



Unsplash Photo by Arni Svanur Danielsson

*“This Evening Christ was born into the world.
Now let Christ be born in you
and change the world through you.”*
- Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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

December 24, 2023, 7pm

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

Prelude “Le Sommeil de l’Enfant Jesus” arr. M. L. Paschal
Kristin Andes, harp

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
One: May the peace of Christ be with you!
Many: And also with you.

Introit 143 “On Christmas Night All Christians Sing” SUSSEX CAROL
On Christmas night all Christians sing, to hear the news the angels bring;
On Christmas night all Christians sing, to hear the news the angels bring;
News of great joy, news of great mirth, news of our gracious Ruler’s birth.

* Call to the Heart Akeera Czarnecki
Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshiping, reading, and singing.

One: God is here	Many: And we are here to worship God.
One: In our dimness	Many: You are the God of Light.
One: In our despair	Many: You are the God of hope.
One: In our sadness	Many: You are the God of joy.
One: In our turmoil	Many: You are the God of peace.
One: In our heartache	Many: You are the God of love.
One: We worship you now	Many: God of everyone! Thanks be to God!

* 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

Stephanie Herrin, Lee Brigman

Tonight, we light all the Advent candles and the Christ candle, signifying the birth of Christ...

Reader One: Because injustice and despair threaten to overwhelm us, we pray for hope...

(Light the first candle in your Advent wreath)

Reader Two: Because so many swords have not yet been remade into plowshares, we pray for peace...

(Light the second candle in your Advent wreath)

Reader One: Because grief and loss weigh so heavily, we pray for joy...

(Light the third candle in your Advent wreath)

Reader Two: Because hatred is still so strong, and because people all over the world are suffering, we pray for love...

(Light the fourth candle in your Advent wreath)

Reader One: God has come to us as a child, to dwell with us, and to walk with us...

(Light the Christ Candle in your Advent wreath)

Reader Two: May the light and the fire from these candles burn away whatever would prevent the God of hope and peace and joy and love from being born among us.

Reader One: Friends, be not afraid, even now – even now – the light of Christ is illuminating the world, on earth as it is in heaven!

Response

“Jesus, the Light of the World”

ELDERKIN

**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)**

Pastoral Reflection

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7 (CEB)

Lee Brigman

The Prophet Foretells the Coming of the Savior

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest, as those who divide plunder rejoice. As on the day of Midian, you’ve shattered the yoke that burdened them, the staff on their shoulders, and the rod of their oppressor. Because every boot of the thundering warriors, and every garment rolled in blood will be burned, fuel for the fire. A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David’s throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever.

Special Music

“O Holy Night”
Dorrie Hankins, vocalist

arr. B. Wolaver

When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom." Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I have never been with a man?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God." Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Handbell Choir "Angels We Have Heard on High" arr. M & S Eithun
Joy Decker, Sally McLester, Dawn Robinson, Dawn Simmons

In those days, Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Special Music “Child of the Poor/What Child Is This” S. Soper
Lisa Cloninger, Kathi Smith, vocalists

Fourth Lesson Matthew 2:1-12 (CEB) Terrence Hayes
The Magi are led by a Star to Jesus

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.” When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Anthem “Christmas Lullaby” J. Rutter

In the beginning there was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. The Word was present to God from the beginning. Through the Word all things came into being, and apart from the Word nothing came into being that has come into being. In the Word was life, and that life was humanity's light – a Light that shines in the darkness, a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.

Then came one named John, sent as an envoy from God, who came as a witness to testify about the Light, so that through his testimony everyone might believe. He himself wasn't the Light; he only came to testify about the Light – the true Light that illumines all humankind.

The Word was coming into the world – was in the world – and though the world was made through the Word, the world didn't recognize it. Though the Word came to its own realm, the Word's own people didn't accept it. Yet any who did accept the Word, who believed in that Name, were empowered to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor urge of flesh nor human will – but born of God. And the Word became flesh and stayed for a little while among us; we saw the Word's glory – the favor and position a parent gives an only child – filled with grace, filled with truth.

