

# *St. Mark's United Methodist Church*

*601 Eighth Street | Laurel, Maryland 20707*

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*"We come together at St. Mark's to praise God, celebrate His love for us, and grow together in Christ by equipping the people of God to implement and spread His Word to the world."*

*Rev. Eugene W. Matthews, Pastor*

*443.257.2730 | [reveugene@comcast.net](mailto:reveugene@comcast.net)*

*Rev. Dr. George F. DeFord, Pastor Emeritus*

*Bishop LaTrelle Millet Easterling*

*Baltimore/Washington Conference*

*Rev. Sarah Schlieckert*

*District Superintendent*

*for the Southern Annapolis Region*

*Welcome, as we gather here to worship!*

*Sunday, December 17, 2023*

*Third Sunday of Advent: "Rejoicing"*  
*Order of Service*

*Ushers:*

*Gemma Desouza-Ottley and Sharon Thomas*

*Sister Sandra Johnson, Worship Leaders*

**Prelude .....Rev. Henry Tindal**

**Lighting of the Candles ..... Usher**

**Gathering Song.....St. Mark's Choir/Congregation**

*"Sweet, Sweet Spirit"*

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know that it's the spirit of the Lord; There are sweet expressions on each face, and I know they feel the presence of the Lord. Sweet holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove, stay right here with us filling us with your love; and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise; without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived when we shall leave this place.

**Greeting/Call to Worship ..... Sister Sandra Johnson**

Leader: Prepare the way! Make straight paths for God's Son.

**People: How can you know he is the One? Perhaps there is another.**

Leader: Prepare the way! This is the Word made flesh, our brother and our friend.

**People: This is Mary' little boy child, born in a manger and sent to Africa in exile.**

Leader: Oh, this is the Incognito God, who hides in our colored skins, knows our broken language, and has suffered our undeserved pain.

**ALL: WE bow in humble son to him and worship him today in joy, great joy "down in our souls."**

*Lighting of the Advent Candle —  
“Rejoicing”  
Patricia Mundell and Cynthia Whitfield*

**Hymn of Praise .....St. Mark’s Choir / Congregation**

*“Joy to the World”*

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare Him room, and heav’n and nature sing,  
and heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ, while fields  
and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding  
joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to  
make His blessings flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far  
as, far as the curse is found.
- 4 He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the  
glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love, and wonders of His love,  
and wonders, wonders of His love.

**Prayer of Confession and Assurance (*Unison*)**

The season of Advent declares that God has come to live among us and did so in the human flesh of Jesus Christ. So often we have sinned and not allowed him to reign over our lives – this is sin. However, today we recognize that through his presence we are strengthened for the life of faith and discipleship. Grant that in this advent season, we will be further strengthened to live in fullness all our days.

**Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer (*sung*)**

**The Invocation .....Sister Sandra Johnson**

**Song of Meditation ..... St. Mark’s Choir**

**The Prayer of Illumination (*In Unison*)**

JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD is Come – come to us especially as we hear the Word of God read in our hearing today. May God’s Word bring Joy, Great Joy, so that we may feel a new experience through the revelation of your presence in the interpretation of the scriptures today. May it be so, **Amen.**

**Scripture Reading #1 ..... Sister Sandra Johnson**  
(Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11, *Common English Bible*)

**61** The Lord God's spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners,<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and a day of vindication for our God, to comfort all who mourn,<sup>3</sup> to provide for Zion's mourners, to give them a crown in place of ashes, oil of joy in place of mourning, a mantle of praise in place of discouragement. They will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by the Lord to glorify himself.<sup>4</sup> They will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will restore formerly deserted places; they will renew ruined cities, places deserted in generations past.

<sup>8</sup> I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and dishonesty. I will faithfully give them their wage, and make with them an enduring covenant.<sup>9</sup> Their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants among the peoples. All who see them will recognize that they are a people blessed by the Lord.

<sup>10</sup> I surely rejoice in the Lord; my heart is joyful because of my God, because he has clothed me with clothes of victory, wrapped me in a robe of righteousness like a bridegroom in a priestly crown, and like a bride adorned in jewelry.<sup>11</sup> As the earth puts out its growth, and as a garden grows its seeds, so the Lord God will grow righteousness and praise before all the nations.

**Scripture Reading #2 ..... Sister Sandra Johnson**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:16–24, *Common English Bible*)

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always. <sup>17</sup> Pray continually. <sup>18</sup> Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Don't suppress the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Don't brush off Spirit-inspired messages,<sup>21</sup> but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid every kind of evil. <sup>23</sup> Now, may the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him; and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept intact and blameless at our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. <sup>24</sup> The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.

**Selection ..... St. Mark's Choir**

**Acknowledgement of Visitors /**

**Announcements ..... Sister Sandra Johnson**

**Blessing of the Offering ..... Sister Sandra Johnson**  
**Offertory**

**Scripture Reading #3 (Gospel)..... Sister Sandra Johnson**  
(*John 1:6–8, 19–28, Common English Version, please stand*)

<sup>6</sup> A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. <sup>8</sup> He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

<sup>19</sup> This is John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

<sup>20</sup> John confessed (he didn't deny but confessed), "I'm not the Christ." <sup>21</sup> They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" John said, "I'm not." "Are you the prophet?" John answered, "No." <sup>22</sup> They asked, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup> John replied, "*I am a voice crying out in the wilderness, Make the Lord's path straight, just as the prophet Isaiah said.*"

<sup>24</sup> Those sent by the Pharisees <sup>25</sup> asked, "Why do you baptize if you aren't the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

<sup>26</sup> John answered, "I baptize with water. Someone greater stands among you, whom you don't recognize. <sup>27</sup> He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie his sandal straps." <sup>28</sup> This encounter took place across the Jordan in Bethany where John was baptizing.

