



*To all who are spiritually weary and seek rest;
to all who mourn and long for comfort;
to all who struggle and desire victory;
to all who sin and need a Savior;
to all who are strangers and want fellowship;
to all who hunger and thirst after righteousness;
and to all who will come,
this church opens wide her doors
and offers welcome
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Church Staff & Officers

David J. Wilcher

Lead Pastor

Kyle Bobos

Children's Ministries

Caleb McDuffee

Student Ministries

Elders

Brent Allmon

Dan Brink

Jon Green

Rob McIntosh

Mark Moore

Andy Yung

Deacons

Matt Bradshaw

Mike Bellin

Rhonnie Bellin

Jeff Cranford

Mark Hill

Scott Johnston

Mike Ryan

Joe Tison

Sunny Yung

Reflections

The Christmas Story tells you that you have been freed forever from denying or minimizing the danger that lives inside you because Jesus came to rescue you, forgive you, transform you, and ultimately to deliver you. That baby in the manger carried with him to earth everything that sinners need. It's only when you admit the need that you will be able to fully celebrate the solution that is Jesus.

— Paul Tripp
Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Devotional

In a very real sense, the Christian community lives in Advent all the time. It can well be called the Time Between, because the people of God live in the time between the first coming of Christ, incognito in the stable in Bethlehem, and his second coming, in glory, to judge the living and the dead. In the Time Between, "our lives are hidden with Christ in God; when Christ who is our life appears, then we also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). Advent contains within itself the crucial balance of the now and the not-yet that our faith requires...The disappointment, brokenness, suffering, and pain that characterize life in this present world is held in dynamic tension with the promise of future glory that is yet to come. In that Advent tension, the church lives its life...The Advent season encourages us to resist denial and face our situation as it really is.

— Fleming Rutledge
Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ

Christmas means that, through the grace of God and the incarnation, peace with God is available; and if you make peace with God, then you can go out and make peace with everybody else. And the more people who embrace the Gospel and do that, the better off the world is. Christmas, therefore, means the increase of peace - both with God and between people - across the face of the world.

— Timothy Keller
Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind The Birth of Christ

The Christmas message is about the reality of God becoming flesh - part and parcel of our reality, with all the suffering and puzzlement that goes with that. And this God-in-the-flesh is indeed the Lord of the world, defeating his enemies through his death and rising to rule and rescue the whole creation. We cannot stress this too strongly: Jesus is not simply Lord in a distant heaven on the one hand and Lord in our private hearts and lives on the other, leaving the real public world untouched. If he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.

— N.T. Wright
From 2007 sermon, *The Shepherds at Midnight*

Grace Presbyterian Church

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2019

10:30 a.m.

Prelude

Words of Welcome

Preparation for Worship¹

_____ *Praise* _____

Call to Worship

- based on **Luke 1:68-75**

Minister: Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,

People: because he has come and has redeemed his people.

Minister: He has raised up a horn of salvation for us, salvation from our enemies...

*People: to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:*

*ALL: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve
him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

¹ As a courtesy, please program all communication devices to silent mode. Thank you!

Children's Advent Program

This year's Advent Program features two songs that are sung from the perspective of Mary as she contemplates the arrival of our redeemer. The imagined conversation between Mary and Eve is a reminder that Jesus was sent to undo all that was lost in the Fall. And Mary's song of praise from Luke chapter 2, helps us focus our hearts as we place our hope in the one who will renew the whole world!

Children's Choir

*Mary Consoles Eve
Magnificat*

Song of Praise

Angels, From the Realms of Glory

Prayer of Adoration

Song of Adoration

Jesus Shall Reign

Private Adoration and Praise

_____ *Renewal* _____

Scripture Reading

John 1:9-11

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Confession of Sin

*Leader &
People:*

Merciful God, you sent the light of your Son to bring renewal and hope, but we live as if that light had never defeated the darkness in the world or in us. We ignore the Christ you sent to be with us and instead we remain distant from you. We've kept the birth of your Son confined to the Christmas season and we do not yearn for his birth each moment in our waiting hearts.

