

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 21, 2025

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

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

Welcome & Announcements

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—one 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. 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.

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



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. ⁷ 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

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

⁴⁶ And 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."*

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

One: This is 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 all nations *(Sing 3x)*

Message

Journey to Bethlehem IV: Mary's Magnificat

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

“Do You Hear What I Hear?”

Ladies’ Ensemble

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

Our contributions support the church's inclusive ministries as well as initiatives that advance compassion, equity, and community well-being. Thank you!

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

Offertory/Ministry of Music

"Magnificat"

Julie Lokai, Vocals
Becca Smith, Percussion

Offertory Prayer of Thanksgiving

**Congregational Response #147*

"Praise God, from whom all blessings 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.”

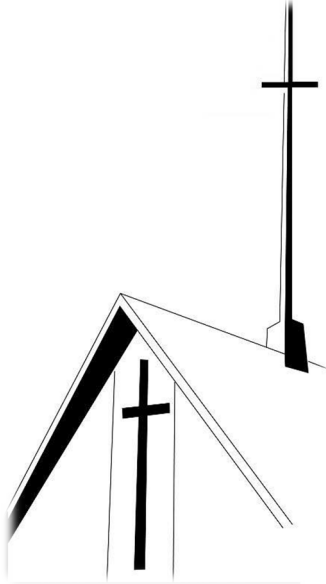
Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

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!**



**Candlelight Christmas Eve:
Wednesday, December 24, 2025
8:00 PM**

**The First Sunday of Christmas:
Sunday, December 28, 2025
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's birthday (12/24) by Kathy Koziol. Happy Birthday!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- December 21: **Fourth Sunday in Advent** and **Service Sunday**. Also our Cookie Exchange! Bring three doz. yummy cookies well before service and bring a mixture home!
- December 24: **Christmas Eve Service at 8:00 PM**
- December 28: **The First Sunday of Christmas: Lessons & Carols**

Save the Date:

January 25, 2026:

New Member Sunday (11:00 AM), Annual Congregational Meeting (12:00 PM), and CUC Potluck Dinner (12:30 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), Brittany Duncan (Army), Matt Duncan (Army), Tyler Anderson (Army National Guard), Shelby Wescott (Army), Jaden O'Hara (Army), Toby Charlton (Marines), Cole Posnett (Army), Hunter Miaczynski (Army), Mathew Anderson (Army), & Zachary Oliver (PA Army National Guard)

PRAYERS FOR:

Anna Silvia, Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Ralph Kester, Ethel Davis, Celeste Eller & Family, Toni Stevenson, Dave Wooledge, Dorothy Moyer, The Vadzemnieks Family, Sandra Ganley, Celeste Peck, Linda Foll Johnson, Todd Carrier, The Kuzma Family, Debra Jackman, Rose Goss, Cathie Witmire, Laura Will, Michael, Erin Mrenak, Paul Dietz, Ruth Schmidt, Lisa Bretz, Al Tilley, and Roy Lloyd

Current Council Members:

Mike Pruzinsky (President), Debbie Anderson (Vice President), Al Tilley (Treasurer), Nancy Alberico (Secretary), Janice Skelly, Angel Conrad, Michele Vahey, Justin Graff, and Mark Davis
Need to contact our Council President? Please email at: mpruzinsky@icloud.com

You may call the church office at 814-864-4429 for pastoral and administrative matters or use email: communityunitedchurch@yahoo.com

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