

Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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



Journey to Bethlehem: The First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2024

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

Centering Music

“Jesus, Name Above All Names” #177

Jesus, name above all names, beautiful Savior, glorious Lord.
Emmanuel, God is with us, blessed Redeemer, Living Word.
(Repeat)

Invocation

One: Holy and loving God, your people now enter the season of Advent. The word Advent means to await.

All: We once again find ourselves on the journey to Bethlehem. Doing so, we remember how our spiritual ancestors *awaited* the coming of a Messiah—a king—who would bring the power of the Reign of God upon the earth.

One: But the journey to Bethlehem reveals an unexpected Messiah, one who was announced through angelic visitors and ordinary human beings, and one whose birth redefined the kingdom of God.

All: As we remember the story of Christ’s birth, let us also be attentive to angelic voices and Spirit’s present in our midst—as we are a people who are still in *waiting* for the fullness of the reign of God, and as a people who still dare to believe. Amen!

* Opening Hymn

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” #153

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born to set thy people free;
Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit—rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit—raise us to thy glorious throne!



***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.

First Reading

The Book of the Prophet Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries out: "*In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Responsorial

Psalm 141:1-3, 8

One: I call upon you, O LORD; come quickly to me; give ear to my voice when I call to you.

All: Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

One: Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

All: But my eyes are turned toward you, O God, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenseless. Amen!



*Doxology

"Savior of the Nations, Come" #168

Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here your home.
Marvel, now, O Heav'n and Earth, That the Lord chose such a birth.

Praise to God the Father sing, Praise to God the Son, our King
Praise to God the Spirit be, Ever and eternity.

*Gospel

Luke 1:5-25

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord

to offer incense. ¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³ When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

²⁴ After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵ "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

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

All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!

Children's Message: **Advent Candles: Week I**

We invite all young people to come forward at this time to light our Advent candles and to add characters to the Manger.

Advent Song "Come now, O Prince of Peace" #157

Come now, O Prince of peace, make us one body;

Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people

(Sing 3x)

Message

Journey to Bethlehem I: Preparing the Way

Gabriel, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John

Pastor Rich

O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.

Chorus:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel—
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer—our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death’s dark shadow put to flight.
(Chorus)

O come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in her ways to go.
(Chorus)

O come, Desire of nations, bind—all peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.
(Chorus)



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 Christ Jesus to be our living bread, to nourish us forever.

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*] We also pray for everyone who has asked their name to be on the prayer list [*see last page of the bulletin*]. 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: 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

God is inviting us to serve in response to God's great love for us, so that the whole world may know the fullness of God's peace.

How is God calling you this week to give of your time, talent, and resources?

Community United Church has the following ministries opportunities and needs:

House and Grounds Team

Hospitality for socials and services

Prayer ministries

Food ministries: Liberty House & Service Sunday

Children's Church leaders

Financial gifts to cover monthly needs (every contribution helps so much)

Every gift is great. Let us all give joyfully!

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

www.communityunited.church

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

1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

Offering & Offertory

"When You Believe"

Bob Martin

Offertory Prayer of Thanksgiving

*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: Holy and loving God, you have sent prophets and messengers throughout time to prepare the way of the Reign of God—we ask, now, that you send us out with the same message.

All: Be our wisdom to announce the good news of Christ’s peace. Be our courage to live as Christ did. Be our consolation when we cannot see the end of the road—and be our faith to follow wherever you lead us. Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn

“Prepare the Way, O Zion” #152

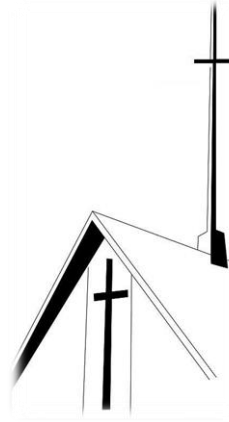
Prepare the way, O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!
Let every hill and valley a level way appear.
Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.
Oh blest is Christ that came—in God’s most holy name.

He brings God’s rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven above.
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.
Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.
Oh blest is Christ that came—in God’s most holy name.

Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior’s rule embrace.
His tidings of salvation—proclaim in every place.
All lands will bow before him, their voices will adore him.
Oh blest is Christ that came—in God’s most holy name.



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



**Next Sunday, December 8, 2024:
Journey to Bethlehem II:**

The Second Week of Advent:

Isaiah 7:10-15

Psalm 131

Luke 2:26-38

Theme:

The Annunciation and Consent of Mary

***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 by
Bob Martin in Memory of his Mother, Elaine Martin**

UPCOMING EVENTS

- December 10: Liberty House
December 11: Christmas Cheer – Fellowship Hall 6:30 PM
December 15: Service Sunday
December 17: Ladies Lunch – Brown Bag and Gift Exchange

Follow the Star has become an area tradition for many in the Christmas season. This show stars Tennessee Backporch, plus friends and family to present a Christmas show with spirit and fun.

- Sunday, December 1: 4:00 Our Lady of the Lake Church, Edinboro
Sunday, December 8: 4:00 Saint Gregory's Church, North East
Sunday, December 15: 4:00 St. Patrick's, Church, Erie

Tickets sold at the door. General seating. Doors open at 3:30. \$25 adult, \$15 student.

Need hearing assistance? We have four available units. Please talk to our tech crew in the back of the sanctuary.

WE REMEMBER THOSE IN OUR ARMED FORCES:

Jackson Feiock (Army), Jacob Snyder (Army), Nick Duncan (Army), Samantha McHenry (Army), Brittany Duncan (Army), Matt Duncan (Army), Tyler Anderson (Army National Guard), Shelby Wescott (Army), Matthew Anderson (Army), Jaden O'Hara (Army), Toby Charlton (Marines), Cole Poshett (Army) & Hunter Miaczynski (Army)

PRAYERS FOR:

Dorothy Moyer, Anna Silvia, Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Diane Walker, Ralph Kester, John M., Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Tammy McIntyre, Laura Stone, Debra Doerfer & David Magid, Annette Minich, Dave Pakulski, Ethel Davis, Chelsea Brown, Celeste Eller & Family, Shirley Carrier, Dave Woledge, Ev Smith, Karis Fenton, Ruth Schmidt, Carol & Doug Rodgers, Jane Moran, Sharon Cooper, Josh Cook & Danny Kaeberlein, The Vadzemnieks Family, Reverend Susan Strouse & Reverend Barbara Peronteau.

Council Members:

Debbie Anderson (President), Angel Conrad (VP), Nancy Alberico (Secretary), Janice Skelly, Mike Pruzinsky, Michele Vahey, Patti Rogers, Carol Rodgers, and Bob Martin