

# 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 Third Sunday of Advent**

**December 14, 2025**

**11:00 AM**

Pastoral Team:

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

“In the Bleak Midwinter” #196 Vv. 1-2

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow; snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter a stable place sufficed  
The Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Invocation

One: Gracious God, Loving Creator, Holy One, throughout the ages You have been there to guide us, to lead us, and to assure of us of Your presence in a world which is troubled, and in a world where we search for meaning and peace in our own personal struggles.

**All: As we contemplate this Third Sunday of Advent, may we acknowledge that, like Joseph, betrothed to Mary, we are often urged to act in faith: to make choices and to make decisions that might seem impossible.**

One: Lead us forward, we pray, with the wisdom to listen to Your urging, and the trust to see that the path you accompany us on—even when we doubt and even when we are fearful—is paved with the love, security, and hope that You bring us.

**All: Dear God, as we worship You today, may we feel the assurance and shelter of your Spirit and the calm understanding that only You can provide. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen!**

\* Opening Hymn “The King of Glory Comes” #159 v. 1.2.4

Refrain

The King of Glory Comes, the nation rejoices.  
Open the gates before him, lift up your voices, voices.

Who is the King of glory; what shall we call him?  
He is Emmanuel, the promised of ages.

(Refrain)

In all of Galilee, in city or village,  
He goes among his people, curing their illness.

(Refrain)

He conquered sin and death;  
He truly has risen,  
And he will share with us his heavenly vision.

(Refrain)

## **\*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 9:2-4**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup> You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

### **Responsorial**

### **based on Psalm 143**

One: Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications.

**All: Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust.**

One: Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

**All: Save me, O LORD, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge.**

One: Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

**All: For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.**

### **\*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**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> 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 is the Gospel of Christ for the people of God.

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

## **Children's Message:**

### **Advent Candles: Week III**

*We invite all young people to come forward.*

## **Advent Song**

"Come now, O Prince of Peace" #157 V.3

Come now, and set us free, O God our Savior  
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations *(Sing 3x)*

Message

*Journey to Bethlehem III: The Shelter of Joseph*

Pastor Joy



You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.  
You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way.  
You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand.  
You shall see the face of God and live.

Refrain

Be not afraid. I go before you always.  
Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown.  
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed.  
If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side,  
Know that I am with you through it all.

(Refrain)

Blessed are your poor, for the Kingdom shall be theirs.  
Blest are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh.  
And if wicked tongues insult and hate you all because of me,  
Blessed, blessed are you!

(Refrain)

**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.

## **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](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**

Offertory/Ministry of Music      "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)"      Ladies' Ensemble

## **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: Almighty and gracious God, may we sense your guidance and have the resilience to forge ahead with confidence, knowing You are with us and will shelter us and will never leave us. May we always act out of mercy, justice, and kindness, assured of Your enduring presence and protection.

**All: Help us to navigate through this life in the way that Joseph did: with courage, faith, humility, and quiet strength. We pray to exhibit true character and integrity so that in following Jesus we also reflect His amazing light. Amen!**

\*Blessing

\*Closing Hymn      “Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates” ” #176 v. 1, 2, 4

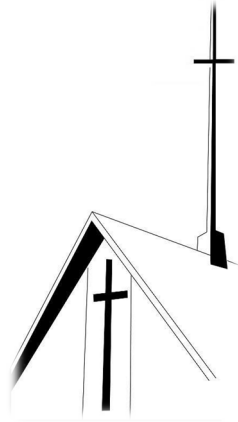
Lift up your heads, O mighty gates:  
Behold, the King of glory waits!  
The King of kings is drawing near,  
the Savior of the World draws near.

Fling wide the portals of your heart:  
make it a temple set apart  
From earthly use for heaven’s employ,  
adorned with prayer and love and joy.

So come, my Sovereign, enter in!  
Let new and nobler life begin!  
Your Holy Spirit guide us on,  
Until the glorious crown be won.



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



**Next Sunday, December 21, 2025:**  
**Journey to Bethlehem IV**

Theme:

**Advent IV: The Magnificat**

*Mary's Prophetic Song about the Reign and Power of God*

Isaiah 9:6-7

Psalm 150

Luke 1:39-56

***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  
Nancy Alberico in celebration of Becky's Birthday**

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- December 15: Church Council meets at 6:30 PM – Please RSVP to Mike Pruzinsky  
December 16: Ladies Lunch – Potluck – bring a dish and a \$10 Gift for exchanging  
December 17: Resonate: *Love Wins* wrap-up and “Carols and Community” gathering including our new “Sock Exchange.” Bring two fun socks filled with trinkets/goodies.  
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**

**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, Michele Serafin, Toni Stevenson, Dave Woledge, Dorothy Moyer,  
The Vadzemnieks Family, Sharon Cooper, 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

### **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](mailto:mpruzinsky@icloud.com)*

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

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