Lord, you came to us in the fullness of time. Forgive us for not opening our eyes to your coming. It's time that we prepare for your Advent. Let the earth ring with song. Let the light break forth. Let us all rejoice in the miracle of love. Let Christ come into the fullness of our time and light our hearts.

Private Confession and Reflection

Words of Encouragement

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Sacrament of Baptism

Sean Alexander Matthews

Song of Baptism

The Blessing

The Peace of God and Announcements

Minister: The peace of the Lord be with you!

People: *And also with you.*

*If parents prefer, children 4 years old – 2nd grade
are invited to attend Children's Church in the Education Building at this time.*

Lighting of the Advent Candle²

Jan and Scott Johnston

Leader: The Advent wreath is a circle with no beginning and no end.
It is a symbol of God's unending love and faithfulness.

People: The shepherds were the first to hear the joyful announcement of Christ's birth - the good news of great joy to all people.

Leader: Upon seeing the baby Jesus, the shepherds spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed.

*People: We have also heard this wonderful news.
We welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

Leader: Though we have not seen Jesus, we love him; and even though we do not see him now we believe in him.

ALL: We are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Song of Response

Come, O Redeemer Come

The Prayers of the People *(concluded with 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 for ever. Amen!

Commitment

The Offering

The offering is a way for members and friends of Grace Church to support the church's mission and ministry. If you are our guest today, please feel under no compulsion to give.

² Lighting the Advent wreath originated in Germany in the nineteenth century, based on a Roman custom of the ceremonial entrance of a ruler to a province or city as his 'advent' (from the Latin *adventus*: 'arrival'). The wreath consists of four candles on the outside of the wreath and one candle in the center. One candle is lit the first Sunday of Advent. Two are lit the 2nd Sunday, and so on. Each of the candles has special significance: The first is the prophecy candle; the second is the Bethlehem candle; the third is the Angel's candle; the 4th is the Shepherd's candle; and the center candle is the Christ candle, lit at Christmas.

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:8-21

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Sermon

Mr. Brad Wright

THE SHEPHERDS' HOPE **THE HOPE OF CHRISTMAS**

Communion

Guidelines for Reception of Communion

Communion is a family meal for Christians. We welcome all committed followers of Jesus Christ to partake of this sacrament: those who are baptized members of a congregation which proclaims the gospel, who are at peace with God and with their neighbor, and who seek strength to live more faithfully for Christ. If you are not a Christian, or if you are not prepared to share in this meal, we encourage you to spend this time in prayer using the prayers that follow as guidelines. We hope that this time is helpful as you consider your relationship with Jesus Christ, and with his people, the church.

The Great Thanksgiving

Minister: Therefore, lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord!

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right to give him thanks and praise!

Song of Communion

How Deep the Father's Love

Prayer of Consecration and the Words of Institution

Prayer for those not communing:

Prayer for Covenant Children (Not Yet Confirmed)

Lord Jesus, thank you for placing me inside your family, the church. Help me more and more to know you, to love you, and to follow you as your faithful disciple. Amen.

Prayer for Those Searching for Truth

Lord Jesus, you claim to be the way, the truth and the life. If what you claim is true, please guide me, teach me, and open to me the reality of who you are. Grant that I might be undaunted by the cost of following you, as I consider the reasons for doing so. Give me an understanding of you that is coherent, convincing, and that leads to the life that you promise. Amen.

Prayer of Belief

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before believed, but, through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared to hope. I thank you for paying my debt, bearing my punishment on the cross and offering forgiveness and new life. Knowing that you have been raised from the dead, I turn from my sins and receive you as my Savior. Amen.

Prayer for Those Struggling with Sin

Lord Jesus, grant that I may see in you the fulfillment of all my needs, and may turn from every false satisfaction to feed on you, the true and living bread. Enable me to lay aside the sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race set before me, looking only to you, the author and finisher of my faith. Amen.

Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus, you have called us to follow you in baptism and in a life of committed discipleship in your church. Grant that I may take the necessary steps to be one with your people, and live in the fullness of your Spirit. Amen.

Distribution of the Bread and the Cup

Grace Presbyterian uses wine in the celebration of Holy Communion. If you prefer non-alcoholic grape juice, please take a cup from the outer circle of the tray. Gluten-free wafers are provided in cups in the center of the cup trays. Please hold the elements until all have received so we can celebrate this meal together.

