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EMBRACE | EMBODY | EXTEND



**ADVENT**  
HOUSTON

**Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**

JANUARY • 28 • 2024

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Advent means “arrival” or “coming.” Many of us have a temptation to believe that we can live a good enough life or do the right things to make our way to God. We think that if we do enough of the right types of things, then God will allow us into His home. But the Bible tells us again and again that we are never the first movers in this relationship. God is always the initiator. He spoke all things into being; He created; and He pursues. He is the one who arrives. And we see this in the first advent of God.

John begins his gospel by saying, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (ESV). God the Son came to us in the first advent: what the church calls the incarnation. He didn’t wait for us to try and make our way to his heavenly abode. He didn’t stand above us to lecture us or condemn us. He came to us. In fact, he became one of us, taking on flesh, pain, sorrows, and death.

And God hasn’t stopped there. After Jesus came into this world to inaugurate the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven, after he died on the cross to atone for our sins, and after he was raised from the dead to defeat sin and death, He ascended to heaven to assume the throne. Scripture tells us that he will come again. And when he comes again, he is bringing the new heavens and the new earth with him.

It is in this second advent, that Jesus promises to make all things new. Though he has already dealt with sin and death, it isn’t until he comes again that death will be eradicated.

## EPIPHANY

The season of Epiphany is a time of enlightenment. The word Epiphany comes from the a Greek word meaning “to bring of light.” The season is a five to nine week period celebrating and remembering the time that God manifested Jesus as the Son of God as the Savior to and for the world.

During Christmas we joyfully celebrated the coming of [the] light in the birth of Jesus. Now the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6 brings this theme to culmination - the light of Christ made manifest to the whole world as symbolized by the Gentile Magi from the East. Thus the day of Epiphany and the season that follows complete what is sometimes called in the liturgical year the Cycle of Light.

Twenty centuries after the birth and ministry of Jesus, we can take it for granted that Jesus was not just the Anointed One for Israel, but that He was the promised Messiah (meaning anointed one) that would bring salvation to all peoples, all tribes, and all nations. So, the season of Epiphany is a time when we remember that Jesus was made manifest to the Wise Men who came to worship him. It is a time when we remember that manifests his ministry and power to the world around him. And it is a time when we begin to more fully contemplate what it means for us to participate in extending his light to the nations. Allow for this season, to be a time when you think more about how you might be able to make Jesus’ story manifest in your own life and to the lives of others.

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## REFLECTIONS

When God makes a covenant with us, God says: 'I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me, or betray me.' In our society we don't speak much about covenants; we speak about contracts. When we make a contract with a person, we say: 'I will fulfill my part as long as you fulfill yours. When you don't live up to your promises, I no longer have to live up to mine.' Contracts are often broken because the partners are unwilling or unable to be faithful to their terms.

But God didn't make a contract with us; God made a covenant with us, and God wants our relationships with one another to reflect that covenant. That's why marriage, friendship, life in community are all ways to give visibility to God's faithfulness in our lives together.

— **Henri J.M. Nouwen**

He does not love us if we love Him. He loves us with an unconditional love; therefore, we should love Him. The message of the covenant is one of God's totally free grace to His people. Of course, it calls for a response of total commitment. But notice the order: God's covenant love is not the result of our commitment; it is the cause of it. The pattern is, "I will, therefore you should;" not "I will, but only if you will first."

— **Sinclair Ferguson**

Prayer: It is the flame of my life to worship thee,  
the crown and glory of my soul to adore thee,  
heavenly pleasure to approach thee.  
Give me power by thy Spirit to help me worship now,  
that I may forget the world,  
be brought into fullness of life,  
be refreshed, comforted, blessed.  
Give me knowledge of thy goodness  
that I might not be over-awed by thy greatness;  
Give me Jesus.

— **From Valley of Vision**

But, as we wait for him to come again, we wait with hope. And as we wait, we live in light of that hope – praying for and acting in the knowledge that God's Kingdom will come in bits and pieces even now, offering us glimpses of the way that it is supposed to be, the way it will ultimately be.

In the middle of these two advents of Christ, there is a third advent. There is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to be with us, to help us to remember all that he taught and accomplished (John 14:26), and to help us as we follow him by faith. And Jesus tells us to follow him in the same way that he himself came. We are to leave our own comforts and to come into the places that he has called us. And so, in that way, we want to take the example of Christ's first coming to enter into the lives of our community. We want to bear witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God in its fullness in the future. And, we want to minister as the mouthpiece, the hands, and the feet of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21).

