



“We must accept finite disappointment,  
but never lose infinite hope.”

“But I know, somehow, that only when it  
is dark enough can you see the stars.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

**OUR MINISTRY TEAM**

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**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT ~ HOPE**

**December 3, 2023, 10:55 am**

*\* Your whole self is welcomed here. Please feel free to take care of your body during worship in ways that work for you.*

Prelude "Let All Mortal Flesh" J. Purifoy

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Tom Magraw

One: May the peace of Christ be with you!

Many: And also with you.

Hanging of the Greens Tom Magraw

*As we start the Advent Season, we prepare our worship space in the signs of life, growth, and joy for the coming of the Christ child who will change the world. After each segment of the liturgy there will be a brief pause as we acknowledge through action the changing to this season of hope and coming...*

One: How shall we prepare this house of worship for the coming of the Bringer of Peace?

Many: **With colors of blue and the beauty and truth of God's Word.**

One: How shall we prepare this house of worship for the coming of our Comforter?

Many: **With garlands of pine and fir, with holly and ivy whose leaves are ever living, ever green.**

One: How shall we prepare this house of worship for the coming of the Light of the World?

Many: **With trees of light, which shine in the darkness, calling us to hope.**

One: How shall we prepare this house of worship for the Beloved of God?

Many: **With a wreath of green and candles of celebration, which lead us through this season of waiting.**

One: How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Many: **By hearing the words of the prophets, by opening our spirits to the songs of the season, by receiving the Word of God in our lives.**

All: **Come, let us worship our God who is, who was, and who is to come.**

Introit

“Rise Up and Shine!”

FOREST GREEN

Rise up and shine! Your light has come; God’s glory breaks like dawn.  
For though the earth be cloaked in night and gloom shrouds everyone,  
Yet over you the Lord will rise, with glory gleaming clear,  
Till nations turn to seek your light and the whole world draws near.

\* Call to Worship

Lee Brigman

*Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshiping, reading, and singing.*

One: God, once again we enter this Advent season of hopeful waiting.

All: **Plant a seed of hope in our hearts that we may grow and change.**

One: God we once again gather as children who eagerly wait on tiptoes looking for your presence.

All: **Plant a seed of hope in our community that we may bear the fruit of love, peace, and joy.**

One: God we once again gather and wait for you to ‘tear open the heavens and make the mountains quake’.

All: **Plant a seed in our world that your kin-dom will come, and your will be done. Plant a seed of hope in us this day and in this hour as we open ourselves to your word and your way.**

\* Hymn 116

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

VENI EMMANUEL

O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Child of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!

O come, O wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;  
To us the path of knowledge show, and help us in that way to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!

O come, Desire of Nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;  
Make envy, strife, and quarrels cease;  
Fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!

Advent Candle Lighting

Glencie Rhedrick and Marleigh

*Advent means “coming.” It is a time of longing, watching, and praying for God’s healing, transformative presence to be ever more vibrantly present in the world. In this sense, Advent is a season in which we focus on that key phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy kingdom come.” As people of faith, the good news we strive to live by and declare is that love is stronger than hate, peace more enduring than war, hope more powerful than despair – and the light of God’s love will dispel forever the shadows of shame cast by violence, suffering, sorrow, and contempt. Today we light the first Advent candle, the candle of hope.*

**One:** When I look around, I see shadows of hunger. So many neighbors, nearby and around the world, will go to bed hungry tonight...

**Many:** When we look around, we see shadows of injustice, the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer – and someone somewhere will fall asleep under a bridge tonight...

**One:** In the face of hunger, we light a candle of hope...

**Many:** In the face of injustice, in the face of despair, we light a candle of hope... (*Light the first candle in your Advent wreath.*)

**One:** May the light from this candle overwhelm the world.

**Many:** May the light from this candle say to all that God’s hope is coming, on earth as it already is in heaven.

**One:** Friends, be not afraid, God’s hope is at hand!

**Many:** God is, even now, coming into the world!

Song

TEMPLE OF PEACE

Hope blooms in a weary world

When creatures, once forlorn, find wilderness reborn.

Hope blooms in a weary world: the promised green of Eden comes.

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Barbara Thomas

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

EMMANUEL

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, your name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us, your name is called Emmanuel.

*Our Hebrew Lesson for today comes from Isaiah 64:1-9, where the prophet writes in the hope of God's intervention in the lives of the Israelites...*

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!  
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.  
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,  
and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

**One:** May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church;

**Many:** Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

\* Gospel Lesson

Mark 13:24-37 (NRSV)

Rev. Barbara L. Thomas

*Our Gospel Lesson for today comes from Mark 13:24-37, where Jesus speaks of his coming and shares the lesson of the fig tree...*

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware; keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

**One:** For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.

**Many:** **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon “Hope in Changing Times: Hope Brings Change in Time”

Rev. Barbara L. Thomas

Invitation to Generosity

Lee Brigman

*Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...*

“We are the work of God’s hands”, says the psalmist, and God continues to shape us each day into a people of hope and goodness. That is why we bring our many gifts this morning: to be part of creating a more beautiful world through the ministry of this church and the witness of our lives each day. Let us gather our gifts together and present them as an offering to God.

