

# St Stephen's Episcopal Church The Fourth Sunday of Advent *All Are Welcome!*

December 21, 2025, 8:00 and 10:30 am Worship Services



Saint Joseph's Dream

#### WELCOME TO ST. STEPHEN'S!

It is a joy to have you worship with us today. We believe everyone who worships with us is sent to us by God. So, welcome.

As we gather for worship, we want to remind everyone of a few important items:

- Please turn off or silence your electronic devices.
- We strongly encourage you to enter the sanctuary in silence as you prepare for worship.
- Before worship begins, we encourage you to speak to God. During worship, be ready for God to speak to you.
- After worship, we invite you to fellowship with one another, especially those God has brought to us our visitors.

#### WHY ARE YOU HERE?

As you come in this morning and settle into your seat, I invite you to think about the following:

- Wherever we go, we have a reason for going there. What is your reason for being here today?
- God is merciful and kind to us each and every day. What thanksgiving do you bring to God today?
- Because each day brings many challenges, what concern(s) do you bring to God today?
- As your Rector, I have come with thanksgiving for God's grace and mercy and to worship Him; because today is a reminder to me that another week has ended and a new week has begun. It is my hope that you have come to do the same. I encourage you to join me as we call upon our God and worship Him.

Canon Wilmot-a son of God

† This symbol represents the point at which we sign ourselves with the sign of the cross during worship.

The Word of God

Please stand for the Opening Prayer.



# **Lighting of the Advent Wreath**

Leader Come and save us, O Lord God of hosts.

People Come and save us, O Lord God of hosts.

Leader Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved:

People O Lord God of Hosts.

Leader Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

People Come and save us, O Lord God of Hosts.

Leader Show us your mercy, O Lord:

People And grant us your salvation.

# Opening Hymn Lo! He Comes, with Clouds Descending Hymnal 57

Lo! he comes, with clouds descending, once for our salvation slain; thousand thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him, robed in dreadful majesty; those who set at nought and sold him, pierced, and nailed him to the tree, deeply wailing, deeply wailing! shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of his passion still his dazzling body bears, cause of endless exultation to his ransomed worshipers; with what rapture, with what rapture! gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, amen! let all adore thee, high on thine eternal throne; Savior, take the power and glory; claim the kingdom for thine own: Alleluia! Alleluia! Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

+ Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.

People His mercy endures forever.

The Decalogue Please sit or kneel.

The Celebrant continues

Hear the commandments of God to his people:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.

You shall have no other gods but me.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Honor your father and your mother.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit murder.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit adultery.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not steal.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not be a false witness.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

## **Confession of Sin**

The Celebrant continues

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *1 John 1:8*, 9

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence is kept.

Celebrant and People

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. *Amen*.

The Celebrant stands and says

Almighty God have mercy + on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

People Amen.

Holy God,

Holy and Mighty,

Holy Immortal One,

People Have mercy upon us.

# The Collect for The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us pray.

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People Amen.

Please be seated.

### The Lessons

May we hear the Word of God through these words. *A Reading from the Prophet Isaiah* 7:10—16

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted."

The Word of the Lord

People Thanks be to God.

## Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

*To be read responsively by the Lay Reader and the Congregation.* 

- L Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; \* shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- C In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, \* stir up your strength and come to help us.

- L Restore us, O God of hosts; \* show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- C O LORD God of hosts, \*
  how long will you be angered
  despite the prayers of your people?
- L You have fed them with the bread of tears; \* you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
- C You have made us the derision of our neighbors, \* and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
- L Restore us, O God of hosts; \* show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- C Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, \* the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.
- L And so will we never turn away from you; \* give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- C Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; \* show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Celebrant and People

Glory to the + Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen*.

May we hear the Word of God through these words. *A Reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans 1:1—7* 

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of the Lord **People Thanks be to God.** 

## Gradual Hymn

# In the Bleak Midwinter

Hymnal 112

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

God, heav'n cannot hold him,
nor can earth sustain;
Heav'n and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign:
in the bleak midwinter a stable-place sufficed
the Lord God incarnate,
Our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Gospel is being announced, a cross is made,

- + (on the forehead) in my mind to understand it,
  - + (on the lips) on my lips to proclaim it, and
    - + (over the heart) in my heart to live it.

