

Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ and The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

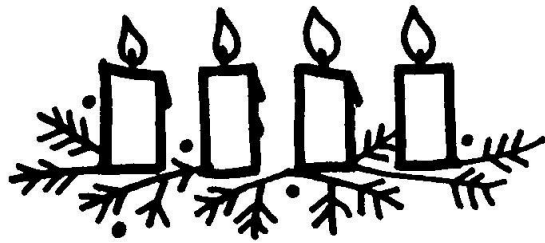


The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2022

11:00 AM

The Fourth Sunday of Advent



Today's Readings:

Revelation 12:1-9, 13-17

Proverbs 1:20-33

Luke 1:39-56



Advent IV:

The Wisdom and Prophecy of Mary

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty, Senior Pastor

Pastor Joy Johnson, Associate Minister

*Whoever you are, and wherever you
are on life's journey, you are
welcome here!*

The new church year is upon us! We begin with Advent, which means "to wait." It is a four-week season of remembering our 'waiting on Christ' to come into the world—in his birth and in his glory. This year we are focusing our Advent worship on the stories of those people and heavenly beings who prepared the way for Christ to come: the family of John the Baptist, Angels, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joseph the husband of Mary, and all others who bore witness to the coming of Christ two thousand years ago. Together, let us once again prepare the way for Christ into our hearts!

Prelude
Special Music by

Cheryl Strecker

Welcome & Announcements
Centering Music

Invocation

One: Grace, mercy, and peace be with you, from God our Creator, Christ the long-awaited Messiah, and the Holy Spirit, our eternal Advocate and friend.

All: And also with you.

One: Holy and loving God, where your reign is embraced: the lowly are lifted up, arrogant pride is scattered, strength comes through love, the empty are filled, and the greedy are emptied out—and all so that we might learn to live in the ways of justice, kindness, and mercy.

All: You have given us the vision of your reign through the Hebrew prophets, through Mary the mother of Jesus, and through Jesus Christ himself. As we choose the wisdom of your reign, may more of heaven manifest through us. This we pray in the name of the child of Mary, Jesus Christ—the living Word and Wisdom of God. Amen!

* Opening Hymn

“Carol at the Manger” #199

Holy Child, within the manger, long ago yet ever near;
Come as friend to every stranger, come as hope for every fear.
As you lived to heal the broken, greet the outcast, free the bound,
As you taught us love unspoken, teach us now where you are found.

Once again we tell the story—how your love for us was shown,
When the image of your glory wore an image like our own.
Come, enlighten with your wisdom, come and fill us with your grace.
May the fire of your compassion kindle every land and race.

Holy Child within the manger, lead us ever in your way,
So we see in every stranger how you come to us today.
In our lives and in our living give us strength to live as you,
That our hearts might be forgiving and our spirits strong and true.

***Opening Prayer**

***Sign of Peace**

One: The peace of Christ be with all of you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us share with one another a sign of peace.

(You may choose to shake hands, hug, or simply acknowledge one another without physical touch based on your comfort and/or health needs.)

Advent Candles

One: As we come to the final Sunday of Advent, our scripture readings have messages of divine Wisdom calling out to us; of mystical symbols of mother and child; and most of all: the prophetic wisdom of Mary, and her great Magnificat. Her words echo throughout time about justice and kindness and the way God wills the world to be ordered.

All: With Mary we dare to speak a world into reality in which there are no longer people who are hungry or greedy, but instead, we speak—with Mary—a new world into place, in which all are filled, as we live by the highest commandment of God: to love one another!

One: In a world that has often marginalized women, denied women's gifts, and refused women authority in religion and state, we see that God goes another way. Through a woman, and her consent, God's living Word and Wisdom took human flesh to become Savior of the world. Through women, the resurrection of Christ was first proclaimed, and the good news went out into the world.

All: On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we not only honor Mary as the *God-bearer* of Christ into the world, but we honor women everywhere who are part of the story of God. We honor the central role of women in the story of salvation, especially as we *all* come together: of many genders, races, and identities to live, now, as the body of Christ, the very body of the One who was born of Mary, in the manger of Bethlehem—and we wait for God's reign to fully-fill the world. Amen.

