

**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF WELCOME**

December 24, 2019, 7:00 PM

*Please silence cell phones*

Prelude 6:50 PM Carolyn Lasater

Welcome and Announcements ✕ Nancy Ellett Allison

One: May the peace of the Christ Child be with you.

**Many: And also with you.**

*(Please pass the information pads so that all worshippers  
might have the opportunity to sign them)*

Introit "Away in a Manger" arr. James Koerts  
Kathleen Smith, Dawn Robinson, piano duet

Welcoming Hope Melissa McQueen-Simmons  
"The Search for a New Humility," Václav Havel

The kind of hope I often think about...is above all a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul...It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is...an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is. Hope is not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out...The deepest and most important form of hope, the only one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from "elsewhere."

**All: We Welcome hope into our lives!**

\* Carol "Angels, from the Realms of Glory" REGENT SQUARE  
Bill Tyler, French horn

☞ Angels from the realms of glory, Wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
Ye who sang creation's story Now proclaim Messiah's birth.

**Refrain: Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, give thanks and sing.**

**Shepherds, in the field abiding, Watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing; Yonder shines the infant light: (Refrain)**

**Sages, leave your contemplations, Brighter visions beam afar;  
Seek the great Desire of nations; Guided by Christ's natal star. (Ref.)**

**Saints, before the altar bending, Watching long in hope and fear;  
Suddenly your prayers attending, Christ beside you shall appear. (Ref.)**

\* Call to Worship Renee Brown

One: Holy One, you have come to us.

**Many: You didn't wait for us to become good. You didn't stay away  
until we searched for you.**

One: You took the initiative.

\* All rise in body or spirit ☞ Sing Response ✕ Hymnals located below pews

**Many: You entered the world as a babe, so that you could enter the  
world of our experience and meet us where we are, as we are.**

One: Returning One, we know that as we worship and pray, you hear,  
you understand, and you answer. Come into our world again.

**Many: Bring your peace and love and trust into a world of war and  
hatred and suspicion.**

One: Come into this land again.

**Many: Bring your healing into a country ravaged by broken promises,  
broken communities, broken relationships, and bodies broken  
by hatred, racism, AIDS, cancer, disease, drugs and greed.**

One: Come into your church again.

**Many: Bring faith and inspiration into the community that you call to  
be your loving servant to the world.**

One: Come into our lives, and those of our loved ones again.

**Many: May we know in the depth of our souls, tonight and always,  
that you, our Faithful Savior, are with us, no matter what life  
brings.**

**ALL: With hope we welcome You and Your healing love into our  
world.**

"Love's Pure Light" by Joel Raney  
Choir, Handbell Choir, Congregation

Lighting the Christ Candle The Allison Family  
Carole, Laura, Nancy and Dale

One: Hope, peace, joy, and love. Four candles, four promises continually  
offered to us by God, and all of them manifest in this one we light  
tonight: the Christ candle. In Christ we find the hope of  
transformation, the peace that follows justice, the joy of service in  
community, the love that encompasses us in our diversity, empowering  
us to make our unique contribution to this world.

**All: We rejoice in God's steadfast presence in our lives,  
and in God's unique presence in the life of Jesus of Nazareth—  
born of Mary, growing through childhood into an adult  
ministry, in all his life living out the peace, love, and justice of  
God; his voice undimmed by the centuries, his call and his  
promise as clear to us as it was to his disciples so long ago.**

*(Advent candles are lit.)*

**Come to us, Lord Jesus, Be born in us this night, in our hearts,  
our minds, our lives. May the light of your life be kindled in us,  
And lead us to the shining truth, of God with us, God for us, God  
in us. Amen.**

*(The Christ Candle is lit.)*

One: "When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is  
gone, When the magi are home, When the shepherds are back with  
their flock,

**Many: "The work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, to heal the  
broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild  
the nations, to bring peace among others, to make music in the  
heart." (Adapted from Howard Thurman)**

Advent Carol "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" GESU BAMBINO  
**O come, o come, Emmanuel, and end this gloom of night.**

**Bring hope to the world, bring peace to the earth,  
And fill us with love's pure light.  
Bring hope and joy and peace,  
And fill us with love's pure light.**

Children's Offering & Message Nancy Ellett Allison  
*(Following the Children's Message, children below first grade  
may go to extended care or return to sit with their parents.)*

\* Carol "It Came upon a Midnight Clear" CAROL

☞ 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, good will to all, from heaven's all-gracious King."  
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

**And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,  
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.  
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!**

**For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet 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 the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.**

Welcoming Peace "Peace" Fred Robinson  
Fred Craddock

The peace of God is the confidence that God is God and neither our gains  
nor our losses are ultimate. It is the truth that God loves the world, is for  
all creatures, and is present with us in every endeavor to make real that  
love in concrete ways. Hassles as we go through life neither prove nor  
disprove God's presence and therefore neither create nor void the peace of  
God.

**All: We Welcome peace into our lives!**

Prayer of St. Francis Fred Robinson

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy;  
and where there is darkness, light.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are  
pardoned, and in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Gift of Music "What Child Is This/Child of the Poor"  
Lisa Cloninger, Kathleen Smith, vocals;  
Avery McGuirt, violin, David McGuirt, guitar

Welcoming Joy "Into the Wild" Margaret Hankins  
Jon Krakauer

You are wrong if you think Joy emanates only or principally from human  
relationships. God has placed it all around us. It is in everything and  
anything we might experience. We just have to have the courage to turn  
against our habitual lifestyle and engage in unconventional living.