# The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew 1:18—25 **People** Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

The Gospel of the Lord

People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Sermon Hymn Hymnal 112

Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
throngèd in the air;
but his mother only,
in her maiden bliss,
worshiped the belovèd
sealed him with a kiss.

What can I give him,
poor as I am? If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
yet what can I give him—
give him all my heart.

**❖** Sermon

Wilmot T. Merchant, II ❖

Please use this time to silently reflect on what the Lord has spoken to you.

#### Please stand.

### The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and 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

(We bow for the following two lines in bold.)

he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. 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. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

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

*Please sit or kneel for The Prayers of the People.* 

# The Prayers of the People

The Prayer Leader and People pray responsively.

Leader The Lord be with you. **People** And also with you.

Leader Let us pray.

Father, we pray for your holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;

People That we all may be one.

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you;

People That your Name may be glorified by all people.

We pray for Sarah, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Sean, our Presiding Bishop, Ruth our Bishop, Wilmot our priest, and for all bishops and other ministers;

People That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world, for Donald our President, Henry our Governor, and J.O. our Mayor;

People That there may be justice and peace on the earth.

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;

People That our works may find favor in your sight.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;

People That they may be delivered from their distress.

Give to the departed eternal rest;

People Let light perpetual shine upon them.

We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;

People May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of our loved ones and others, for the men and women who are serving in the armed forces, and all others who serve to preserve and protect lives, and those who have asked us to remember them in our prayers, especially our families, friends, and loved ones.

Lord in your mercy

People Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the people in disaster and troubled areas and those affected by acts of violence here at home and all around the world. Let us also pray for the many First Responders and volunteers who are working to assist our brothers and sisters in those areas that have been devastated either by man-made or natural disaster.

Lord, in your mercy.

# People Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for God's people throughout the world, especially the Anglican Communion, The Episcopal Church, and The Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. Today we are praying for: All Priests and Deacons, Retired Clergy, Spouses and Surviving Spouses of The Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, and The Anglican Church of Burundi.

Lord, in your mercy.

People Hear our prayer.

\*Additional Prayers

# LET US PRAY AND GIVE THANKS FOR OUR VISITORS. LET US PRAY FOR TRAVELERS THIS WEEK.

*HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:* Charlie Benson (12/22), Winnie Douglas (12/24), George Ingalls (12/25), Mark Uzun (12/25), Jean Worthington (12/25), James Ginley (12/27), Donna Walsh (12/27).

*HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:* Tom & Brenda Pitkin (12/23), Wyck Richards & Bernie Walsh (12/26).

## LET US PRAY FOR OUR PARISH FAMILY.

INTERCESSORY AND THANKSGIVING PRAYER. As we continue to hold one another up in prayer in this parish, this week we are praying for: Ann McIntyre, Hazen McLaren, Jr., Robert & Judy McLellan, Wilmot & Caroline Merchant, Maureen Miller, BJ & Denny Mills, Tommy & Gayle Mizell, Judy Mohr, Kip & Victoria Molnar, Wayne & Sue Mumford.

Celebrant and People

Gracious and most loving God, we join them in committing to you whatever concerns they may have, asking you to let your will be done for them. We also join them in giving you thanks, for your many blessings bestowed upon them and their loved ones. We praise you and thank you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

#### Please stand.

#### The Peace

Jesus said, Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give to you . . . John 14:27

Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

At the conclusion of the peace, the Celebrant says:

Celebrant God is Good!
People All the Time.

Please be seated.

## The Holy Communion

Offertory **Prepare the Royal Highway** H. Hopson

Doxology—to be sung

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow; praise Him, all creatures here below; O Praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. O Praise Him! O Praise Him! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

# The Great Thanksgiving and Sanctus Eucharistic Prayer A

Please remain standing.

Celebrant: The Lord be with you. **People:** And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and every-where to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

Celebrant and People Bow during the underlined text

S129

Holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
+ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Please sit, kneel or remain standing.

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Celebrant and People

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever.

People Amen.

And now, let us sing in thanksgiving the prayer our Savior Christ taught us, *Celebrant and People* 

Our Father, which 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.



**The Breaking of the Bread** *Celebrant and People ~ to be sung* 

S154

Al-le-lu-ia. Al-le-lu-ia. Christ our Pass-o-ver is sac-ri-ficed for us; There-fore let us keep the feast.
Al-le-lu-ia. Al-le-lu-ia. Al-le-lu-ia.