Advent Song

"Wait for the Lord"

#166

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

(Sing 3x)

First Reading

The Book of Revelation 12:1-9, 13-17

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. ³ Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to deliver a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵ And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a scepter of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

⁷ And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹³ So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had delivered the male child. ¹⁴ But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. ¹⁶ But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to wage war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

Responsorial

Proverbs 1:20-33

One: Wisdom cries out in the street; in the square she raises her voice. At the busiest street corner, she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

All: "...Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you."

One: [But] because they hated knowledge and did not choose the reverence of the LORD, and would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof...they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.

All: For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease without dread of disaster. Amen!

*Doxology

"Glory Be to God, Creator" #145

Glory be to God, Creator, glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit, known as Three, yet God the One

As it was in the beginning, it is now and so shall be,
In a world without an ending, glory through eternity.

Holy, holy God Almighty! Holy, holy Prince of Peace!
Holy, holy Wind of Presence! Holy, holy, holy! Amen!



***Gospel**

Luke 1:39-56

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be^[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

⁴⁶And Mary said,

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

One: This the Gospel of Christ for the people of God.

All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!

Message

The Wisdom and Prophecy of Mary

Pastor Rich



What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, come peasant king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the Virgin sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!



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—and as the 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 and receive the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Life.

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer ("Debts and Debtors")

One: The Lord be with you!

All: And also with you!

One: Let us pray: For the prayer requests that have come to us today, whether joys or sorrows...*[prayer requests are presented]*...Holy and loving God, in your wisdom, meet all of these needs in the perfect way of your grace.

All: God, hear our prayer!

One: That we would remember that Christ was born of Mary to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, until all the world lives in justice and love.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: For those who turn the story of Christ's birth—or the holiday seasons of Advent and Christmas—into tools of political division or judgment of others; may God correct such errors.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: For all that we hold in the silence of our hearts, we come to you in the confidence of quiet, O God, and lift our petitions privately to you. *(Silent prayer)*... Almighty God, Sovereign of Heaven, shower your blessings upon all people! Move the mountains in our lives, or help to move us so that we might be fully at peace. This we pray in the name of Jesus, 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

Cheryl Strecker

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.

Offertory Prayer of Thanks

*Congregational Response #147

***“Praise God, from whom all blessing flow:
Praise God, all creatures high and low: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, in Jesus fully known!
Creator, Word, and Spirit one!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”***



*Departing Prayer

One: O God of Elizabeth and Mary, you visited your servants with news of the world's redemption in the coming of the Savior, Jesus the Christ.

All: Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome Christ into our midst—not only by faith in Jesus, but also by loving the least among us. Amen!

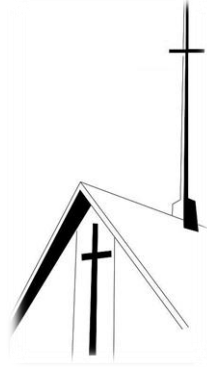
*Blessing

*Closing Hymn “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” #221

Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging—angels singing—noels ringing, tidings brining:
Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping: shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new
Saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of the Gospel true.
Thus rejoicing—free from sorrow—praises voicing greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you.
Christ the babe was born for you.

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



Coming up!

**Saturday, December 24: 8:00 PM
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

Please bring family and friends!

Sunday, December 25 – No Worship Service

Enjoy the holiday in stillness or celebration!

Sunday, January 1, 2023:

**The First Sunday After Christmas
Annual Lessons and Carols Service**

11:00 AM

*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



Community United Church

THE ALTAR FLOWERS THIS MORNING ARE GIVEN TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN CELEBRATION OF KRISTINE KOZIOL'S BIRTHDAY FROM KATHY KOZIOL.

Today: Sunday School 9:45, Worship 11 AM and Service Sunday to follow
December 24: Christmas Eve Service

WE REMEMBER THOSE IN OUR ARMED FORCES:

Jacob Snyder (Army), Nick Duncan (Army), Samantha McHenry (Army), Shelby Wescott (Army), Mathew Anderson (Army) and DJ Miaczynski (Marines)

PRAYERS FOR:

Rod and Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Sue Scheiwer, Julie Davis, Diane Walker, George Churley, Robin Adams, Ralph Kester, Sharon Cooper, Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Jimmyo, Sandy Gool, Tammy McIntyre, Laura Stone, Jared and Priscilla Hall and Ron Celeski

Council Members:

Debbie Anderson (President), Bob Martin (VP), Dina Johnson (Secretary), Ginnie Burger (Treas.), Mike Pruzinsky, April Knapp, Patti Rogers, Carol Rodgers, and Angel Hall