\* Doxology

W ńłobie leńy

**Glory be to the Creator, glory be to the Christ,  
Glory be to the Spirit, our praise to you arise.  
Here we offer to you gladly all the gifts that you impart,  
As we glory in your presence, giving from a grateful heart.**

\* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Lee Brigman

*Please join me in a unison prayer of dedication for all we have received...*

**Giver of all that is good, may the gifts that we bring today— gifts of money, energy, and commitment— be gathered up into your great love, and through us, may your love overflow more and more into all the world. Amen.**

**HOLY COMMUNION  
ALL ARE WELCOME AT THIS TABLE**

Anthem

“Christmas Communion Song”

S. N. Callaway

Invitation

Rev. Barbara Thomas

God’s Banquet is coming; the time when all will gather from the North, East, West, and South. A banquet where the rich and powerful sit with the weak and poverty-stricken. A table where the young and old will learn from each other. A table where distinctions are shed, and where all sit together in peace as equals. This is not the church’s table, but God’s table, and all who seek to follow The Way are welcome to eat and drink from it. So come, because of who you are, and taste what grace is like. Drink and see that God is loving and good.

One: God is with us.

**Many: We are not alone.**

One: Christ is present here.

**Many: The Spirit moves within us.**

One: Let us give thanks to God.

**Many: In memory and in hope.**





Hark! The herald angels sing. Jesus, the light of the world.  
Glory to the Christ-child bring, Jesus, the light of the world.

*Refrain: We'll walk in the light, beautiful light.  
Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.  
O, shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.*

Joyful all you nations, rise. Jesus, the light of the world.  
Join the triumph of the skies. Jesus, the light of the world. (R)

Christ by highest heaven adored; Jesus, the light of the world.  
Christ, the everlasting Lord; Jesus, the light of the world. (R)

Hail, the Bearer of God's peace! Jesus, the light of the world.  
Hail, the Sun of righteousness! Jesus, the light of the world. (R)

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Rev. Barbara Thomas

God of pregnant expectations, God of Christmas promise, God of child-like hope, we have eaten and drunk from your table. May the eating and the drinking fill us with hope in a world of despair. May we be beacons of hope as we wait for the day when the world will be changed. Grant that this taste of your banquet will give us the hunger for peace and justice in our community and around the world. Amen.

\* Hymn 345

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

PICARDY

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly-minded for with blessing in the hand,  
Christ our God to earth descending, our full homage to demand.

Monarch great, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth Christ stood,  
Lord of all, in human vesture— in the body and the blood—  
Christ will give to all the faithful bread of life for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,  
As the Light of light descending from the realms of endless day,  
That the powers of hell may vanish as the shadows clear away.

At Christ's feet the six-winged seraphs, cherubim with sleepless eye,  
Veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, God most high!

\* Benediction

Rev. Barbara Thomas

\* Benediction Response

KEEP YOUR LAMPS

Keep your lamps trimmed and burning, (3x)  
For the time is drawing nigh.

Postlude

“Let All Mortal Flesh”

E. Butler

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*The liturgy for today's service were used in part from Worship Ways,  
Presbyterian Lectionary Aids 2015-2016, Rev. Gord Waldie.*

**WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:**

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison, Barbara Schneller, Dave Shimberg, Pam Shimberg, Shakti Subramanian

We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Do you like talking to interesting people and being helpful? **Greeters and ushers, liturgists and readers are needed** starting at 10:30 every Sunday. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>



## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

### WELCOME BACK REV. BARBARA THOMAS

Barbara is currently Director of The Forum, a new training and collaboration center located at Hope Haven, which was generously supported by HCUCC with a proof of concept grant in 2022. Since its opening, The Forum has served over 360 front line staff from 42 agencies; offering training and support programs. The support of HCUCC is being felt by staff in Charlotte who are working with our most vulnerable populations.

**FUN FACT:** Our very own Jon Weddell is one of Barbara's contracted trainers at The Forum. He trains the advanced skills workshop for Motivational Interviewing (MI) and also leads a monthly learning community for MI, a nine-month cohort of staff from multiple local agencies.

Following worship today, stay and experience a special training: “With Grace and a Smile: Impactful Conversations”. This 1 hour workshop will engage us all to create positive conversations with anyone and may be especially helpful to Room In The Inn volunteers.

### **HOLIDAY LOVE OFFERING FOR OUR STAFF**

During this joyful time of year, we ask you to consider contributing to a holiday love offering to be divided among our dedicated staff members who work hard to make Holy Covenant a place of welcome, warmth, & spiritual renewal. No gift is too small and all are appreciated. If you choose to give by **December 12**, offerings can be made to Martha Bomely with the following methods:

**Zelle:** [Martha.bomely@gmail.com](mailto:Martha.bomely@gmail.com), 7048040640;

**PayPal:** [Martha.bomely@gmail.com](mailto:Martha.bomely@gmail.com);

**Venmo:** @mbbomely

Checks should be payable to Martha Bomely.

### **PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER**

#### **Members**

Linda Clark and family in the recent death of her husband, Gary Clark.

Linda Carver, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Melissa Noll, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita Taylor

#### **Friends & Family Members**

Clifton & Gwendolyn Washington, Jr. (Deborah Winston)

Karen & Billy (Kim Tyler), Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Jim & Janet Chittick (Stephanie Herrin), Erika Eckel and family (Dawn Simmons), David & Cecelia Griffin (JP Griffin), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Darin Jellison (Jo Ann Jellison), Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Sue Parrish (Terry Raley-Dennis), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Barbara Rutelonis (Eric Miner), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher Sizemore (Tina Ettesen), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to

[prayers@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org)

**Stay connected!** There are many new events in our future! Check out all the current happenings in the weekly newsletter via Constant Contact. *Not seeing it in your inbox? Sign-up here:* <https://holycovenantucc.org/newsletters/>

# Season of Advent at Holy Covenant UCC

12/10—Peace

Cookie Exchange 1pm;  
Room In The Inn (RITI)

12/17—Joy

Music Sunday, Consistory

12/24—Love

11 am service

Chili Supper 5:30pm

Candlelight Worship 7pm service