



HOLY COVENANT

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

-be the Church, everywhere

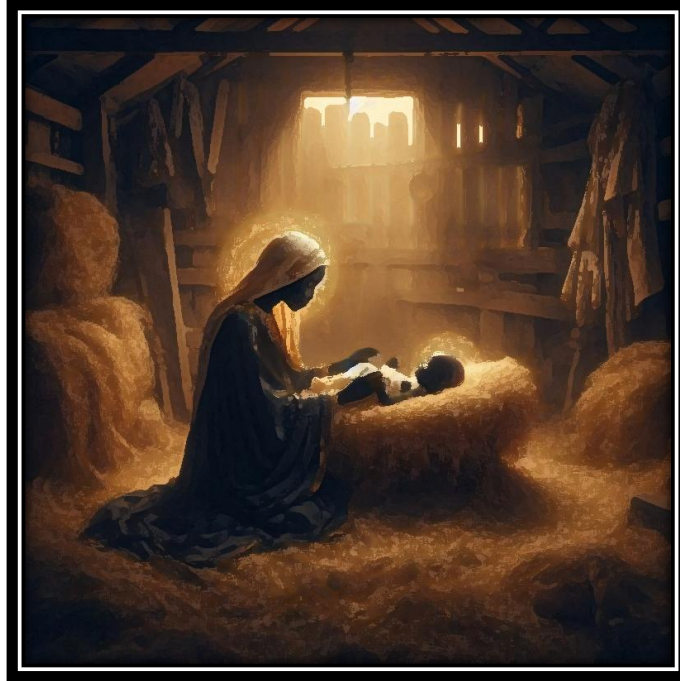


Photo by Microsoft Image Creator

“Christmas celebrates the birth of a child
who brings hope to the disinherited and courage
to those who live with their backs against the wall.”

- Howard Thurman

“The promise of Christmas is that God is found
not in coercive power, but in vulnerable love.”

-Walter Brueggemann

“Jesus was born into an occupied land, and his story still speaks
most clearly where people struggle for dignity and life.”

-Mitri Raheb

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
CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE**

December 24, 2025, 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, Patrick Washburn, piano duet

Welcome Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
One: May the peace of the Christ Child 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 (*responsive*) Suzanne Lamorey
One: On this holy night, we gather to remember a story older than memory and still unfolding among us.
Many: **We come to hear the story of love born into the world.**
One: We gather not because all is well in the world, but because it is a world aching for hope, justice, and peace.
Many: **We come carrying our joys and our sorrows, our faith and our doubts.**
One: Long ago, God chose to enter the world not in power, but through vulnerability, born in a manger, among those pushed to the margins.
Many: **We worship the God who draws near to the forgotten and the oppressed.**
One: So come, let us make room for this holy mystery, for the one who is God with us, still being born in our midst.
Many: **We come to worship, to listen, and to welcome the Christ born among us. Amen.**

* 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 let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him: Christ the 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 let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him: Christ the 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 let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him: Christ the Lord!

Yea, 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 let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him: Christ the Lord!

Advent Candle Lighting - Christ Candle

Hankins Family

Tonight, we light the Christ Candle. We light this candle to celebrate that love has come, hope has awakened, peace is possible, and joy abides within and around us. Christ's birth reminds us that God chooses to dwell with us, in us, and through us. The story we tell tonight is not just about long ago; it is about the ways God's presence is being born again in this world through our compassion, justice, kindness, and love. May this candle and flame we light tonight remind us of the light of Christ that resides within us all, and the power it has to change the world.

(Light the Christ Candle)

One: To all who are holding onto hope...

Many: **We light the Christ candle.**

One: The light of Christ has come...

Many: **And it shines through us still.**

One: May we go forth to the far reaches of the world...

Many: **And be the love, peace, and justice that is needed here on earth.**

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)

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7 (CEB)

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 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.

Anthem

"Christmas Lullaby"
Choir

J. Rutter

Third Lesson

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

Suzanne Lamorey

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.

Handbell Choir

"Twas in the Moon of Wintertime"

arr. C. Moglebust

*Martha Battles, Roman Chmura, Joy Decker, Autumn Holt,
Tammy Holt, Sally McLester, Diane Neese, Dawn Robinson,
Cheryl Sexton, Dawn Simmons, Jon Weddell*

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.” When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened. Let’s confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.” They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

Anthem

“Away in a Manger”

arr. C. Bara

Sermon

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
“The Manger and the Oppressed”**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, Rev. Melissa McQueen-Simmons

One: God be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: **We lift them up to God.**

One: Let us give thanks to the Holy One.

