



Unsplash Photo by Nathan Dumlao

“Don’t be afraid to shine bright,
be joyful and honor the whole truth of who you are.”

- Gabby Bernstein

“I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw
that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy.”

- Kahlil Gibran

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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* Hymn 135

“O Come, All You Faithful”

ADESTE FIDELES

O come, all you faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come now, O come now to Bethlehem.
Come and behold the ruler of all angels:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

God of true God - Light of true Light -
Born of the Virgin's womb in human form;
Truly our God, begotten, not created:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing all you messengers of heavenly love:
“Glory to God, all glory in the highest”:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord!

Amen, Lord, we greet you, born this happy morning;
Jesus to you shall all glory be given;
Word of our God now in flesh appearing:
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration: Christ is Lord

Advent Candle Lighting

the Czarnecki-Simmons Family

The Advent candle lighters today is the Czarnecki-Simmons family which is quite appropriate as we find Joy in having a new Pastor and family, and Joy in the future God has in store for our church community! Think of JOY like this: serving Jesus, helping Others, and taking care of Yourself! We see this reflected in this family. Today, we light the third Advent candle, the candle for joy...

Reader One: When I look around, I see shadows of sadness, people who are hungry, people living within systems of injustice, people in prison, people who are isolated and feel they on their own...

Reader Two: When I look around, I see shadows of grief, families who have lost loved ones, people dreading the holidays because of painful memories, or people who don't want to spend another Christmas alone...

Reader One: In the face of sadness, in the face of depression, we light a candle of joy...

Reader Two: In the face of grief, in the face of loss, we light a candle of joy...

(Light the third candle in your Advent wreath.)

Reader One: May the light from this candle overwhelm the world with joy.

Reader Two: May the light from this candle say to all that joy is coming.

Reader One: Friends, be not afraid, God's joy is at hand!

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

Song (lyrics by Kathleen Smith)

TEMPLE OF PEACE

Joy sings in a weary world

When spirits are unbound and dance the whole world round.

Joy sings in a weary world: the promised day of freedom comes.

Daily Affirmation

Ourselves: "Today is a gift, and **I** embrace it with joy."

Neighbor: "Today is a gift, and **you** embrace it with joy."

World: "Today is a gift, and **we** embrace it with joy."

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Anthem

"Still, Still, Still"

arr. R. Lau

Our Hebrew lesson for today comes from the Book of Isaiah, where the prophet Isaiah speaks of the joy of liberation from landlessness, slavery, and debt...

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

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

“The Joy of What God Can Do Through You”

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity

Lloyd Spencer

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

Even in joyless times we remember that God has done great things for us. And so, we choose to live our lives in hope, counting on the goodness of God in every season. As a sign of our trust in God, we share our gifts this morning, strengthening this church, its ministries, and future as we seek together to offer hope, summon peace, and extend love. For there is joy in knowing God can still do great things. Let us now share our gifts with God...

Offering Anthem

“Lo How a Rose E’er Blooming”

arr. H. Hopson

* Doxology

W żłobie leży

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*)

Lloyd Spencer

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

Giving God, your heart abounds with gifts which continue to bless. Receive the gift of these offerings as a sign of our trust in you and our intention to live a life of faith grounded in your mercy, inspired by your Spirit, open to the joy of your presence, hospitable to one another, and generous toward your world and the people in it. Amen.

* Hymn

“Prepare the Way, O Zion”

BEREDEN VÄG FÖR HERRAN

Prepare the way, O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!

Let every hill and valley a level way appear.

Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.

O blest is Christ who came in God’s most holy name.

He brings God’s rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven above.

His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.

Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.

O blest is Christ who came in God’s most holy name.

Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior’s rule embrace,

And tidings of salvation proclaim in every place.

All lands will bow rejoicing, their adoration voicing.

O blest is Christ who came in God’s most holy name.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

KEEP YOUR LAMPS

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

Postlude

“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming”
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arr. J. Purifoy

*Parts of the liturgy for today's service were adapted from www.saltproject.org,
North Texas Conference of the UMC, Worship Ways.*

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

Akeera Czarnecki, D Evans, Brian Hankins, Anne Hayes, Jo Ann Jellison, 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

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/>

We give thanks for all who have made a joyful noise for HCUCC this year! We are grateful for each of you, your interest in singing in the choir, your dedication and teamwork, and your gift in music for each of us to enjoy.

