

# 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 Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**December 22, 2024**

**11:00 AM**

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy L. Johnson

Centering Music                      “Emmanuel, Emmanuel,” #178

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, his name is called Emmanuel.  
God with us, revealed in us, his name is called Emmanuel.  
*(Repeat All)*

Invocation

One: People of God, hear again the good news of prophets and angels: God sends Christ into the world to be light, life, and love!

**All: As we approach Christ’s birth in Bethlehem, we are reminded that God comes into the world in humble form—and does so to bring all of creation into glory.**

One: Today, we remember that before Christ was born, Mary was given a vision, which she proclaimed in prophecy:

**All: Her child, the Christ, will bring the Reign of God. With the coming of God’s Reign, systems of privilege and oppression will be overturned, and a new era will come: of filling the hungry with all good things. Where we are hungry, O God, fill us. Where we sit at tables that should be overturned, convict us. When we refuse correction, soften our hearts. Together, let us walk more boldly towards Bethlehem, with Mary—to share in her prophetic word, and to live into its vision. Amen!**

\* Opening Hymn                      “Angels, from the Realms of Glory” #189

Angels, from the realms of glory,  
Wing your flight o’er all the earth.

You who sang creation’s story, now proclaim Messiah’s birth.  
*Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,  
Watching o’er your flocks by night,

God with us is now residing, yonder shines the infant light:  
*Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*

Sages, leave your contemplations,  
Brighter visions beam afar;

Seek the great Desire of nations, you have seen the natal star:  
*Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*

Saints before the altar bending,  
Watching long in hope and fear,

Suddenly the Lord, descending, in his temple shall appear:  
*Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*

## **\*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 9:6-7**

For 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. <sup>7</sup> Great will be his authority, 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**

### **Psalm 150**

One: Praise the LORD! Praise God in the sanctuary; praise the Holy One in the mighty firmament.

**All: Praise God for the Holy One's mighty deeds; praise God according to the LORD's surpassing greatness.**

One: Praise the Holy One with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp.

**All: Praise God with tambourine and dance; praise God with strings and pipe. Praise the Holy One with loud clashing cymbals.**

One: Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!

**All: Praise the LORD! Amen.**

### **\*Doxology**

### **"Savior of the Nations, Come" #168 Vv. 1, 5**

Savior of the nations, come,  
Show yourself the Virgin's son.  
Fill with wonder, all the earth,  
That our God chose such a birth.

Praise to you, O Lord we sing,  
Praise to Christ, our newborn King!  
With the Father, Spirit, one,  
Let your lasting kingdom come.

## \*Gospel

Luke 1:39-56

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

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; <sup>50</sup>indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup>He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

<sup>56</sup>And 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!**

**Children's Message:**

**Advent Candles: Week IV**

*We invite all young people to come forward!*



**Advent Song**

"Come now, O Prince of Peace" #157 V.1

Come now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body;  
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people. *(Sing 3x)*

Message

*Mary's Prophecy of the Reign of God*

Pastor Rich

Song of Response      “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” #191 Vv. 1, 3

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:  
“Peace on the earth, goodwill to all, from heaven’s all gracious King:”  
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophets seen of old,  
When, with the ever-circling years, shall come the time foretold,  
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,  
And all the world give back the song which now the angels sing.



**Communion**

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

**All: Bethlehem means “house of bread.” In 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**

“Be Born in Me”

Dina Johnson

## 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 that is 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

*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:**

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

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

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

Offering & Offertory

"Magnificat"

Julie Lokahi

**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, through the prophetic words of Isaiah and Mary, we are reminded that the Reign of God brings abundance, justice, and fulfillment for *all people*.

**All: May the wisdom of your Holy Spirit come also through us—that we might not only proclaim the Gospel, but live into its values, and by doing so, to heal and transform the world. Amen!**

\*Blessing

\*Closing Hymn                      “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” #185

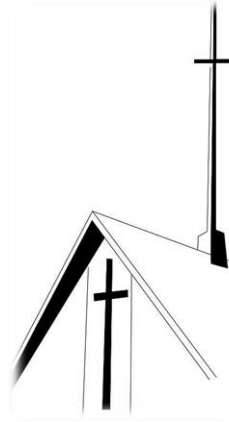
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King:  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;  
With th’angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”  
*Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn 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 th’incarnate Deity,  
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
*Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”*

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.  
*Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”*



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



**Christmas Eve 2024:  
Journey to Bethlehem**

Theme:

**Christ is Born**

Isaiah 52:7-10

Titus 3:4-7

Psalm 97

John 1:1-14

Luke 2:1-20

***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

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





## Community United Church

**The altar flowers this morning are given to the glory of God by and in celebration of Kristine's birthday from the Koziol Family**

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

December 24, 2024: Christmas Eve Service 8:00 PM  
December 29, 2024: First Sunday of Christmas 11:00 AM  
January 5, 2025: Second Sunday of Christmas, 11:00 AM  
January 12, 2025: Celebration of Epiphany, 11:00 AM  
January 19, 2025: Worship at 11:00 AM & Annual Congregational Meeting at 12:00 PM

***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, and John & Tina Schnarrs

### **Council Members:**

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

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