

# Community United Church

**An Open and Affirming Congregation**

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



**The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**December 24, 2023**

**11:00 AM**

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

Centering Music                   “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” #182 Vs. 2

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;  
*O Come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

Invocation

One: Holy and loving God, we praise you for revealing your Wisdom to us. We give you thanks for meeting us in ways that we can understand—as you speak through prophets and angels, and even through some of our dreams.

**All: Spirit of God, we open ourselves to your still-speaking Word and living Wisdom—which we believe became human for us, and for our salvation, in Jesus Christ, the Messiah born in Bethlehem. Amen!**

\* Opening 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 new-born King.  
*Glo—ria! In excelsis Deo!*  
*Glo—ria! In excelsis Deo!”*

**\*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 greet one another without physical touch based on your comfort and/or health needs.)*

## Advent Candles: Week IV - LOVE

*We invite all young people present to come forward to light our Advent candles!*

### **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 Letter to Titus 3:4-7**

<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

### **Music Ministry**

“Dona Nobis Pacem”

Community United Bell Choir

### **Responsorial**

**Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26**

One: I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

**All: I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.**

One: [The Holy One says]: My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with the anointed one, the king, and in my name the anointed one shall be exalted.

**All: The anointed one shall cry to me, “You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. Amen!”**

### **\*Gloria**

**“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**

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*<sup>23</sup> "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"*

which means, "God is with us." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife <sup>25</sup> but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

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

**All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!**

Message

*Faith-Filling Dreams:  
Joseph's Calling*

Pastor Joy

Song of Response

"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 bringing:  
*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.*



## 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.

## Communion Music

“At this Table”

Rich & Cheryl

## Pastoral Prayer and Lord’s Prayer (“Debts and Debtors”)

One: The Lord be with you.

All: ***And also with you.***

One: People of God, let us center our hearts and extend the spiritual power within us. *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

*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.*

*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.*

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

**[www.communityunited.church](http://www.communityunited.church)**

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

1011 West 38<sup>th</sup> Street – Erie, PA 16508



**Ministry of Music**

Offertory Medley

Cheryl Strecker

## 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, like Joseph, may we be discerning of your living voice—and may we remember that your voice is distinguished by your messages of love, restoration, and peace.

**All: Come to us in dreams and visions, O God! Come to us through the loving words of people we meet. Come to us, now more than ever, in your Word-made-flesh, in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and everlasting King. Amen!**

\*Blessing

\*Closing Hymn

“The First Noel” #229 Vv. 1-2, 4

The first Noel, the angel did say,  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
In fields where they—lay keeping their sheep,  
On a cold winter’s night that was so deep.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!*

They looked up and saw a star  
Shining in the east, beyond them far,  
And to the earth it gave great light,  
And so it continued both day and night.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!*

This star drew nigh to the northwest,  
O’er Beth-le-hem it took its rest,  
And there it did both stop and stay,  
Right over the place where Je-sus lay.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!*



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



**Tonight: Christmas Eve Service – 8:00 PM**

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-12

Luke 2:1-20

John 1:1-14

Theme:

*Christ is Born!*

**Next Sunday, December 31, 2023:**

**Annual Lessons & Carols Service**

**The First Sunday after Christmas**

**11:00 AM**

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

1011 West 38<sup>th</sup> Street – Erie, PA 16508

(814) – 864 – 4429

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## Community United Church

**The altar flowers this morning are given to the glory of God by Kathy Koziol in honor of Kristine's birthday.**

### **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

- December 24: Christmas Eve Service Fourth Sunday of Advent 11:00 AM  
December 24: Christmas Eve Service 8:00 PM  
December 31: First Sunday in Christmas: Annual Lessons & Carols Service 11:00 AM

*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:**

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), DJ Miaczynski (Marines), Jaden O'Hara (Army)  
& Toby Charlton (Marines)

### **PRAYERS FOR:**

Dorothy Moyer, Anna Silvia, Kevin Bennett & family & friends, Rod & Dew Johnson,  
Harry Lamb, Sue Scheiwer, Diane Walker, Robin Adams, Ralph Kester,  
John M., Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Jimmyo, Sandy Gool, Tammy McIntyre, Laura Stone,  
Ron Celeski, Jan & Tim Crowe and Family, Debra Doerfer & David Magid, Annette Minich,  
Dave Pikulski, Randi Johnson, Lillian Hendrickson, Wilma and Janice Skelly, Ethel Davis,  
Jim Haglund, Chelsea Brown, John Waid, Patti Rogers, Celeste Eller & Family, Shirley Carrier,  
Dave Woledge, Ev Smith, Karis Fenton, Ruth Schmidt

### **Council Members:**

Debbie Anderson (President), Bob Martin (VP), Dina Johnson (Secretary), Janice Skelly,  
Mike Pruzinsky, April Knapp, Patti Rogers, Carol Rodgers, and Angel Conrad.