

Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ & the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Christmas Eve Worship

December 24, 2023

8:00 PM

Prelude

Carols of the Season

Sarah & Cheryl

Musical Call to Worship

“Rise Up Shepherds”

Brent Johnson

Christmas Proclamation:

Luke 2:8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ 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!”

*Opening Hymn

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” #182

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him, born the king of angels.

Refrain:

*O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
“Glory to God, all glory in the highest!” *(Refrain)*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing *(Refrain)*

*Opening Prayer

Advent Wreath and Christ Candle

One: Advent hope moves us; Advent love leads us; Advent joy stirs us; Advent peace stills us—that we might affirm our Savior and King Jesus. It is time we set flame to this Advent affirmation by lighting the Christ Candle, now, on Christmas Eve.

All: **We believe that Jesus is the living Word of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He was—and is—the long-awaited Messiah, whose coming was promised. By the Holy Spirit, the same Jesus who reigns in heaven also dwells in our hearts. As *God-with-Us*, Christ deserves our highest loyalty and total commitment. In Jesus Christ, our hope is fulfilled; our love is realized; our joy is complete; and our peace is sealed. Rejoice! A Savior is born!**

Hymn

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” #185

Hark! the herald angels sing," Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Refrain:

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"*

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel. *(Refrain)*

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth. *(Refrain)*

First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. ³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Responsorial

Psalms 98

One: O sing to the LORD a new song, for God has done marvelous things.

All: Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

One: Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it.

All: For God is coming to visit the earth. God will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. Amen!

Third Reading

The Gospel of John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

*Hymn

“O Holy Night” #187 Vv. 1, 3

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appears and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night divine!—O night, O night divine!

Truly he taught us to love one another,
His law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raising,
Let all within in us praise his holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise his name forever!
His power and glory ever-more proclaim!
His power and glory—every more proclaim!



Gospel*Luke 2:1-20**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ 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.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ 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!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

One: These are the words of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Message

Christ is Born!

Pastor Rich

Hymn

"Angels We have Heard on High" #188

Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply echo back their joyous strains.

Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say, what may the tidings be, which inspire your heavenly song?

Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see, him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee—Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria—in excelsis Deo!

Christmas Communion

Pastor: People of God, the scriptures say that Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

All: Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Into Bethlehem we believe God manifested in humanity, through Christ Jesus, to be our living bread.

Pastor: In our time, and in our place, the celebration of Christ’s birth happens in the cold and darkness of winter.

All: The darkness requires us to seek out light, to see where we are going. The cold requires us to seek warmth for our very lives. Scripture and season both point to our need for communion with the One who can be our light, our warmth, and our food for life.

Pastor: And so, here at this Table we take bread and cup, and we ask the Holy Spirit to make it for us, communion with Christ who gave his life as the bread of heaven and as the cup of eternal life—the Holy One who is the light in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome.

All: Here at this Table we remember that Christ was born into the world to be an outpouring of God’s Love—a love that will, one day, renew all things. Amen.

Pastor: Beloved of God, come to the table!

Communion Music

“A Baby Changes Everything”

Shelly Conrad

Prayers of the People

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you!

Let us pray: *Wonderful Counselor*, tonight we pray for the world’s leaders to use their power to lift burdens, to act justly, and to ease the suffering of those who need it most.

All: God, hear our prayer!

Mighty God, tonight we pray for those who are sick, those who may be dying, and for those who have lost loved ones. We pray for those who may feel alone and lonely. May those who walk in deep darkness now begin to see the great light of hope.

All: God, hear our prayer!

One: *Prince of Peace*, we pray for an end to violence and warfare, and that your authority may continue to grow until there is endless peace in every land. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the Christ-child, who taught us to pray:

All: “Our Father, who 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, the Power, and the Glory forever.” Amen!

Offering

Our offerings are first and foremost what we give to the world through justice, kindness, and mercy—and these we can do every day. Our offerings can also take the form of financial contributions to the church to support our ministries.

If you are not in the sanctuary, online donations can be made at:

www.communityunited.church/donate/

Or, if you prefer to mail in a check, that can be addressed to the church at:

1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

Ministry of Music and Time for Contemplation

“Christmas Lullaby”

Leah Johnson

Your offerings make this inclusive ministry possible. Thank you! Because of you, our church reaches through and beyond Erie: providing worship, community, and service. As you can give generously, it is well received.

Christmas Affirmation of Faith

Pastor: People of God, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

**All: Christ is born! Death no longer has a hold on us! Darkness must flee.
Amen!**

Lighting of Candles

“All is Well”

Linda Smith & Bob Martin

Hymn

“Silent Night” #186

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child! Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight:
glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing, “Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!”

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light,
radiant, beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!

Silent night, holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light.
With the angels let us sing “Alleluia” to our King,
“Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.”

*Departing Prayer

One: Living God, tonight we stand with shepherds—amazed at your glory. We sing with angels, rejoicing in your work. We wait with Joseph, trusting in your promise. And we sit with Mary, cradling your love.

All: May the good news of this night inspire us to tell the world of our great joy: *For unto us is born a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.* Glory and praise to you forever Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn

“Joy to the World! #179

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

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.

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.

**Thank you for worshipping with us this evening at
Community United Church!**



Upcoming Service:

Sunday, December 31, 2023:

Annual Carols and Lessons, 11:00 AM (In-person, only)

A Very Merry Christmas to All!

***Need to contact us for prayer, conversation, or to connect
with a small group or church ministry?***

1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

(814) – 864 – 4429

www.communityunited.church