

**LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD**  
**– FROM PASTOR LAWRENCE**

At the beginning of this year, “2020 Vision” became a trending phrase among congregations. More than a clever turn of phrase, this served as a title for sermons, a framework for goals, a tool for assessments, and much more. The year 2020 not only felt full of hope, it seemed quite filled with certainty. Take a moment to peer back all the way to January 1. What did you anticipate that this auspicious year held for you?

In our ministry, the twelve months of 2020 appeared poised to be a year with expanding family and campus ministries, the launch of our “Called to Life!” Teams, introduction of the vision for our “Journey Outward,” and much more!

As I look back over the year, I reflect on how differently 2020 turned out than expected. I never, ever imagined an Easter Sunday without a congregation filling the sanctuary with resurrection joy! If you told me in January that the choral and congregational singing we so cherish would not lift the roof off the rafters for the majority of the year, I would have been shocked into silence. I may have wondered if you had just read an apocalyptic book or watched a dystopian movie if you advised us to cancel the Spirit of Scotland journey or the Summer Youth Mission Trip due to a worldwide pandemic. What a humbling and hugely significant year!

Perhaps we are prepared for the Season of Advent as never before, for Advent itself is a time of preparation. Among my favorite passages throughout scripture are the stories of Mary in Nazareth, as well as Anna and Simeon in Jerusalem. I encourage you to read Luke 1-2 as the gospel writer so lovingly describes the preparation each one of these faithful folks took as they expected God’s light and love to break into a world that may seem so filled with darkness and fear.

They made themselves ready and available for the Living Lord to work through them. They waited ... and waited. Luke 2:22-36 describes how Simeon and Anna went to the temple every day in order to see the Messiah. On the day that Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple, Simeon and Anna were ready. Moved beyond words, Simeon praised God with this song:

***“...my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.”***  
(emphasis added)

Mary, Simeon and Anna may have been dismissed as dreamers by those around them. Yet, scripture bears witness that they were those who had prepared themselves for God to act in and through them. They perceived what others did not.

As we prepare for the great gift of Emmanuel - God with us - our theme this Advent Season is Those Who Dream. This theme is inspired by the phrase from Psalm 126 - *we were like those who dream*. I encourage you to read the entire Psalm!

Our printed devotion this Advent on the theme of Those Who Dream is a collaboration of pastors and artists. Please click [here](#) to request your copy to be mailed to you or pick one up at the church.

The engaging artwork from Those Who Dream offers us an opportunity to explore a new form of Bible Study called - "Visio Divina." Visio Divina is Latin for "divine seeing" and extends the practice of Lectio Divina by the use of visual imagery for meditation, reflection and prayer.

We offer you the opportunity to join us in a small group setting for Advent Visio Divina on Sunday, December 20 at 11:45 a.m. As we continue to adapt to the pandemic, please contact [me](#) for meeting details.

What did Mary perceive when she first looked upon Jesus on Christmas day?  
What did Simeon see when he held Jesus in his arms and began praising God?

How will you prepare for the great gift of incarnation ... of the Word becoming flesh... of God taking on human form?

For the Lord God proclaims, *I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

As we enter the Season of Advent, I enthusiastically encourage you to join me in this new way of seeing with gracious and generous eyes.