Song of Commitment

Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder

Benediction³

May God, who sent his son to dwell with his people, fill you with joy and make you heralds of the gospel.

Dismissal

Minister: Now, let us go forth to serve this community and the world as those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

ALL: Thanks be to God!

The pastoral staff and other church leaders are available following the service to pray with you or to answer your questions about the Christian faith or Grace Church.

Worship Music⁴

Thank you for sharing your gifts and talents with Grace Presbyterian Church.

Brent Allmon, saxophone
David Fox, keyboard
Damon Henrichs, guitar

Debra Moses, flute
Rae Moses, piano
Jennifer Reddick, flute

Sermon Notes

Luke 2:1-21
THE SHEPHERDS' HOPE
THE FACES OF CHRISTMAS

³ The benediction is much more than a wish or even a prayer. It is a renewed ordination of the people of God to their service to each other, to their community and the world. God declares his own favor toward his people.

⁴ All songs except hymns are copied under CCL # 1214497. The hymns are reprinted from *Trinity Hymnal* (© 1990, Great Commission Publications). Used by permission. All Scripture is quoted from, unless otherwise indicated, the *THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION*®, *NIV*® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by *Biblica, Inc.*™ Used by permission

Welcome, Guests! We are excited you're here with us today. We hope that you were warmly welcomed and would love for you to be a part of Grace. Please take a moment to fill out the visitor information on the back of the bulletin, tear it off and drop it in the offering plate or give it on to an usher.

Parents of Infants - Three-Yr Olds: Our nursery and early-childhood classes provide a warm, nurturing, and well-supervised environment. Our workers welcome the opportunity to love your child! When using the nursery, please check in and label all items (bags, cups, etc.) with your child's name. If you need assistance or have any questions about the Nursery, please contact our Nursery Coordinator, Kate Weimar, at mothersdayout@gracewoodlands.org.

Cry Room: A cry room is available for the comfort of our new parents in order to ensure that everyone enjoys our services. It is located in the back of the sanctuary and it is well equipped (comfortable rockers, changing table, etc.) but if you are in need of anything, one of our ushers will be glad to assist.

Sunday Mornings at Grace

8:30 am Prayer

9:30 am Christian Education Classes

10:15 am Coffee Break

10:30 am Worship

11:45 am Intercession

Sunday Morning Prayer Ministry: To clasp hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world. We would like to invite you to be a part of this uprising at 8:30 each Sunday morning in the Prayer Room (114). Join us as we pray for the expansion of God's Kingdom.

Lessons and Carols: Join us at 5:00 pm for our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. Based on a Service of Lessons and Carols, first crafted by Anglican Bishop William Benson in 1880, this service joins biblical texts about the birth of Christ with carols that highlight the themes of those texts. Universally beloved, this service is used with some variation all over the world. The nursery will be available during this service.

All Christian Education Classes and Community Groups are on holiday break and will resume in the New Year.

Children's Ministries:

- **Children's Christian Education** classes are offered for Preschoolers (2-3yrs old), Pre-K and Kindergarten, 1st-2nd Grade, 3rd-4th Grade, and 5th-6th Grade. Classes meet in the Education Building at 9:30 am 2nd Grade and under are on the 1st floor, 3rd Grade and above meet on the 2nd floor.
- **Children's Church** is offered for children ages 4 years old through 2nd grade. During passing of the peace, the children line up with their leader in the back of the sanctuary to exit worship. During the song of communion, children will rejoin their families to observe communion with the rest of the church body. We gather in room 108 in the Education Building to sing songs, pray, and hear a children's sermon. We also collect a children's offering during the service. This format is designed to model worship for our children and teach them the importance of meeting together as the body of Christ.
- **SNiCK and 56ers** are on holiday break and will resume in the New Year.

Student Ministries is designed for students 7th grade through 12th grade. If you would like to be put on the mailing list for Student Ministries, or would like more information about an upcoming youth event, or have any questions at all, contact Caleb McDuffee at caleb@gracewoodlands.org. Have your student connect with us on Instagram (called GPCyouth) or ask to be put in our Youth group GroupMe, our primary medium for communication to hear about upcoming youth group events!

