



Image: Microsoft Designer

“Love is the force that will break down the walls of injustice and build a world of freedom for all.” -Kaji Dousa

“In love, we find the courage to challenge the systems that harm and to build a more just world.” -Bell Hooks

“When we sing with love, we raise our voices not only in praise but in the call for justice, creating harmony where there was once division.”

- Rev. Dr. William Barber II

Founded in 1916, we are an Open & Affirming (LGBTQ+), anti-racist, and justice seeking church that is part of the greater United Church of Christ.

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

**December 22, 2024, 10:55 am**

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

Prelude "Journey to the Manger" E. Butler  
*Patrick Washburn, Jon Weddell, piano duet*

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

Chiming of the Hour

Introit "Angels We Have Heard on High" arr. M & S Eithun  
*Handbell choir*

**RESPONSIVE LITANY FOR THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Reader: On this day of celebration, we remember and give thanks for 25 years in this sacred space...

Many: **We gather with gratitude for all who have walked this journey with us, for their faith, vision, and commitment.**

Reader: For the babies who have been baptized in this sanctuary, marked as God's beloved and held by this community's love...

Many: **We give thanks!**

Reader: For the countless new members who have found their spiritual home here, bringing new gifts, new voices, and new hope...

Many: **We give thanks!**

Reader: For the children who grew up in this church, who sang in our choirs, learned from our teachers, and became adults among us...

Many: **We give thanks!**

Reader: For the pastors who have faithfully shepherded us, preaching the Gospel, sharing our joys, and walking with us through life's challenges...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the moment we boldly declared ourselves an Open & Affirming church, making a covenant of welcome to all of God's children...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the weddings celebrated here, joining hearts and lives in love, and for the funerals where we grieved and honored beloved souls...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For those who have found sanctuary and refuge within these walls, during life's hardest moments...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the ministries that have transformed lives, the hands that have served without notice, and the leaders who have guided with wisdom...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the moments this church has stood boldly on the side of justice and love, declaring that God's table is open to all...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the music that has filled this space with beauty, lifting hearts and spirits toward God...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the times when answers were unclear, but faith sustained us, and for the presence of Christ, felt deeply in our midst...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: For the redemption, the resurrection, the transformation, and the renewal we have experienced together...

**Many: We give thanks!**

Reader: And for the future ahead, for the lives still to be touched, the justice still to be done, and the love still to be shared...

**Many: We commit ourselves anew, trusting in God's faithfulness to guide us.**

Reader: Holy Covenant United Church of Christ, 25 years in this sanctuary and we are still proclaiming God's love...

**All: May we continue to be a light in the world, a place where lives are transformed, love is embodied, and justice rises. With gratitude for the past and faith in the future, we step boldly into the next chapter of God's unfolding story. 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!

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love

Richard, Cheryl & Daniel Sexton

Today, we light the fourth candle, the candle of **Love**. Love is the foundation of our faith, the greatest commandment, and the most transformative force in the world. Love is radical; it challenges us to move beyond our comfort zones and embrace all people, especially those who are marginalized and oppressed. Love calls us to act with compassion, to speak out against injustice, and to work for the well-being of all creation.

As we light this candle, we affirm that love is not just an emotion, but a call to action. Love is the way of Jesus, and it is the way we are called to live every day.

*(Light the fourth candle in your Advent wreath.)*

One: Love is our guide, our hope, and our call.

Many: We will love always, as God loves us.

Song of Response

“Love’s Pure Light”

J. Raney

**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. *(with choral ending)***

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Anthem

“Winter’s Snow”

P. Neidman

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Anthem

“Child of Mercy”  
*(Ed Vickery, cantor)*

J. Grimaldi

**Child of mercy, child of peace,  
Jesus, Bread of life, food to fill our longing.  
Child of justice, child of light,  
Jesus, saving cup, Emmanuel, God with us.**

Modern Lesson

Cheryl Milam

*Our Modern Lesson for today comes from Claudia L. Johnson, who is a LGBTQ+ theologian and community advocate. Among her work she says...*

True love is not a luxury, but a necessity. It is in love that we find the strength to resist, to rise up, and to claim our full humanity. To love is to stand with the oppressed, to seek justice for the broken, and to never give up on the possibility of healing.