So, Advent Houston is a **coming** of a group of Christians to the Texas Medical Center, to Rice University, and to the surrounding neighborhoods to embrace, embody, and extend the grace of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

We are so glad that you are here with us!

# SERVICE OF THE WORD

## \*CALL TO WORSHIP

Adapted from Psalm 111

**Leader:** Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

**People:** **Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.**

**Leader:** He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful.

**People:** **He provides for those who worship him; he is ever mindful of his covenant.**

**Leader:** His covenant is established forever. Holy and awesome is his name.

**ALL:** **I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Praise the LORD!**

## \*SONG

## For the Beauty of the Earth

Words by Folliott Sandford Pierpoint and Music by Conrad Kocher

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### Verse 1

For the beauty of the Earth, for the glory of the skies  
For the love, which from our birth, over and around us lies

### Chorus

Lord of all to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise  
Lord of all to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

### Verse 2

For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night  
Hill and vale and tree and flower, Sun and moon and stars of light

*Chorus*

### Verse 3

For each perfect gift of thine to our world so freely given  
Graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven

### Ending

Lord of all to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise  
Lord of all to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise  
Lord of all to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

## PRAYER OF ADORATION

### FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 28:16-20

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: **Praise be to you Lord Christ.**

### SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Colossians 1:15-20

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (ESV)

Leader: The Word of the LORD

People: **Thanks be to God.**

## **\*SONG**

## **All the Poor and Powerless**

Words and music by Leslie Jordan and David Leonard

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### **Verse 1**

All the poor and powerless  
And all the lost and lonely  
All the thieves will come confess  
And know that you are holy  
And know that you are holy

### **Chorus**

And all will sing out, Hallelujah  
And we will cry out, Hallelujah

### **Verse 2**

All the hearts who are content  
And all who feel unworthy  
All who hurt with nothing left  
Will know that you are holy  
Chorus x2

### **Bridge**

Shout it, go on and scream it from the mountains  
Go on and tell it to the masses  
That He is God (x3)

### **Reprise**

We will sing out hallelujah  
We will cry out hallelujah  
We will sing out hallelujah (x2)

### **Ending**

Shout it, go on and scream it from the mountains  
Go on and tell it to the masses  
That He is God

## **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

Selected questions from Westminster Shorter Catechism, modernized by City Reformed Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh.

Leader: What is the misery of that state into which mankind fell?  
**ALL: All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so are made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.**

Leader: Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery?  
**ALL: Out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, God chose some for everlasting life, and he entered into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of their state of sin and misery and to bring them into a state of salvation by a redeemer.**

Leader: Who is the redeemer of God's elect?  
**ALL: The only redeemer of God's chosen ones is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continues to be God and man in two wholly distinct natures and one person, forever.**

## **CONFESSION OF SIN**

Adapted from Henry Smith, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan Preacher

**ALL: We appeal, O Lord, to your mercies, knowing them to be much more greater than our sins, and you came not to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance, to whom you say, "Come unto me all you that are overladen and diseased with the burden of sins, and I will ease you and refresh you." Yes, Lord, you are that God who wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live. You are our Savior, who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of your truth. Therefore, O Lord, we humbly ask you not to withdraw your mercies from us because of our sins, but rather, O Lord, lay upon us your saving health, that you may show yourself toward us to be a Savior, Amen.**

## \*ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Adapted from *Heidelberg Catechism*, 4.056

**Leader:** Hear the good news!  
For the sake of Christ's reconciling work, God will no more remember our sins or the sinfulness with which we have to struggle throughout our lives.