- **Christian Education:** On Sunday mornings from 9:30-10:15 am, we gather to know more deeply about our Lord and Savior and who we are in Christ. Join us on Sunday mornings in room 206. Currently we are on break until January 12th.
- **Youth Group** on Wednesday nights is on break until January 15th.

- **Ranchopalooza** is our annual Sr. High retreat on February 28th to March 1st at Stoney Creek Ranch! The cost per Student is \$155 for the weekend. At Ranchopalooza the gospel is preached, relationships are strengthened, students are introduced to college ministers, and Christ is celebrated. This year's speaker is Wil Nettleton, the campus minister for RUF @ Trinity University. Talk to Caleb to sign up or ask for more information.

Women's Ministry Events and More! If you have any questions about Women's Ministry contact Natalie Webster or join the Women's Ministry on E-Connect to get involved.

- **Women's Bible Study** is on holiday break and will resume in the New Year.
- **Rain Walks** is a grief support group for women who are dealing with the loss of a loved one, either recently or in the past. Please come to listen (and share if you like) as we discuss our journeys and ways to "walk" through our loss. Rain Walks meets the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 8:30 am at Black Walnut Cafe in The Woodlands. Contact Sabrina Amell for more information.

Men's Fraternal: We are looking for men who would like to support the men's events and planning. Please contact John, with interest and to learn more on the specific needs.

- **Brew Night:** Our next monthly men's gathering is set for Thursday, Jan. 16th for dinner and fellowship starting at 6:30 pm. Join us at Wings 'N More (16580 I-45 South) for dinner and fellowship starting at 6:30 pm.

GraceCares: Caring for the church and the community. If you are interested in helping with GraceCares and the needs of the church and the community, please contact Joe Tison.

- **Autumn Grove:** Just a few minutes drive from Grace, Autumn Grove Cottage, a sixteen resident assisted living home, provides care to men and women with Alzheimer's. A small group from Grace visits roughly once a month for about 30 minutes or so to sing, pray and visit with the residents. Contact Dan Brink for more information. We welcome anyone and everyone.
- **Meals Ministry:** There are events in life when we all need the help and encouragement from our community. The Meals Ministry seeks to enter into these times by providing meals. If you are in need of meals, or would like to help provide meals for others, please contact our Coordinator, Rhonnie Bellin.
- **Giving:** If you would like to know the best way to support those who might have needs in our church and community, we would encourage you to consider giving to the Deacon's Fund. It is through the deacons and their ministry that Grace church provides for, supports and comes alongside those who are in need. If you have questions, please contact Matt Bradshaw.
- **Prayer Ministry:** Our desire at Grace is that we take seriously the privilege of prayer and there are several ways you can participate. If you become aware of a prayer need, please communicate this to us in one of the following ways:
 - **In writing:** Fill out the back page of the bulletin and place it in the offering plate.
 - **By phone:** 281-296-0911 (Church Office)

Your requests will be communicated to our Church Staff, Officers, and our Prayer Team. If you would like to be on our Prayer Team, please let us know.

Missions Service Opportunities & Events: Contact John Zeigler for more information or to be added to our GraceMissions email list or to connect with a missions team advocate.

- **December Prayer Partners**
 - Grace Presbyterian Diaconate
 - Wil and Mary Nettleton, RUF @ Trinity University
- **Thank you from Tamina!** Shirley and Ranson Grimes send Christmas greetings and a warm thank you to Grace for all the Christmas gifts that were donated. The children and their parents are so grateful for your generosity.
- **Local Missions Partners**
 - Cornerstone of Houston Team Counseling | The Woodlands, TX
 - Interfaith Family Services | The Woodlands, TX
 - Montgomery County Women's Center | Montgomery County, TX
 - Pregnancy Assistance Center North | The Woodlands, TX
 - Redeemed Ministries | The Woodlands, TX

