

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, December 7, 2025 – Table Copy

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Pastor

Holy and Merciful God, you judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. The mountains yield prosperity for all your people, and the hills are clothed with your splendor. You defend the cause of the poor, and deliver the needy. You are like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. Filled with the joy and peace of believing, we will sing your praises and serve you with our whole being, to the end that the nations may come to witness to your glory. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Worship Assistant

Great God of peace, whose ways are not our ways, and the time of whose coming among us – once again – cannot be predicted: Speak to us now through your Word, that we might be awake and alert, prepared for – and able to fully embrace – the unexpected. Change us by your Word, and transform us into a peaceful, loving community – for the sake of your house – that all peoples and nations may be drawn to it. Amen.

LESSON 1 Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the LORD.
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

LESSON 2 Isaiah 40:1-5 OT p. 740

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.
A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

LESSON 3 Isaiah 40:6-11 OT. p 740

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.
Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

LESSON 4 Malachi 3:1-4 OT p. 995

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me,
and the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.
The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—
indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
But who can endure the day of his coming,
and who can stand when he appears?
For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap;
he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,
and he will purify the descendants of Levi,
and refine them like gold and silver,
until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.
Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD --
as in the days of old, and as in former years.

LESSON 5 Luke 2 1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus,
that all the world should be registered.
This was the first registration,
and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
All went to their own towns to be registered.
Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee,
to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem,
because he was descended from the house and family of David.
He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged,
and who was expecting a child.
While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.
And she gave birth to her firstborn son,
and wrapped him in bands of cloth,
and laid him in a manger,
because there was no place for them in the inn.

LESSON 6 Luke 2:8-14 NT p. 59-60

In that region there were shepherds – living in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night.
Then, an angel of the Lord stood before them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified.
But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid;
for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah, the Lord.
This will be a sign for you: you will find a child –
wrapped in bands of cloth, and lying in a manger.”
And – suddenly – there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and – on earth – peace among those whom he favors!”

SERMON TEXT:

Romans 15:4-13

Pastor

*Our sermon text comes from Paul's letter to the Church at Rome.
He is nearing the end of his letter, and is presenting some of his final –
and most important – thoughts.....*

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,
so that – by steadfastness, and by the encouragement of the scriptures –
we might have hope.
May the God of steadfastness – and encouragement –
grant you to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus,
that – together – you may – with one voice –
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,
for the glory of God.
For I tell you, that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised –
on behalf of the truth of God –
in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors,
and in order that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.
As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles,
and sing praises to your name";
and – again – he says, "Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people";
and again, "Praise the Lord, all you gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him";
and – again – Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the gentiles;
in him the gentiles shall hope."
May the God of hope fill you with all joy – and peace – in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

MEDITATION

“Credo”

Pastor

In the year 325 – 1700 years ago – there was a *fight* in the Church.

It was a *major disagreement* –
one that *threatened to split* the **Christian community** in half.

But – unlike some church disagreements today –
the division *was not* caused by the *style of music*,
or the *color of the carpet* in the sanctuary.....

Rather, the fight was caused by a *disagreement about the nature* of **Jesus Christ**.

Some considered **Jesus** to be a *creation* of **God** –
made by the **Creator** – but *before* the beginning of time.

Others said no — **Jesus is God**,
and **Jesus the Son** is *coeternal* with **God the Father**.

And – because of this disagreement –
the cities of the **Roman Empire** were *disturbed by riots*.

Heated battles were breaking out – between the opposing sides.

In fact, Bishops from the “*Jesus is God*” side were exiled from their posts –
and replaced by bishops from the “*Jesus is not God*” side.

All of this made the **Roman Emperor – Constantine** – very nervous.

He did not want a split in **Christianity** –
so, *he called for a council* – to resolve this theological division.

So, church leaders – then – gathered in **Nicaea**,
a location in modern **Turkey** – now called **Iznik**.

And – according to **Religion News Service reports** –
“318 bishops deliberated on controversies on the nature of Christ,
both human and divine,
and agreed on a statement of faith – still known today –
as the **Nicene Creed**.”

The **Nicene Creed** – then –
is the *oldest* of our universal, Christian, statements of faith.

It came out of the council of **Nicaea** – held exactly **1,700 years** ago –
and it defines **God** as *one entity*, appearing in *three persons*:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In other words, **God** chose to self-reveal – in three persons.

And – we might add – the self-revelation of the **Deity** is unique to **Christianity**;
God desires to be known – to be in community, and fellowship –
with humankind!

Returning to the **Creed**, the key aspect is that **Jesus** *is not* a creation of **God**.

Rather, **Jesus** is “*begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.*”

And – furthermore – the **Holy Spirit** is equally **God**.

The creed declares that the **Spirit** is
“*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.*”

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God, three persons.

Today, we call it – the **Three Person Godhead** – “*the Trinity.*”

The **bishops** at **Nicaea** also established a date for **Easter** –
which was very helpful for churches around the world.

The date for **Christmas** – **December 25th** –
was not set until a few years later, in the year **336**.

Until then, there could be *no Christmas shopping season* –
since there was *no formal celebration* of the **birth of Jesus**.

Ah, the good old days..... .

In addition, the **council of Nicaea** created **20 new church laws** –
we will not go into those this morning :-)

Then – at the end of the council –
the leaders of the “*Jesus is not God*” group were *sent into exile*.

So, *what can we learn* from the **Nicene Creed**?

First of all, Paul calls it an encouraging word.

In his letter to the **Romans**, Paul says,
“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,
so that by steadfastness –
and by the *encouragement* of the scriptures –
we might have hope.” (15:4)

In this verse, Paul is talking about **Holy Scripture**.

