

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 15, 2024

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

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

Centering Music

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 of your Spirit and the calm of understanding that only You can provide. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. 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 a child and yet a king;
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 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. ³You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For 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

Psalm 143:1a, 8-11

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

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ 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!

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: Joseph's Dream

Pastor Joy

Song of Response

"Blessed Be the God of Israel" #158 v 1, 2

Blessed be the God of Israel, who comes to set us free,
Who visits and redeems us, and grants us liberty.
The prophets spoke of mercy, of freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise to bring our people peace.

Now from the house of David a child of grace has come,
A Savior who will lead us to our eternal home.
Before Him goes the herald, forerunner in the way,
The prophet of salvation, the harbinger of day.

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

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

"You know better than I"

Jerry Strobel

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, may we recognize your voice and have the strength of character to forge ahead, knowing You are with us, and will never leave us. With Your guidance, may we always act out of mercy, justice, and kindness.

All: Help us to navigate through this life in the way that Joseph did: with courage, with faith, with humility, and with 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

“Once in Royal David's City” #183 v 1, 2, 4

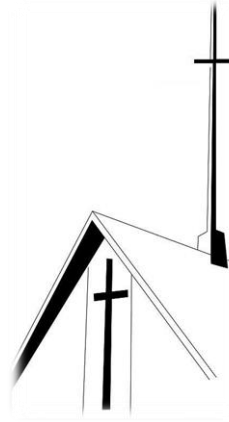
Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little child

He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall:
With the poor and mean and lowly
Lived on earth our Savior holy

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love;
For that child, so dear and gentle,
Is our Lord in heaven above:
And he leads his children on
To the place where he is gone



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



**Next Sunday, December 22, 2024:
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?***

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www.communityunited.church