Poem

“Written in the Stars”

Robert Shepherd

Tonight, I look up at the stars in the sky
And remember another star, from days long gone by
That shone oh so brightly, to show humanity the way
To a small baby laid in a manger of hay

This baby was sweet, all shiny and new,
But he means so much more to me and to you
We know him as Jesus Christ, or Emmanuel
And his story is one we have long loved to tell

Because it is a story of the best of humanity
Of mercy and sacrifice and God’s all-knowing plan
It is a story of love beyond measure
Of a God who gave us God’s most precious treasure

I think of all this, as I look at the stars
I think about the love of this God of ours
And I close my eyes and cross myself, and I pray
That I will remember this love every day

Hymn

“Born in the Night, Mary’s Child”

MARY’S CHILD

**Born in the night, Mary’s Child, a long way from your home;
Coming in need, Mary’s Child, born in a borrowed room.**

**Clear shining light, Mary’s Child, your face lights up our way;
Light of the world, Mary’s Child, dawn on our darkened day.**

**Truth of our life, Mary’s Child, you tell us God is good;
Yes, it is true, Mary’s Child, shown on your cross of wood.**

**Hope of the world, Mary’s Child, you’re coming soon to reign;
God of the earth, Mary’s Child, walk in our streets again.**

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Invitation

Tonight, heaven and earth meet. Tonight, a backyard shed is holy ground. Tonight, strangers gather as family. And so we come here, to the feast table of God, as Christ's invited friends, chosen and beloved. If you have been here often, if the memory of this table stretches back through all your Christmases, you are welcome. If you have been here rarely, if reverence for bread and juice is strange to you, you are welcome. If you have much faith, or little faith, or wouldn't know where to even begin if you wanted to believe, you are welcome here. For Christ does not hold himself back from us, but boldly enters every heart. Christ welcomes you to this table just as you are. On this sacred evening under the stars, where miracles are born, that is all you need to know.

One: The Lord be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: We lift them to the Lord.

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Tonight, we remember how Christ came into a world that barely made room for him. As we imagine him, fragile, vulnerable, and tiny, we shudder to think of a child in a backyard shed during the cold of night with only the protection that the fierce love of his parents could give him. We remember how shepherds and kings knelt before him. Before he could form words of blessing or raise his hands to heal how they adored him, not for what he'd done but for who he was, God among us, a miracle that was held in someone's hands.

Light of the world, we give thanks that you came among us, with healing in your touch, compassion in your voice, and grace in your power. The shadows of the world may seem so strong, but the slightest light disrupts it. Tonight, you descend upon our world again, vanquishing the powers of evil, sorrow, and despair through us. Shine for those who grieve tonight, who are lost or lonely, ill or empty, who dread the night and fear the morning. Shine in us, so that we might shine for them that all shadows would clear away and we would meet each other in heaven's light, and call each other beloved as you do us.

Holy Spirit, presence of Christ in and among us, we praise you with our own Alleluias. Rest yourself in these gifts of bread and cup that they may be sure signs of God's love for us, forgiveness and life abundant. Unite us with all the saints in every time and place, all those who loved you and all those you loved. Remind us that at this table are those we miss so dearly tonight, those who are missing from our holiday tables, but ever present at this heavenly banquet. And most of all, unite us with Christ, the child of Bethlehem, that we might love as he loved, so greatly that it changed the whole world. Alleluia, we sing tonight. Alleluia, Lord most high!

Many: Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is born.

Words of Institution

Sharing of the Elements

Communion Music

“All Is Well”

by M. W. Smith

Ed Vickery, Eric Miner, vocalists

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Bread of heaven, let us not be unchanged by tonight. Let us not pass by the stable in silence; let us not leave the table empty. Dwell in our hearts, and shine in our lives, that we might know your deep, deep peace, and share it with the world. Fill us with your love, so that we might walk hand in hand with you all our days. For this we pray in the holy name of the Christ-child, born for us this night. Amen.