- Tamina Community Center | Conroe, TX
- Oaklawn Presbyterian Church | Houston, TX
- Juan Carlos & Samara Martínez | RUF | Rice University
- Brooks & Meredith Harwood | RUF | University of Houston
- Grace Presbyterian ESL Ministry
- Grace Presbyterian Diaconate
- **National Missions Partners**
 - Robbie & Kelly Mills | New City Fellowship Dallas | Dallas, TX
 - David & Kelly Richter | Somerville Project | Boston, MA
 - Way & Amy Rutherford | RUF | Baylor University
 - William & Katherine Bondurant | RUF | Texas A & M University
 - Ryan & Laura Anderson | RUF | Texas Christian University
 - Wil & Mary Nettleton | RUF | Trinity University
 - John & Chrissy Trapp | RUF | University of Texas
 - Curtis & Marian Castleberry | RUF | University of Texas at San Antonio
 - Francis A. Schaeffer Institute, Covenant Theological Seminary | St. Louis, MO
 - Southwest Church Planting Network | Dallas, TX
- **International Missions Partners**
 - Arab Baptist Theological Seminary / Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development | Beirut, Lebanon
 - Titus & Crystal Bagby | RUF International | Texas A & M University
 - Terry & Mary Rose Dykstra | RUF International | University of Texas
 - Charles & Bonita Davidson | MTW | Monterrey, Mexico
 - Joe & Felicity Congdon | MTW | Yokkaichi, Japan
 - Andy & Missy Shadburne | MTW | Fremantle, Perth, Australia
 - David & Eowyn Stoddard | MTW | Berlin, Germany
 - Kay Burklin | MTW | Refugee Liaison, Europe
 - Mission to The World | Atlanta, GA

Banners Explained: Advent is the beginning of the Church Year for most churches in the Western tradition. The primary color is Purple. This is the color of penitence and fasting as well as the color of royalty to welcome the Advent of the King. This color is also the color of suffering and points to an important connection between Jesus’ birth and death. Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.

The banner on the left comes from Isaiah 11:1 “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” The prophet Isaiah looks forward to a time when Jesus, a king far mightier than David Jesse’s son, would come to rule the world with justice, mercy, and love.

The banner on the right depicts an advent wreath. The green leaves and holly symbolize life brought to us in Jesus, and each Sunday a candle is lit in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. The white center candle is lit on Christmas eve, and symbolizes purity and truth.

Stewardship Update: Grace thanks you so much for your generous gifts and offerings to our Savior for November 2019.

	<u>Nov.</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget	62,666	689,326
Actual General Fund	63,721	708,813
Variance	1,055	19,487

Grace Online gives users access to the church directory and event calendar. Users can also join groups, print giving statements and give online. If you need any online instructions contact Dianna in the office at 281-296-0911 or admin@gracewoodlands.org.

- **Website:** Grace Online directory link, gracewoodlands.org under the Connect tab.

- **Mobile App (Elexio Community)** can be found by clicking the Apple App Store and Google Play icons on the church website. To log on, replace "Domain" with gracewoodlands and use your directory username and password for the app.
- **Online Giving:** If you would like to give online, you will need to set up an account, the link is under the Care tab on our website.

We are glad to have you as our guest today. Please use this page to let us know of your visit and to make us aware of any ideas, suggestions or concerns you may have. You may deposit this page in the offering plate as it comes by, or give it to an usher or greeter. Have confidence that no one will call or drop by your home; this is for us to have a record of your visit or your prayer requests.

Name, Email & Cell Number: _____

Spouse, Email & Cell Number: _____

Home Address: _____

Children, Age & Grade: _____

Please let us know if you are:

- Visitor Regular Attendee One time visit from out of town

I am interested in learning about:

- Community Groups Music Usher, Greeter
 Sunday Volunteer Children's Ministry Women's Ministry
 Student Ministry Men's Ministry Membership

Prayer Request:

- I would like to speak with someone about this prayer request or other spiritual concern; please have someone contact me at: _____.
- I would like the prayer team to pray for the following needs or concerns:

Prayer of Belief...

Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful that I ever before believed, but through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope.

I thank you for paying my debt on the cross, bearing my punishment and offering forgiveness.

Knowing that you have been raised from the dead, I turn from my sins and receive you as Savior and Lord. Amen.