**The Gloria Patri – "Glory Be to the Father" (Hymnal, #71)**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

**Hymn of Preparation ..... St. Mark's Choir**

**Inspirational Message ..... Dr. Rev. Louis Shockley, Jr.**

***"Oaks of Righteousness"***

(*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8–11, CEB*)

**Invitation / Praise and Concerns**

**Altar Call ..... Dr. Rev. Louis Shockley, Jr.**

**Benediction**

# Announcements

**Wearing a mask while in the sanctuary is at your discretion.**

Worship Attendance — 12/10/2023	
In-Person	?
YouTube	?
Total	?

## Pray Daily at Noon

Please remember to pray daily at NOON. Some areas to include in your prayer can include the pandemic, racial healing, government leaders, educational challenges, our youth and most importantly for our sick and shut-ins and each other.



**Tuesday Women's Roundtable (6:30 p.m.) — Book Study — Purpose Driven Life.** Join

Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88571184455?pwd=UmpvVERkcjkyVFVoVHR1YlJxK284Zz09;>

Meeting ID: **885 7118 4455**; Passcode: **459563**

**Wednesday Night Experience (7:15 p.m.)** — This study is based on the Upper Room reading for Wednesday. **Call in info:** 267.807.9611, **Access Code:** 331960.

**Today, Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> (5:00 p.m.) Christmas Concert at Queens Chapel UMC — “Sharing Good Tidings of Great Joy” Luke 2:10.** Refreshments following concert. Choir made up of local churches.

St. Mark's UMC our beloved Pastor Matthews will be retiring in June. We have been asked by the conference to share our desires for the next pastor of St. Mark's UMC. We are asking all members to actively participate in the search by elevating your voice and sharing your perspectives. You can do so in 3 ways – (1) Complete the questionnaire, (2) Attend a Zoom Listening Session, or (3) Speak with a member of SPRC. You are encouraged to participate in at least one way; but of course, you are also welcome to participate in all sessions. This is an important time for our church, and we appreciate all who are willing to share as we think thoughtfully about our path forward as a church and congregation.

1. Questionnaires were given out last Sunday and are due today, **December 17 or next Sunday, December 24.**
2. Join us this **Thursday, December 21** to share your thoughts. We will be on Zoom at 7:00pm. Please join: Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82003932137?pwd=VFZYbjVFaGs4R2pqelhcOWNVVTFBUT09;>  
**Meeting ID:** 820 0393 2137; **Passcode:** 604793
3. Reach out to a member of SPRC to share your thoughts: Jaime Coffen, Venita Stratford-Smith, Andrea Gibson, Nena Hughes, Desire Vanloo, Tony Latney, Robert Catchings

**Thursday, December 21<sup>th</sup> (6:30 p.m.)** — Choir rehearsal

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The Christmas and Year ending Seasons is a customary time when most of us receive financial requests in support of our Alma Maters, along with asking from many non-profit, charitable organizations. This year I have decided to intentionally add St. Mark's to my special Christmas list. This is an invitation for members and friends of St. Mark's to join with me in making a special gift to the Church on **Sunday, December 24, 2023**. Our gifts will be in celebration and thankfulness to God for the GIFT in the personage of Jesus Christ our Savior. **Giving envelopes will be distributed today, you can use these for your offering next week.**

*Pastor Matthews*

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**Attention Women: Roundtable Recharge Retreat**, April 25<sup>th</sup>–April 27<sup>th</sup> at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum. For additional information, please **Nena Hughes**. \$100 deposit will hold your reservation.

**Note from Finance:** First, thank you to all that have been giving. This is a reminder that there are several ways to get your offering to the church:

1. You can drop it off at the church and place it in church mailbox
2. You can mail it to the church (601 Eighth Street, Laurel, MD 20707)
3. You can use on-line giving (Give–St. Marks —  
<https://www.shelbygiving.com/app/giving/stmarkslmd>)



***“Proclaiming Christ to the generations...  
Equipping disciples to transform the world”***

**Special Prayers / Sick and Shut-In List:** If you hear of anyone that needs special prayer or is taken to the hospital, please contact: Rev. Eugene Matthews (443.257.2730),  
[reveugene@comcast.net](mailto:reveugene@comcast.net).

Judith James, Isabella Dustin, Joseph Ballard, Robert (Bobby) Marshall, Oscar Johnson, Harold (Bubby) Awkward, Jr., Tyrone Awkward, William (Jimmy) Scott, Charles Gregg, Rev. Henry Tindal, Rev. George F. DeFord, Janet Carey, Lafayette and Elaine Harvey, All branches of the Military, Bernice Jackson, Brenda Jackson, Shawn Settles, Floyd Hughes Sr., Jannette Shuford-Reeves, Phillip Reese, Naomi Williams (Ms. Cynthia's Mom), Leah Henry, Sonja Smith, Marvin Hebron, Eric Smith, Gloria Thomas, Wanda Dumas, Tyrone Mundell, Ernestine Gibson, James Matthews, Birdie Walker, Paul Browder, Lamar Payne, Kevin Miller, Hannah Polk

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