Participating with the choir in 2023:

Kristin Andes, Lee Brigman, Lisa Cloninger, Joy Decker, Tina Dickens, Cheri Dennis, D Evans, Henry Hankins, Laura Hankins, Jim Hong, Meg Houlihan, Sally McLester, Eric Miner, Diane Neese, Alice Phelan-Young, Sally Phelan-Young, Terry Raley-Dennis, Beth Sharp, Robert Shepherd, Kathi Smith, Ed Vickery, Darline Warren, Mike Yonkovic

FOR OUR KIDDOS

The Christian Ed team has put together packets for kids who find themselves in church for the whole hour and need some activity. The packets for our “regulars” will have their names on them. Packets for others will specify “non-reader” or “young reader”, based on instructions to be read in the latter. The packets will include crayons and will be at the usher station.

MASKS WELCOMED

According to Atrium Health, respiratory virus season is upon us. There are increasing levels of COVID, flu (influenza), RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), as well as colds and strep. It would be a kindness if those experiencing respiratory symptoms could stay home and not expose vulnerable folks at Holy Covenant. CDC has information and guidelines for those exposed to COVID but not yet having symptoms. Feel free to wear a mask to avoid exposure to colds and other respiratory viruses. Stay healthy and cozy this winter!

ANGEL TREE GIVING

*With gratitude for each gift! Thank you for providing joy for our sponsored family!
Merry Christmas*

CHRISTMAS EVE CHILI SUPPER

Let's gather for a meal at 5:30pm! (Choir rehearses at 6pm) Come straight from work. Several styles of Chili, rice, rolls, and various fixin's. Even a soup, if chili's not your thang! We'll be cleaned up and ready for worship by 7pm. Sign up to bring a food item here https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-45334242-christmas# or see the sign-up sheet in the gathering room. Help us keep our community safe by listing ingredients, particularly items with gluten, peanuts and tree nuts.

YEAR-END GIVING - THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

Holy Covenant's fiscal year ends on Friday, December 29. Contributions for 2023, or prepayments for 2024, must be received at the church by noon on 12/29/2023, or postmarked on or before 12/31/2023 if being mailed. Please use the secure address of Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269. Questions about year-end contributions, stock gifts or electronic giving may be directed to Dawn Simmons at office@holycovenantucc.org. We are blessed by your generous support of the ministries at Holy Covenant!

SECOND ANNUAL NEW YEARS EVE GAME NIGHT

Come and join us on New Year's Eve at church from 6:30 pm until 9-ish for all kinds of games and jocularly. Bring your favorite games and goodies!!
Email Suzanne at suzlam@yahoo.com for more information.

SONGS OF HOPE AND FREEDOM, WEEKEND OF JANUARY 20-21

Special Musical Event: Songs of Hope and Freedom with Reggie Harris, an interactive music workshop from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. **Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024.** Join us to enrich our worship and fellowship with this special musical event. No singing or musical ability required!

An expert on the music of the Underground Railroad and the modern Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Harris will teach us songs that together, we can make a part of our regular worship service. Among his many awards are the Spirit of Folk Award and the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Award. He is also a teaching artist in an education program for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and a Woodrow Wilson scholar. Read more on Reggie Harris' website, reggisharrismusic.com.

Mr. Harris will also join us for worship on **Sunday, Jan. 21.**

Please at <https://forms.gle/TDjPVqxKSqDj5smu9>

We are publicizing this event widely so we encourage Holy Covenant members to register ASAP! You can always cancel later if you can't make it.



This event is sponsored by the Racial Justice and Equity Committee.

For more information, email Holly Middleton at hsmiddleton@gmail.com. Thank you!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Linda Carver, Linda Clark, 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

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), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher Sizemore (Tina Ettesen), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Clifton Jr. & Gwendolyn Washington (Deborah Winston), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

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

prayers@holycovenantucc.org