**People:** **God graciously imparts to us the righteousness of Christ so that we may never come into condemnation.**

## \*Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis)

Words: Luke 2:29-32; Music: LAND OF REST, American Folk Melody  
Arranged by David Lutes, 2010

Lord, bid your servant go in peace,  
Your word is now fulfilled.  
These eyes have seen salvation's dawn,  
This child so long foretold

This is the Savior of the world  
The Gentile's promised light  
God's glory dwelling in our midst  
The joy of Israel

ADVENTURERS

CHILDREN (1<sup>ST</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADES)

All children, 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades, are invited to go to Adventurers, for a children's lesson and activity time during the sermon. The Adventurers will be escorted back to the Chapel during the Passing of the Peace.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

From *Book of Common Prayer, Intercessions for Epiphany*

**Leader:** We pray that Christ may be seen in the life of the Church.  
You have called us into the family  
of those who are the children of God.  
May our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ  
be strengthened by your grace.  
Lord of glory,

**People:** **Hear our prayer.**



Leader: You have called us to be a temple  
where the Holy Spirit can dwell.  
Give us clean hands and pure hearts  
so that our lives will reflect your holiness.  
Lord of glory,

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: You have called us to be a light to the world,  
so that those in darkness come to you.  
May our lives shine as a witness  
to the saving grace you have given for all.  
Lord of glory,

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: You have called us to be members of your body,  
so that when one suffers, all suffer together.  
We ask for your comfort and healing power  
to bring hope to those in distress.  
Lord of glory,

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: You have called us to be the Bride,  
where you, Lord, are the Bridegroom.  
Prepare us for the wedding feast,  
where we will be united with you for ever.  
Lord of glory,

**People: Hear our prayer.**

*Congregants are invited to pray out loud for things in the world, our city, the church, or our lives. After finishing the leader will prompt in prayer the following response:*

*Leader Lord of glory,*

***People: Hear our prayer.***

Leader: We pray all of this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray,  
saying ...

**People: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your 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 Yours is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

**SERMON SCRIPTURE READING**

**Genesis 8:13, 15-17, 20-22;  
9:1, 8-17**

[13] In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry.

...

[15] Then God said to Noah, [16] “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. [17] Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” ...

[20] Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. [21] And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. [22] While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

[9:1] And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth....

[8] Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, [9] “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, [10] and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. [11] I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” [12] And God said, “This is the sign of the

covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: [13] I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. [14] When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, [15] I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. [16] When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” [17] God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.” (ESV)

Leader: The Word of the LORD  
People: **Thanks be to God.**

## **SERMON**

**Rev. Taylor Leachman**

“The Origins Story: The Promise”



Do you have a question about today’s sermon? If so, click on the QR code for discussion at the next Question & Discussion time.

## PASSING OF THE PEACE

**Leader:** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, go and be reconciled with one another.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

**People:** **And also with you!**

### RETURN OF ADVENTURERS

During the Passing of the Peace, the teachers will bring the Adventurers back to the Chapel.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are glad to have you worship with us today. Please sign-in on the pad located near the center aisle and record your information there.

## OFFERTORY & PRIVATE PRAYER

All giving is a response to God's generosity to you in all aspects of life, but particularly through the person and work of Jesus. If you are not sure what you think about Jesus or Christianity, or if you are a guest, we would invite you to refrain from giving at this time.

Online giving is available at [adventpres.org/give](http://adventpres.org/give). You can also scan this QR code or place a gift in the offering basket near the entrance of the chapel.



# SERVICE OF THE TABLE

## CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

**ALL:** We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord, who always delights in showing mercy. Nourish us, therefore, gracious Lord, so that in partaking of this sacrament of your son Jesus Christ, we may walk in newness of life, grow into his likeness, and evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

**Leader:** All honor and praise be yours always and everywhere, mighty creator, ever-living God, through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord: for at this time we celebrate your glory made present in our midst.

In the coming of the magi the King of all the world was revealed to the nations. In the waters of baptism Jesus was revealed as the Christ, the Savior sent to redeem us. In the water made wine the new creation was revealed at the wedding feast. Poverty was turned to riches, sorrow into joy.

Therefore with all the angels of heaven we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

**ALL:**

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of power and might,  
Hea - ven and earth are full, full of your  
Bless - ed is He who comes in the name of the  
glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est. Ho -  
Lord. san - na in the high - est.

## WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Leader: Alleluia, Alleluia  
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
And we have seen His glory.

All: Alleluia

## COMMUNION AT ADVENT

Advent welcomes all baptized Christians to participate in the Lord's table. This includes all Christians, whether members at Advent or at another church. Children who have been baptized and admitted to the table by the elders of this church or the leadership of another church are also welcome to the table.