The Celebrant says the following Invitation
The Gifts of God for the People of God.
Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

This is the Lord's table, not of the church, but of the Lord.

It is made ready for those who love Him and for those who want to love Him more.

So come, you who have much faith and you who have little;

You who have been here often and you who have not been here long;

You who have tried to follow and you who have failed;

Come, because it is the Lord who invites you.

It is His will that those who want Him should meet Him here.

Please join in singing our Communion Hymns.

# They'll Know We Are Christians

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord And we pray that all unity may one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land

Refrain

We will work with each other, we will work side by side We will work with each other, we will work side by side And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride

Refrain

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come And all praise to Christ Jesus, his only Son And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one

Refrain

## Hymnal 81

## Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung! Of Jesse's lineage coming as seers of old have sung. It came, a blossom bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
the Rose I have in mind,
with Mary we behold it,
the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
she bore to us a Savior,
when half spent was the night.

O Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air, dispel in glorious splendor the darkness everywhere; true man, yet very God, from sin and death now save us, and share our every load.



*After Communion, the Celebrant says:* Let us pray.

Almighty and everliving God, we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; and for assuring us in these holy mysteries that we are living members of the Body of your Son, and heirs of your eternal kingdom. And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen*.

The Celebrant gives the blessing

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin.

# People Amen.

May he whose second Coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love.

# People Amen.

May you, who rejoice in the celebration of the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and your loved ones far and near and remain with all of you for ever.

People Amen.

Please be seated for a brief announcement.

**Benediction** *To be sung—please stand.* 

God be with you till we meet again;
By His counsels guide, uphold you,
With His sheep securely fold you,
God be with you till we meet again.



O come, O come, Emmanuel, 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!

O come, thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily; to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go.

Refrain

O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height in ancient times didst give the law, in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

Refrain

O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree, free them from Satan's tyranny that trust thy mighty power to save, and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

*Celebrant* We are called to be one with God and each other in Christ.

People By living the Gospel with love and compassion.

Celebrant Alleluia. Alleluia. Let us go in peace to love and serve God and

one another.

People Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Alleluia.

### THE WORSHIP HAS ENDED. LET THE SERVICE BEGIN.

"... what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" *Micah 6:8* 



Cover Museo Del Prado, *"Saint Joseph's Dream,"* 1660 Oil on Canvas, Herrera the Younger, Francisco de, Sevilla (Spain) 1627—Madrid (Spain) 1685.

Music not in Public Domain covered under One License #729456-A or St. James Press License #15729.

#### **Our Mission**

is to be one with God and humanity in Christ by living the Gospel with love and compassion.



#### **Our Vision**

is to become comfortable with Jesus Christ and boldly proclaim Him.



#### PARTICIPANTS IN THE CELEBRATION AT ST. STEPHEN'S

Ministers: The Congregants of St. Stephen's, Family, Friends and Visitors

Celebrant: The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Wilmot T. Merchant, II

Dir of Music: Roberta Rowland-Raybold, c.a.g.o. Vergers: Cathy Fellows and Robert Dunn

## MINISTERS AND LAYLEADERS

The Most Rev. Sean Rowe, Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church The Right Rev. Ruth Woodliff-Stanley, Bishop, The Diocese of SC The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Wilmot T. Merchant, II, Rector

## **Vestry Members**

- ❖ Will Bridges, Senior Warden (2025) ❖ Sue Crouch, Junior Warden (2026)
- ❖ Veronica Brown (2025)❖ Marrjo Shattuck (2025)❖ Robert Dunn (2026)
- ❖ Wayne Mumford (2026) Mike Raley (2027) ❖ Tracy Thompson (2027)
- Chris Welborn (2027)

## Associate Vestry Members

❖ Harry Austin, Jr. (2025) ❖ Kathy Finch (2025) ❖ James Uzun (2025)

## **Vestry Officers**

- ❖ Bill Mann, Treasurer ❖ Kathy Finch, Assistant Treasurer
- ❖ Jane Buckner, Parish/Vestry Clerk

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 801 11th Avenue North, North Myrtle Beach SC 29582, 843.249.1169