 1:26-38,
written by Rev. Anna Strickland
Sermon: "First Things First: Beginning with Blessing"
Nathan Grieser *

Responding

Prayer of Confession
Words of Forgiveness
In Case No One Ever Told You
Prayer of the People Pastor Dawn Ranck-Hower
Sharing
Lord's Prayer
Announcements

Sending

O Come, O Come, Immanuel (VT 210) (Vs. 1, 7)
Benediction

Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

* Nathan Grieser lives in Lancaster with his spouse Kate and daughters Ivy and Juniper. Together they love making music, gardening, and spending time with neighbors, and care about living simply and sustainably as a way of pursuing peace and justice. Nathan is the Director of Faith Based Programs with RegenAll, a climate action nonprofit in Lancaster, and is on the pastor team at Sunnyside Mennonite Church.

Coffee/Greeter: Pat Thomas; **Sound:** Bryan Hower
Nursery: Ruth Douglas Miller; **Close:** Mike Bortzel
Offering: Ruth Douglas Miller & Wanda Gonzalez Bortzel

November 24: Annual Covenant Sunday

Attendance: 39 • Offering: \$1,762.00

NEXT SUNDAY: December 8

Coffee: Ray Hurst; **Greeters:** Brenda & Ray Hurst
Song Leader: Jenn Esbenshade; **Children's Time:** Michele Good
Worship Leader: Bryan Hower; **Sound:** Kai Esbenshade
Prayer: Dawn Kaczor; **Nursery:** Danika Snader
Offering: Wade Esbenshade & Sue Martin **Close:** Tim Martin

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

All events are at New Holland Mennonite Church unless otherwise indicated

Tuesday, December 3: Garden Reflection Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
Church lobby. What went well in the garden this summer? What could we change for next year? Comments and questions.

Thursday, December 5: Men's Dinner at Garden Spot Village: 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 7: Meal by Adina Bills (Details in weekly email). Need a baked good for Thanksgiving or Christmas? Adina does cheesecakes, cakes, and pumpkin rolls for order.

Thursday, December 12: ELC Christmas Celebration: 5:30-7:00 p.m. A variety of activities and opportunity to connect with ELC families and staff as we celebrate the Christmas season.

Friday, December 13: Book Club: Location & Leaders: Brenda & Ray, 7 p.m. Book: Atonement. RSVP on link in weekly email.

Saturday, December 21: Longest Night: We will NOT be having a Longest Night Service at church this year.

Projected Artwork: “Favored One”

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Luke 1:26-38 • Digital Painting

“She was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.” (Luke 1:29) I’m certain I would have had the same reaction to being called “favored one” by God’s messenger. At an early age, I learned that because I am human, I am sinful, and by my very existence, I am unsuitable to be in God’s presence. Without Jesus to intercede on my behalf, my unworthiness was untenable to God. Needless to say, this was not good for my self-esteem or self-image, and though I have done a lot of work to untangle these lessons from my expanding theology, there is a lot of lingering self-doubt—bordering on self-hatred—that I have yet to root out.

God chooses Mary, a young, unmarried woman—with little value as far as society is concerned—to be the conduit through which Love takes on flesh. “Why me?” I can almost hear Mary’s spiraling thoughts even before she knows the purpose of the angel’s visit. And then the angel pronounces what is to come. I imagine Mary first confused, then nearly crushed by the weight of an impossible burden. How do I square this reading with the fact that Mary is favored by God?

I originally created this image for *Sojourners Magazine*. I was invited to create an illustration based on Natalie Wigg Stevenson’s reflection on the Annunciation through a queer theological lens. Stevenson’s writing stretched me beyond my limits, and once I got past my discomfort, I became grateful for this challenge. Her commentary broke open my perspective and rebuilt it with affirmation, agency, consent, and pleasure. She notes that Mary is affirmed by the angel: “Greetings, favored one!” (v. 28), Mary exhibits agency: “How can this be?” (v. 34), and offers consent: “Here I am . . . let it be with me according to

your word” (v. 38). Stevenson’s writing introduced a question I had never considered: What if Mary experienced pleasure? This notion proved incompatible with my internalized shame. It challenged my deep-seated feelings of unworthiness and threatened to overturn the construct of a God who is repelled by anything human—especially the very natural human qualities of pleasure and desire. The exercise of sitting with this thought felt revolutionary.

As I attempted to create imagery to accompany her work, I found myself in tears. What if my fully embodied self, including the most human parts of me, are not only acceptable but beloved by the creator of the universe? What if because of my meanness, God couldn’t stay away, and chose to come near and take on flesh too? As I drew, I felt a few steps closer to accepting the steadfast, limitless, unconditional love of God that I claim to believe in, but have yet to fully receive.

What resulted was an image of Mary and Gabriel in a warm, intimate embrace. Mary has a peace to her that is like a wave of relief over her whole being. A kaleidoscope quilt pattern surrounds them and patterns Mary’s clothes. If we could open ourselves up to receive the incomprehensible love of God, maybe we would constantly feel wrapped up in a soft, cozy, lovingly-stitched-together quilt. Favored one, God delights in you—every single bit of you. Never forget: you are a blessing.

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Land Acknowledgment: We acknowledge, with humility, that the land where we sit and stand today is land that was home to the Susquehannock, Shawnee, and Lenape people. Let us be aware that we occupy their homeland, and that their presence is imbued in this land.

Pastor: Dawn Ranck-Hower

Leadership Team: Wade Esbenshade, Dawn Kaczor, Ruth Douglas Miller
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