Special Music

“Night of Silence”

D. Kantor

Lisa Cloninger, Kathleen Smith, vocalists

(Individual candles will be lit while the choir is singing.

The ushers will bring the light to the congregation.

To light your candle, tip it into the flame of the lit candle.

There are baskets in the foyer for returning your candle.)

*Cold are the people, Winter of life, We tremble in shadows this cold endless night,
Frozen in the snow lie roses sleeping, Flowers that will echo the sunrise,
Fire of hope is our only warmth, Weary, its flame will be dying soon.*

*Voice in the distance, Call in the night, On wind you enfold us You speak of the light,
Gentle on the ear you whisper softly, Rumors of a dawn so embracing,
Breathless love awaits darkened souls, Soon will we know of the morning.*

*Spirit among us, Shine like the star, Your light that guides shepherds and kings from afar,
Shimmer in the sky so empty, lonely, Rising in the warmth of your Son's love,
Star unknowing of night and day, Spirit we wait for your loving Son.*

Hymn 134

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

STILLE NACHT

**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

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Postlude

“O Holy Night”

arr. B. C. Dockery

Bill Tyler, piano, Kim Tyler, oboe, Liam Sullivan, cello

*Songs in this service are used by permission.
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Parts of the liturgy for today's service were adapted from John Maynard (Call to Worship), www.saltproject.org (Advent Candle Lighting), Carol Ferguson (Communion).

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/>

Masks Welcomed

Feel free to wear a mask to avoid exposure to colds and other respiratory viruses. Stay healthy and cozy this winter!

THE UCC CHRISTMAS FUND FOR THE VETERANS OF THE CROSS

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. If you write a check to HCUCC, please list *Christmas Fund* in the memo. You may also [Give online](#). Thank you for supporting any of the UCC's 5 special offerings throughout the year! You bless this greater church beyond measure!

HOPEFUL SPIRITS GROUP BEGINS MEETINGS, DECEMBER 26

As part of our community outreach ministries, we welcome the Hopeful Spirits, a newly formed Community AA meeting beginning Tuesday, December 26, 2023. This group will meet each week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30pm-7:30pm in the Conference Room. If you, or someone you know, is a “friend of Bill W” or a person who believes they may have a problem with alcohol, pass it on! This meeting is all inclusive for anyone in the community. Thank you for your support.

<https://aanorthcarolina.org/meetings/?tsml-region=charlotte>

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, JANUARY 20-21, 2024

This Special Musical Event with Reggie Harris is an interactive music workshop from **9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 20**. 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's [website](#). **Mr. Harris will also join us for worship on Sunday, Jan. 21**. Please register. We are publicizing this event widely so we encourage Holy Covenant members to register ASAP! This event is sponsored by your Racial Justice and Equity Committee. For more information, email Holly Middleton at hsmiddleton@gmail.com. Thank you!

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. Please let Dawn know if you are making a stock gift so we can include the value of this gift on your year-end giving statement. We are blessed by your generous support of the ministries at Holy Covenant!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

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

Karen & Billy (Kim Tyler), Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Jim & Janet Chittick (Stephanie Herrin), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Darin Jellison (Jo Ann Jellison), Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Clifton & Gwendolyn Washington, Jr. (Deborah Winston), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

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

prayers@holycovenantucc.org

HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY TEAM

presents....

SONGS OF HOPE AND FREEDOM

SPECIAL GUEST **REGGIE HARRIS**

WORKSHOP

**SATURDAY JANUARY 20TH,
2024 9:00 AM- 1:00 PM EST
(REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE)**

WORSHIP

**SUNDAY JANUARY 21ST, 2024
10:55 AM EST**

REGISTER HERE!



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