



Unsplash Photo by Phil Hearing

**“Do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”
-Mother Teresa**

**“In the midst of an ordinary day,
between ordinary people
with ordinary hearts
blossomed an extraordinary love.”
-Alicia N. Green**

**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT ~ LOVE**

December 24, 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 "Carol Medley" arr. S. Woods
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 "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 the Heart Laura Hankins
Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshiping, reading, and singing.

One: God of love, we yearn for your presence.

Many: **Our hearts ache for your Light.**

One: Christ, bearer of miracles, we look to your coming, for the dawning of your new day.

Many: **We look for the Light that leads us to life.**

One: Spirit of Light, arise in us and guide us,

Many: **Our hearts are open mangers, ready for the birth of the holy child in our love and hope and gentleness.**

One: Come, O Light, and dawn upon us.

Many: **Come, O Light, and unfold your beauty within us.**

* Hymn 101

“Comfort, Comfort O My People”

FREU DICH SEHR

“Comfort, comfort O my people, tell of peace” thus says our God;
Comfort those whose hearts are shrouded, mourning under sorrow’s load.
Speak unto Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, and their warfare now is over.

For the herald’s voice is calling in the desert far and near,
Bidding us to make repentance since the realm of God is here.
Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise in meeting and the hills bow down in greeting.

Straight shall be what long was crooked, and the rougher places plain!
Let your hearts be true and humble, for Messiah’s holy reign.
For God’s glory evermore shall be known o’er all the world;
And all flesh shall see the token that God’s word is never broken.

Advent Candle Lighting

Eric Miner & Ed Vickery

“Today, we invite Eric Miner and Ed Vickery to light the Advent candle of love. Through their lives they demonstrate love is so much more than romance, but love is kindness, love is compassion, love even contains moments of humor and laughter, and most of all, love truly knows no bounds. Love is a choice and is seen in its fullest expression when it is offered freely and openly from the heart, which they continually do. Today, they light the fourth Advent candle, the candle for love...”

Reader One: Because too many people are wandering in the wilderness, because too many people are sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, because too many of our conversations are laced with conflict and bitterness, we light candles...

Reader Two: Because people all over the world are suffering, and we’re often too distracted to notice, we light candles...

Reader One: One for hope, one for peace, one for joy, and one for love...
(Light the fourth candle in your Advent wreath.)

Reader Two: May the light from these candles overwhelm the world.

Reader One: May the light from these candles illuminate the valley of the shadow of death.

Reader Two: And may the fire from these candles burn away whatever would prevent God’s love from being born among us.

Reader One: Friends, be not afraid, even now – even now – God’s love is overwhelming the world, on earth as it already is in heaven!

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

Song

TEMPLE OF PEACE

Love grows in a weary world
When hungry hearts find bread and children's dreams are fed.
Love grows in a weary world: the promised feast of plenty comes!

Daily Affirmation

Ourselves: "I am capable of giving and receiving love."
Neighbor: "You are capable of giving and receiving love."
World: "We are capable of giving and receiving love."

Stories for All People

Laura Hankins

Anthem

"like a child"

arr. D. Cherwien

Responsive Prayers of the People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: Watching and waiting for the coming of Christ, we pray for the promise of a new creation, saying...

Many: Come quickly, Lord; our hope is in you.

One: With expectation, we pray for the church . . . Fill our mouths with the song of your unending love. May we never stop proclaiming your faithfulness from one generation to another...

Many: Come quickly, Lord; our hope is in you.

One: With expectation, we pray for the world . . . Come and dwell among all the people of the world. As you made your home with your people in ancient times, make your home among us now...

Many: Come quickly, Lord; our hope is in you.

One: With expectation, we pray for this community . . . By your power at work in us, use us to bring healing and freedom, liberation and comfort, and to share the good news that you walk in our streets...

Many: Come quickly, Lord; our hope is in you.

One: With expectation, we pray for loved ones . . . Remember those who are hurting or searching. Even when they feel that all is lost hold their desires and dreams in your heart...

Many: Come quickly, Lord; our hope is in you.