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

One: On this holy night, we gather around a table not set by empire but by a child born without power, laid in a manger, offered to the world in love. This is the table of Christ, the one who knew hunger and hospitality, who ate with strangers and friends, who welcomed those pushed to the margins and called them beloved. This table is for all people. For the hungry or the fed, for those who are struggling or stable, for those using or clean, for the exhausted and the hopeful, for the faithful, the doubtful, and the searching. This table is for the straight and the queer, for the cisgender and the transgender, for the poor and the wealthy, for the grieving and the rejoicing, for the young, the old, and every age between. You do not have to earn a place here. You do not have to explain yourself to be welcomed. If you long for love, if you hunger for justice, if you need grace, this table is for you.

Many: **I have been welcome, and now we welcome one another.**

Prayer of Remembrance

One: Holy God, on this night of wonder, tenderness, and vulnerability, we give you thanks for drawing near to us. In a world pained by fear and division, you chose to be present among us. In a world marked by hunger and exclusion, you chose to be born among the lowly. You came to us in Jesus. A child born into poverty, a teacher who proclaimed good news to the poor, a healer who restored dignity, a prophet who confronted unjust power, and a companion who gathered strangers and outcasts at tables like this one as neighbors and equals. Through this meal, you remind us that your love is not distant, your grace is not limited, and your welcome is wider than we could ever imagine. Therefore, with hearts full of gratitude, we say together:

Many: **He is born among us and lives within us still.**

Words of Institution

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gathered for a last meal among friends. And at that table as they ate, he took bread, gave thanks for it, blessed it and broke

it, and said: *“This is my body, given for you. Whenever you eat it, remember me.”*

Let this be a sign that God will always love you.

In the same way after supper, Jesus took the cup. And after giving thanks he blessed it, poured it, and gave it to his disciples and said: *“This cup is the new covenant, poured out in love for all people. Whenever you drink it, remember me.”*

Let this be a sign that God will always be with you.

Sharing of the Elements

Communion Music

“Candle in the Night”

C. Clatterbuck

“All Is Well”

M. W. Smith

Ed Vickery, Eric Miner, vocalists

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Gracious God, we give you thanks for this holy meal shared with you and with one another. As we go forth from this table, send us into the world as bearers of your love: to feed the hungry, to comfort the brokenhearted, to resist injustice, and to make room where the world has said there is none. May the Christ born among us tonight be born again through us once more. 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

Joy Decker, Sally McLester, vocalists

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

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*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.*

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Masks Welcomed

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

CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT

<https://holycovenantucc.org/events/>

12/28 Guest Preacher Rev. Judah L. Jones

12/31 4th Annual NYE Game Night 6:30-8:30pm

01/11 Room In The Inn



Your generosity builds a more inclusive church!

Explore secure options available online

<https://holycovenantucc.org/giving/>

YEAR-END GIVING - THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

Holy Covenant's fiscal year ends on Tuesday, December 31. Contributions for 2025, or prepayments for 2026, **must be received at the church by noon on 12/31/2025**, or postmarked on or before 12/31/2025 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 Treasurer, Martha Bomely, 704-804-0640, or Dawn Simmons at office@holycovenantucc.org. Please let them know if you plan to make 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

Mel Andersen, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Teresa Eller, Kathy Habel, Jon & Linda Heaslet, Eileen Howe, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Linda Miller, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Benjamin Rudolph, Anita Taylor, Sally Phelan-Young

Friends & Family Members

Joan Bowling (Kristen Fuchs), Lester Brigman (Lee Parrish), Kim Chamberlain (Kevin Decker), Gayle Clay (Jay Whitley), Erica Echeverri, Gloria Echeverri (Melissa Noll), Jason Field (Benjamin Rudolph), Samuel Head (Benjamin Rudolph), Jack Hillard (Barbara Schneller), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Matt, Brianna and Rhiannon Pacewicz (Dom Ciciollo), Frank Roach (Kristen Fuchs), Tom, Beth and Ariel Rudolph (Benjamin Rudolph), Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Ed Stack (Martha Bomely), Tara Washburn (Patrick Washburn), Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley)

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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Jon Weddell, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, Executive Assistant

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