**One:** May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

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

Song

“Canticle of the Turning”  
*(Meg Houlihan, vocalist, and band)*

STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN

*Refrain:*

**My heart shall sing of the day you bring.**

**Let the fires of your justice burn.**

**Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,**

**And the world is about to turn.**

\* Gospel Lesson

Luke 1:39-56 (NRSV)

Tom Magraw

*Our Scripture Lesson for today comes from the Gospel of Luke 1:39-56, where Mary greets Elizabeth and responds in song to what God is doing through her...*

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**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.

The Good News

"Will You Sing with Mary?"

*Rev. Christopher Czarnecki*

Invitation to Generosity

Tom Magraw

Mary's song reminds us that God's love is not confined to the powerful or the privileged. It is a love that lifts the lowly, fills the hungry, and calls us to participate in the work of justice and compassion. As we offer our gifts today, may we do so with the same spirit of trust and hope that Mary proclaimed, knowing that through our generosity, God's love can take shape in the world. Let us give joyfully and with open hearts.

Anthem

"Coventry Carol"

arr. H. Cable

## \* Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
 Praise God all creatures here below.  
 Praise God above, ye heavenly host.  
 Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost.

Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Tom Magraw

God of love and justice, we dedicate these gifts to your work in the world. May they lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and proclaim your mercy to every generation. Bless what we bring today, that it might be a song of love in action, echoing Mary's joy and courage. Use us and these offerings to help bring your vision of hope and wholeness to life. 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)

## \* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

## \* Benediction Response

WONDERFUL CHILD

Jesus, Jesus, oh, what a wonderful child.  
 Jesus, Jesus, so holy, meek, and mild.  
 New life, new hope the child will bring.  
 Listen to the angels sing, "Glory, glory, glory," let the heavens ring!

## Postlude

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

arr. T. Wilhelmi

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*The liturgy for today's service was written by Rev. Christopher Czarnecki.*

*Candid photographs and/or video recording share our work and witness and invite others into the fellowship of our congregation. Some pictures/video may be published in church print publications, on our website or on our official social media sites. If you do not wish to have your image published, please contact the church office by phone or email.*

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

*Participating with the choir, band or handbell choir in 2024:  
Kristin Andes, Lee Brigman, Joy Decker, Tina Dickens, D Evans,  
Laura Hankins, Meg Houlihan, Sally McLester, Eric Miner, Diane  
Neese, Alice Phelan-Young, Sally Phelan-Young, Terry Raley-  
Dennis, Dawn Robinson, Benjamin Rudolph, Dawn Simmons, Beth  
Sharp, Robert Shepherd, Mary Tarr, Steven Tarr, Ed Vickery,  
Darline Warren, Patrick Washburn*



## 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 PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Laura Hankins  
Ushers: Shakti Subramanian      Greeters:  
Refreshments: Sojourners Class

### WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Greeters and ushers are needed starting at 10:30am every Sunday. Liturgists and readers roles are also available. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or at

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>.



CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT <https://holycovenantucc.org/events/>

*Christmas Eve: Chili & Soup Supper 5:30pm*  
*Christmas Eve Worship: 7:00pm*  
*New Year's Eve Game Night 6:30pm*  
*Save the Dates: Jan 25 All Church Work Day*  
*New Members & Inquirer's Classes February 2 & 16*

### YEAR-END GIVING - THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

Holy Covenant's fiscal year ends on Tuesday, December 31. Contributions for 2024, or prepayments for 2025, **must be received at the church by noon on 12/31/2024**, or postmarked on or before 12/31/2024 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](mailto: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

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to  
[prayers@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org).

### Members

Jana Harrison & Jeff Hughes in the death of Jana's father, James Thomas Harrison  
Friends and Family in the recent death of the Rev. H. Linn Finger  
Linda Carver, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Alix Felsing & Joann Felsing, Jim & Faye  
Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Suzanne Lamorey, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy  
Powell, Ed & Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Darline Warren

### Friends & Family Members

Will Judd and family in the death of his father, Grady Judd  
Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon  
(Melissa Noll), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Pam Culp (Melissa Noll), Cindy Hedrick  
(Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charles Jernigan  
(Lee Parrish), Dave Johnson, Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Earl & Susie Morgan  
(Ed Vickery), Joe Parks (Beth Sharp), Larry & Karen Roark (Ed Vickery), Michelle  
Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Brian Weddell (Jon  
Weddell), Kim Wiggs-Gamblin, Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley), John Zastrow (Barb  
Schneller)

### OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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