One: God our hope, as the promised day approaches, fill us with the joy of your Holy Spirit and strengthen us to serve you faithfully; through Christ, whose reign is coming.

Many: Amen.

Lord's Prayer (*unison*)

Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

EMMANUEL

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, your name is called Emmanuel.

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

Hebrew Lesson

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (CEB)

Terry Raley-Dennis

Our Hebrew Lesson for today comes from Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26, where the psalmist expresses gratitude for the mercy and love of God...

The Lord God's spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and a day of vindication for our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for Zion's mourners, to give them a crown in place of ashes, oil of joy in place of mourning, a mantle of praise in place of discouragement. They will be called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by the Lord to glorify himself. They will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will restore formerly deserted places; they will renew ruined cities, places deserted in generations past.

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

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

* Gospel Lesson

Luke 1:26-38 (CEB)

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Our Gospel Lesson for today comes from Luke 1:26-38, where the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her she will bear the child of God...

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 haven’t had sexual relations 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.

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

“How Can This Be?”

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity

Laura Hankins

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

On this day that has become synonymous with gift giving, let us reflect on the gifts of love, hope, joy, and peace this Advent brings. Let us respond to the generosity of the God who gives and in turn give generously by sharing God’s goodness. What might seem like an ordinary offering may end up being something extraordinary in the life of someone else, to our community, and the world we share. Let us now offer our gifts in extraordinary love.

* 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*)

Laura Hankins

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

Generous God, we give thanks for the beauty and diversity of the gifts we have received. May these gifts and the stewardship of their use bring glory and honor to you. May they find avenues for loving all your people, strengthen the fights for justice that are being fought, unveil the beauty that was always present, and bring peace to your creation. Every gift, no matter how small, has place and purpose in your kin-dom. Amen.

* Hymn 144

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”

MENDELSSOHN

Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all you saints arise, join the triumph of the skies;
With the angel host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Refrain: Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time the Savior comes, off-spring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh, the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased on earth with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel. (R)

Hail the Bearer of God’s peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness,
Light and life our Savior brings, risen with radiant, healing wings.
Mildly laying glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us all from earth, born to give us second birth. (R)

Poem

“The Work of Christmas”

by Howard Thurman

Kevin Edwards-Knight

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
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.
Go in hope, peace, joy, and love...to spread the beauty of Christmas.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

KEEP YOUR LAMPS

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

Postlude

“What Child Is This”

arr. Bill Tyler

Bill Tyler, French horn, Kim Tyler, oboe

*Songs in this service are used by permission.
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Parts of the liturgy for today's service were written or adapted from Worship Ways, www.saltproject.org, Howard Thurman, and Unfolding Light.

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, 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/>

CHRISTMAS EVE CHILI SUPPER 5:30PM, CANDLELIGHT WORSHIP 7PM

Let's gather for a meal at 5:30pm! (Choir rehearses at 6pm) 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.

FOR OUR CHILDREN

The Christian Ed team has put together some 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

With respiratory virus season is upon us, and increasing levels of COVID, flu (influenza), RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), as well as colds and strep, please feel free to wear a mask to avoid exposure to colds and other respiratory viruses. Stay healthy and cozy this winter!

HOPEFUL SPIRITS GROUP MEETINGS BEGINNING 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 6:30 pm-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.

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 jocularities. Bring your favorite games and goodies!! Email Suzanne at suzlam@yahoo.com for more information.

\$555 RAISED FOR TIME OUT YOUTH

Thank you, HCUCC family, for your wonderful support of the Love Offering opportunity for Time Out Youth this past Sunday. Because of your generosity, T.O.Y. will be blessed with an unexpected gift of \$555 to assist in their work with supporting local LGBTQ+ youth. What a wonderful way to help this deserving organization! And thank you, Kim Tyler, for donating your beautiful creations for benefit of this group. Have a Merry Christmas! [Time Out Youth](#) offers support, advocacy and opportunities for personal development and social interaction to LGBTQ+ youth, ages 13-24.

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!

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

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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