But, the **creeds of the church** have *many of the same qualities*.

That is to say, the creeds were *hammered out* by the Church –
to *clarify* what the **Scripture** led the Church to believe,
under the *pressure of contemporary, historical, circumstances*.

And – so – they too are written for our instruction.
They encourage us.
And they give us hope.

A pastor and professor – named **Ronni Kurtz** –
planted a **Baptist church**, in **Kansas City, Missouri**.

That church – subsequently – *offered a series* on the Trinity.

And –as part of the series –
they *began reciting* the **Nicene Creed** as part of their weekly worsship.

Sharing the results with *Christianity Today*, Kurtz reported:

“One of the things I could see happening,
was the church learned to talk about the Trinity,
and articulate its theology.

“They could use phrases like ‘begotten, not made’
and grab hold of a deeper theology.

“Regular Christians — moms and dads, brothers and sisters —
talked about the Trinity.”

Hence – as Paul said,

“whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.”

The Nicene Creed can also encourage us.

Philosophy professor **Phillip Cary** describes the creed as “so darn beautiful!”

It tells us that the Father

“has never been without a Son he loves.

“The Father has always given all of his divine essence to the Son.

“That’s gorgeous, and it’s also really important for Christian faith.”

In other words, *it is encouraging* to discover that love – and generosity –
are at the heart of God’s very Being.

Love and generosity are shown by the Father to the Son –
and to us as well.

In addition, the Nicene Creed can give us hope.

Suzanne Nicholson – a professor at **Asbury University** –
admits that the **Trinity** *is hard* to understand.

But the creed gives us hope –
because it shows us the beauty of God,
and draws us into a deeper relationship with God.

The **beauty of God** “is revealed in the Trinity,” she says.
“Why would I want to *know less* of that?
I want to *know more* of God.

“We need to know more of God – so that we can glorify God more fully.”

Instruction, encouragement, and hope – *all can be found* in the **Nicene Creed**.

In our sermon text, **Paul** goes on to talk about “Christ Jesus,”
and “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And, he includes *these encouraging words*,
“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

When Paul talks about Christ Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit,
he *says a lot* about God

But **Paul** *never uses* the term “**Trinity**.”
The word “God” appears 4,761 times in the Bible.
“Jesus” is named 1,092 times.

But the word “Trinity” does not appear at all – not even once.

Although there are hints of a **triune God** in the **Bible**,
Christians *did not start talking* about the **Trinity**
until the *middle* of the **second century**.

But – nevertheless – an understanding of the **Trinity** *had to be developed* –
because Christians *needed to explain* the relationships –
between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The **Trinity** – then – is all about loving relationships, and *it is beautiful*.

The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father,
the Father loves the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Son –
round and round again.

And – so – the essence of **God** is a *loving community*:
Three Divine Persons, in an *eternal, loving, relationship* with one another.

But, God willed to extend this community!

Remember what **God** said – in **Genesis 1:26**:
“Let us make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness....”

The **Triune God** – graciously – desired to extend the fellowship – and love –
enjoyed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –
to *include human beings*, created in the **Divine Image!**

God desired to extend this kind of love, harmony, and praise,
because *relationship is at the heart* of the **Trinity**.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *three persons* – in an eternal relationship.

John of Damascus – a **Greek theologian**, of the seventh century –
came up with an understanding of the **Trinity** based on *perichoresis*.

Perichoresis is a **Greek** word – meaning “*dancing around*” –
as in the **choreography of a ballet**.

[Today, we could compare it to the **Capitol Brass** –
four distinct brass instruments,
joining together in delightful harmony!]

So, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *are not* like three kings – on three thrones –
but – rather – they *are like* three dancers:
holding hands, dancing together –
in perfect love, freedom, and harmony.

They are *deeply one*, but – at the same time – they are *distinctly three*.

And, they are what they are in relation to each other —
in a shared purpose, and in a mutual love –
for all eternity.

That is the key to our relationship with the Trinity.

We are invited to enter into a gracious relationship with the Trinity,
to join the *Lord's never-ending dance*,
and to become part of *God's extended family*.

We *are not* asked to understand the Trinity perfectly,
but – rather – to join the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their *perichoresis*.

Indeed, such an understanding *can unite us* as **Christians** –
especially as we struggle with divisions in our country, and in our world.

So, the challenge for us – in **21st century America** –
is to turn off our computers, our televisions, and our iPhones,
and *find joy in people* – instead of technology.

Joy will come –
as we commit ourselves to doing the hard work of making peace –
instead of giving up on others,
and trusting only in ourselves.

Closeness to God will be experienced –
if we accept the invitation to join the dance –
of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – with hope and joy.

The **Holy Trinity** lives in *an eternal relationship* of joy, peace, and hope;
which is why Paul wrote:

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy, and peace, in believing,
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

That is exactly the kind of relationship
that the **Nicene Creed** *invites people* to enter,
with God, and with each other.

This **invitation** has been extended for the past 1,700 years.

And – today – it is extended to us!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Pastor

The Nicene Creed (Traditional)

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten
of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very
God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom
all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from
Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was
made man: And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered
and was buried: And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures:
And ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father: And he
shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose
Kingdom will have no end:

And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who
proceedeth from the Father and the Son. Who with the Father and the Son
together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets. And I
believe in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one
Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the Dead:
And the Life of the world to come. Amen.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Go forth, and continue the journey of Advent.

Continue the planning, and the preparations.

But – in all you are doing – keep focused on the greatest gift:
Jesus of Nazareth – the Christ child of Bethlehem.

Emmanuel – God with us,
and – by the power of the Holy Spirit –
God revealed in – and through – us!

Let us receive the Lord's benediction...

