



Photo by Microsoft Image Creator

“The Christmas story is not just about the birth of a baby in a manger; it is about the birth of hope, the incarnation of love, and the coming of justice for all people.”

- Kittredge Cherry

“In the birth of Jesus, we see the love of God made manifest in the most humble of circumstances, revealing the profound mystery of God’s presence among us.”

-Bishop Gene Robinson

“Christ came that all might be free, and that freedom is a radical force, one that upends systems of power and privilege.”

-Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder

HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

December 24, 2024, 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 "O Little Town of Bethlehem" arr. E. Butler
Dawn Robinson, Jon Weddell, piano duet

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

Introit "When Christ Was Born of Mary Free" R. Bonington

* Call to the Heart (*responsive*) Brian Hankins
One: Tonight, we gather to remember the story that has shaped us, the promise that has carried us, and the light that leads us still.
Many: **We come with hearts full of wonder, to celebrate the birth of love among us.**
One: In the cries of a newborn, in the courage of a young mother, in the faithfulness of a father, we find the hope of the world.
Many: **God is with us, Emmanuel, bringing peace, joy, and love.**
One: So come, let us worship the One who dwells in the manger and in our hearts.
Many: **Let us rejoice in the miracle of this night, and welcome Christ's light among us!**

* 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

Jay & Cathy Whitley

Tonight, we light the Christ candle, the final candle of Advent, as we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World. In Christ, we encounter the fullness of God's love, peace, hope, and joy. Jesus embodies God's promise to be with us always, offering forgiveness, healing, and the invitation to live in community with one another. As we light this candle, we celebrate the birth of Christ, the coming of the divine into the world, bringing transformation and renewal to all things. Let this light shine as a symbol of the love, grace, and hope that Christ brings, illuminating our hearts and our world.

(Light the Christ Candle in your Advent wreath)

One: Christ is born among us, shining with love and grace.

Many: We rejoice and celebrate the light of Christ, now and forever.

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)

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7 (CEB)

Carl Johnson

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. The zeal of the Lord of heavenly forces will do this.

Special Music

“Gesu Bambino/O Holy Night”
Dorrie Hankins, vocalist

arr. B. Wolaver

Second Lesson

Luke 1:26-38 (CEB)
The Birth of Jesus Is Foretold

Tina Dickens

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.

Special Music

"Breath of Heaven"
Meg Houlihan, vocalist

A. Grant/C. Eaton

Third Lesson

Luke 2:10-14 (CEB)
The Angels Sing "Glory to God"

Phyllis Johnson

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

Anthem

"Carol of the Bells"

arr. P. J. Wilhousky

Fourth Lesson

Luke 2:1-7 (CEB)
The Birth of Jesus

Patti Unger

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 guestroom.

Handbell Choir

“What Child Is This”

arr. K. L. Buckwalter

Joy Decker, Sally McLester, Diane Neese, Dawn Robinson, Dawn Simmons

Sermon

“Will We Make Room?”

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

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.**

The Invitation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: The Lord be with you!

Many: And also with you!

One: Lift up your hearts, open to the wonder of this night!

Many: We lift them up to God, who meets us here in love.

One: Let us give thanks to the Holy One, source of all that is good.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise, for God’s light has come to dwell among us.

One: On this holy night, we come to a table that stretches across time and space, where heaven and earth meet in the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup. This is the table of Christ, where all are welcomed, all are nourished, and all are invited to taste and see the goodness of God. Come, not because you must, but because you are loved. Come, not because you are strong, but because you seek strength. Come, not because you are whole, but because you long to be made new.

Many: Here, we celebrate the gift of Christ's birth, the Word made flesh, love born into the world.

Prayer of Consecration

One: God of every good gift, on this night of wonder, we give you thanks for the child born in Bethlehem. With angels, we sing of your glory. With shepherds, we marvel at your grace. With all creation, we welcome the light that shines in the darkness. As we break this bread and share this cup, may your Spirit fill us with the tenderness of Mary, the courage of

Joseph, and the hope of all who seek your face. Transform these simple gifts of bread and cup into signs of your presence among us. May they strengthen us to be your body in the world, shining with your love.

Many: Amen.

Words of Institution
Sharing of the Elements

Communion Music	“Wood of the Cradle”	F. P. O’Brien
	<i>Choir</i>	
	“All Is Well”	M. W. Smith
	<i>Ed Vickery, Eric Miner, vocalists</i>	

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Holy God, on this night of wonder, we have tasted your love and shared in your grace. Let the mystery of this meal sustain us as we carry the light of Christ into a waiting world. May our lives reflect the hope of this holy night, and may we walk in your peace, rejoicing in the gift that God is with us. Amen.

*(Individual candles will be lit during special music.
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.)*

Special Music	“Night of Silence”	D. Kantor
	<i>Joy Decker, Sally McLester, vocalists</i>	

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

“Silent Night”

arr. A. M. David

Songs in this service are used by permission. CCLI License #11439355; CSPL164710

*Parts of the liturgy for today’s service were written or adapted from
Lectionary Liturgies and 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.*

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, MDiv, MBA, Senior Pastor

RevChris@holycovenantucc.org, 314-402-8167

Jon Weddell, MDiv, MSW, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant

Mailing address: PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269

3501 West W.T. Harris Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28269-8510

www.holycovenantucc.org 704-599-9810

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!

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/>

WINTER COAT DRIVE

Supporting kids in the Channel 9 Coats for Kids drive. We will collect new or gently used (freshly laundered) coats of all sizes through Sunday, December 29th. There is a collection bin in the Gathering Room. Thank you for ensuring every child has a coat this winter!

PROJECT LINUS BLANKETS FOR KIDS

Our church is proud to sponsor **Project Linus**, which provides handmade blankets to children 0-18 who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need. Due to the tremendous need for comfort and warmth as it gets cold several blankets are being made for those affected by Hurricane Helene. Supplies and instructions are available for anyone wishing to help. Return the completed blankets to the gathering room.

THIRD 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!!

NEW MEMBERS CLASSES IN 2025

If you are interested in becoming a member at Holy Covenant or would like to explore what becoming a member means, mark your calendar for some upcoming dates in 2025. We hold new member classes on February 2nd and 16th, with a new member installation on March 2nd, which is Transfiguration Sunday. If you are interested in becoming a new member or have questions, please reach out to **Pastor Chris** or contact the **church office**.

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. 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.

Members

Jana Harrison, Jeff Hughes and family 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)