If you're still investigating Christianity, not sure what you believe, or simply choose not to participate, you may either remain in your seat or come forward, cross your arms over your chest, and receive a blessing. Feel free to use the prayers printed in the bulletin below. Non-communicating children are encouraged to come forward to receive a blessing while their parents receive communion.

### ABOUT THE ELEMENTS

- We serve both wine and grape juice for communion.
- Grape juice is available in the center of the communion trays; wine is available along the edge.
- All communion bread is gluten free.



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### 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. Give me the ability to follow you no matter what it might cost me. Give me an understanding for you that is coherent, convincing, and leads to the life that you promise. Amen. A prayer of belief: A prayer for those struggling against sin: A prayer for covenant children who have not yet made a profession of faith:

### PRAYER OF BELIEF

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever believed, but through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared 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 and are now representing me at the Father's right hand in heaven, I turn from my sins and receive you as my savior. Amen.

### PRAYER FOR THOSE STRUGGLING AGAINST SIN

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

### A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT YET MADE A PROFESSION OF FAITH

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me the opportunity to grow up in a Christian family where I am surrounded by the good news of the gospel. Help me to grow in my understanding of who you are and what you have done for me on the cross. Help me learn what it means for me to turn from my sins and trust in you alone for my salvation. Teach me what it means to follow you as one of your disciples. Amen.

## COMMUNION SONG

## Just As I Am

Words by Charlotte Elliott and music by Bobby Guy and Craig Brown

© 1998 Nomella Music

Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee Whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.



## \*SONG

## Isaiah 43

Words from Isaiah 43, author unknown

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### Verse 1

When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you,  
And the waves will not  
Overcome you.  
Do not fear,  
For I have redeemed you,  
I have called you by name,  
You are Mine.

### Chorus (Echo)

For I am the Lord your God (I am the Lord your God),  
I am the Lord your God (I am)  
The Holy One of Israel  
Your Savior  
For I am the Lord your God (I am the Lord your God),  
I am the Lord your God (I am)  
The Holy One of Israel  
Your Savior  
I am the Lord (do not fear)  
I am the Lord (do not fear)  
I am the Lord (do not fear)  
I am the Lord (do not fear)

### Verse 2

When you walk through the fire  
You'll not be burned,  
And the flames will not  
Consume you.  
Do not fear,  
For I have redeemed you,  
I have called you by name,  
You are Mine.

*Chorus*

## **\*CLOSING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING & MISSION**

Adapted from "faithandworship.com," Prayers for Epiphany

**Leader:** We pray for confidence to share your Word with others and for the opportunity to proclaim it. Forgive our reluctance, our timidity.

We pray for wisdom to know what should be said and the moment in which to say it. Forgive our reticence, our anxiety.

We pray for knowledge of the fullness of your Grace and the willingness to live it. Forgive our ignorance, our self-reliance.

Be the center of all we are. The Light by which we walk. The blessing we bring to others. Through Jesus Christ alone we ask.  
Amen

## **\*BENEDICTION**

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

**Leader:** The LORD bless you and keep you;  
The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

**ALL: AMEN.**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

*Sunday, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup> 12:00 – 1:00 P.M.*

Join us for our second annual Congregational Meeting. All are welcome to attend.

Location: Weekley Family YMCA Multi-purpose Room



### STUDENT LUNCH

*Sunday, Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> 12:30 P.M.*

Calling all college students ... join Advent's monthly lunch for undergrads, graduate, and medical students. Register at [Adventpres.org/events](http://Adventpres.org/events) so we can have a good headcount.

Invite a friend to meet your friends.

Location: The Price's 2202 McClendon St.



### NEW PARISH GROUPS ARE COMING

Interested in being more connected at Advent Houston? Join a Parish Group!

Click the QR code, complete the form.



### Media Release

Advent Houston shares photos taken at our events in our monthly newsletters, on our website, or on social media for the purpose of promoting and highlighting the church's mission. By being present, you consent to being photographed and having these photos shared. For individuals who are not comfortable being visible in a shared photograph, please notify the church at [admin@adventpres.org](mailto:admin@adventpres.org) to opt out of the media release.

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**ADVENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON**

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ADVENT HOUSTON EXISTS TO EMBRACE,  
EMBODY, AND EXTEND THE GRACE OF JESUS  
TO THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER, RICE  
UNIVERSITY, AND THE SURROUNDING  
NEIGHBORHOODS.

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