My point is that you do not need me or anyone else around to bring this new  
kind of light in your life. It is simply waiting out there for you to grasp it,  
and all you have to do is reach for it. The only person you are fighting is  
yourself and your stubbornness to engage in new circumstances.

**All: We Welcome joy into our lives!**

\* Carol “Angels We Have Heard on High” GLORIA

☩ **Angels we have heard on high Sweetly singing o’er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply Echoing their joyous strains.**

*Refrain: Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

**Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?  
Say what may the tidings be Which inspire your heavenly song?**

**Come to Bethlehem and see Christ whose birth the angels sing;  
Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King.**

**See Him in a manger laid, Whom the choirs of angels praise;  
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, While our hearts in love we raise.**

Welcoming Love “Letter from a Region in My Mind” Ebstein Simmons  
James Baldwin

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace - not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.

**All: We Welcome love into our lives!**

Gift in Music “In the Bleak Midwinter”  
*Claire Houlihan, Meg Houlihan, vocals; Adam Watkins, piano*

Offertory Invitation Fred Robinson

Offertory “He is Born” arr. Sylvia Woods  
*Kristin Andes, Hannah Magraw, harps*

\* Doxology OLD HUNDREDTH  
☩ **To God all glorious heavenly Light,  
To Christ revealed in earthly night,  
To God the Spirit now we raise  
Our joyful songs of thankful praise. Amen.**

\* Offertory Dedication Fred Robinson

Welcoming the Christ Child Luke 2:1-8 Jim Dwiggins  
In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered...Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

One: God’s word for us.

**All: We Welcome Christ into our lives!**

Gift in Music “O Come, All Ye Faithful” ADESTES FIDELES  
*Felicia Robinson, vocals*

Welcoming Shepherds & Angels Luke 2:9-14 Nancy Ellett Allison  
In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel

said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!’

One: God’s word for us.

**All: We Welcome serving shepherds and singing angels into our lives!**

“O Holy Night” *by Adolphe Adam*  
*Margaret Hankins, vocals; Adam Watkins, piano*

Meditation “Welcoming the Journey” Nancy Ellett Allison

Chancel Choir, Music Co-op “Light of the World” by Lauren Daigle

## Sacrament of Holy Communion

*(Parents are welcome to bring their children in from Children’s Church to join them in receiving communion.)*

Invitation Nancy Ellett Allison, Fred Robinson

On this holy night, you are invited to this table of welcome. You are invited to cradle the infant Jesus in your hearts. You are invited to let Jesus go, as we all have to let each other go, and then to receive the Living Christ through the bread and the cup at this table. You are invited to lay your burdens down, so that you may sing and dance in joy. You are invited.

Confession and Thanksgiving

One: Holy One, You sent Jesus into a world where children are at risk; where they, Holy Innocents, suffer, and their parents, like Rachel, weep for them. When we forget that The Holy Family was a poor family:

**Many: Lord, have mercy.**

One: When we forget that The Holy Family was a refugee family:

**Many: Christ, have mercy.**

One: When we forget that The Holy Family was an immigrant family:

**Many: Lord, have mercy. Forgive us, O God, and lead us to recognize your Holy Child in the places of greatest need.**

One: We give you thanks, O Holy One,

**Many: For Jesus as an infant reflecting you in his smile and cry, his heart and hands.**

One: We give you thanks, O Holy One,

**Many: For Jesus as a man who laughed and loved, wept and healed, and spoke your Word to this world so that we might know the passion of your love.**

One: We give you thanks, O Holy One,

**Many: For Jesus Christ, who died to free us from that which binds, and rose so that our tombs may be opened to the promise of new life.**

Words of Institution Nancy Ellett Allison

Sharing the Bread and Wine

One: The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all things are ready.

*(Communion is received by intinction. Take a wafer or bread and dip it into the cup to receive both elements. Gluten free wafers are available.)*

Music during Communion Carolyn Lasater

Prayer after Communion Nancy Ellett Allison

**Wondrous God, through the bread and the cup, the gift of Christ’s life,  
we are brought near to you and one another. Let us rejoice as we turn  
to you with grateful hearts. Let us be made whole. Amen.**

Lighting Our Candles of Commitment  
*(Please sit in silent meditation as our ministers and elders  
Bring the Christ Light into the congregation to light each candle.)*

Gift of Music “Silent Night” The Handbell Choir

\* Closing Carol “Silent Night” Franz Gruber  
*(As the last line of each verse is sung, please raise your candle)*

☩ **Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and Child.  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight,  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia;  
Christ, the Savior, is born, Christ, the Savior, is born!**

**Silent night, holy night, Child of God, love’s pure light,  
Radiant beams from your holy face  
Bring the dawn of redeeming grace;  
Jesus Lord at your birth, Jesus Lord at your birth.**

\* Benediction Nancy Ellett Allison

Postlude Carolyn Lasater  
*(You will find baskets in the foyer for returning your candle  
and for recycling your worship bulletin.)*