



The Gift of Being Present

An Advent/Christmas Worship Series

December 17, 2023

8 and 10:30am

Advent 3: Being Present with Joy



GUESTS, Welcome to our faith community. To learn more about us please visit our website at www.unionucc.org or like us on

Facebook at www.facebook.com/unioneffs .

Let us know you're here by completing the Welcome Card in the racks in front of you and hand it to a pastor or drop it in the offering plate. Feel free to call or email a pastor.

Vision Statement

UNION UCC: RELEVANT, ENGAGED, and GROWING

Mission Statement

Our church is a diverse family of believers, spiritually united in Christ, rooted in a rich heritage and growing with vitality into the future. We proclaim God's word, nurturing and inspiring dedicated Christian discipleship through worship, education, pastoral care, fellowship, and outreach within our community and the world.

***No matter who you are or where you on life's journey,
you are welcome here.***

Lay Readers: 8:00 Doug Albert, 10:30 Eric Minnich
Ushers: 8:00 Debbie Romig, Connie Gioielli, Dixie Gross
10:30 Deb Wenner, Maryann Puia, C Gloria Toner,
Carol Stout, Marianne Kitzmiller, Donna Christman
Greeters: Carol & Ron Pope, Johanna & Greg Zellner
Sound: Mike Baer

Like a shepherd you feed your flock, gathering the lambs and holding them close, and leading mother ewes with gentleness.” — Isaiah 40:11, The Inclusive Bible

Advent can be filled with worry about finding the perfect Christmas gifts. Deep down we want people in our lives to know they are special and that we love them. But sometimes we overlook the greatest gift of all... our very presence. Our spiritual ancestors were also worried — often about survival in the midst of political occupation. And the response of the scriptures is “the Holy Living One is with you.” Like a shepherd who never leaves the flock, we are held close. This season, we are invited to be the gift of presence for our loved ones, for our communities, for those who need it most.

***Please stand in body or spirit.**

Prelude Music

Jingle Bells James Pierpont, Arr. Kenneth Baird

Jazz Ensemble: Mike Baer, Matt Gerry, Andy Hill, Garet Hill, Blake Hoppes, Craig Knauss, and Mitchell Roth

Welcome

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

What Can I Give Him Arr. Mark Hayes

READER NAMES: 8:00 Edie and Jim Fella

10:30 Devon and Rowan Kuharik

Reader: Today we will read the words of Isaiah offering a prophetic vision that Jesus then claims for his ministry. Likewise, we are called to claim the gift of being fully present

with all people — those who mourn, those who grieve, those who have suffered indignity and oppression. Mary's Magnificat is prophetic as well. She claims the overturning of injustice even before it has come to pass. In the difficulty of her situation, she "sings" with joy about the very real presence of God growing within her.

Solo/Choir:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Reader: We unwrap a present on this third Sunday of Advent
with great anticipation for the gift that God will reveal.

People: We open our hearts as we open the gift!

Reader: The promise of Joy is the Divine Gift we receive.

People: And what will we do with it?

Reader: The gift of joy is not the equivalent of happiness, but rather the deep conviction that we are called to be present

in the work of bringing about "great things" —
a better world for those who need it most.

People: We light this Candle of Joy as a sign that we will be Present with Joy in the world.

ALL sing:

**What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.**

Prayer of Presence

Let us pray:

Holy Living Light of God,
you are our Joyful Presence.
Let this joy grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Joy to others.
Unwrap and open our hearts.
May it be so.
Amen.

Being Presence/Present with Each Other – Passing God's Peace

Please stand in body or spirit.

***Opening Hymn**

**#193 O Come, All Ye Faithful
Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God**

ALL:

**O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come, and behold Him, born the King of angels!**

Refrain:

**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 ye citizens of heav'n above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!**

[Refrain]

**Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
[Refrain]**

Please be seated.

10:30 Christmas Song Blake Hoppes

Worship Children's Time with Ms. Tiffany and Friends– The Gift of Children

Children's Church – during 10:30am Worship for ages 3-grade 5. Kids start in worship with their family and are invited forward for a children's time, They then leave with Ms. Tiffany and return before worship is over.

Also kids are invited to the Education Hour and Faith Formation for All Ages – 9:15-10:15am on Sundays, ages 3 to grade 7.

Children will be in Room 100 on the first floor and will return before worship is over. If worship ends early, parents are welcome to meet their children in Room 100.

Christmas Song Blake Hoppes

Music Offering

"The First Noel" arranged by Lloyd Larson

Chime Players: Carol Pope, Ron Pope, Tami Wassum, Barbara Carinci, Bonnie Herzog, Sandy Daumer, Dawn Dengler, Susan Glosan, Debbie Romig, John Fabian, Dan Haffl

Director: Edie Fella

Scripture Gospel Reading

Isaiah 61: 1-4; 10

Reader: The prophet Isaiah declares in this morning's excerpt from chapter 61 that there is great joy when we know, and do, what is right. This scripture was powerful in the time when the Babylonian exile was over and the Hebrew people needed the words to express their praise and thanks. And it was powerful when Jesus used these same words to refer to the heart of the purpose of his ministry. Salvation from oppression and the joy of God continue to proceed through the ages to hand-in-hand.

*God has sent me to bring good news to those who are poor;
to heal broken hearts;*

*to proclaim release to those held captive
and liberation to those in prison;*

*to announce a year of favor from YHWH, and the day of
God's vindication;*

*to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in
Zion —*

*to give them a wreath of flowers instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of tears, a cloak of praise instead
of despair.*

*They will be known as trees of integrity, planted by YHWH to
display God's glory.*

*They will restore the ancient ruins,
and rebuild sites long devastated;
they will repair the ruined cities,
neglected for generations...*

*They will be known as trees of integrity,
planted by YHWH to display God's glory.*

*I will joyfully exult in YHWH,
who is the joy of my soul!*

Music Offering

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen Kyle Pederson

Jazz Ensemble

Scripture

Luke 1: 41-55

Reader: Luke is the Gospel author we draw from this week. The account of Mary visiting Elizabeth is the context for a description of joy that resides even in the midst of uncertainty and possible harm to Mary, the young pregnant woman at the margins of society. She believes with her whole heart that the child in her womb is just as the angel has declared... a gift from God, of God, the holiest of matter.

As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished!" Mary said:

*"My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.*

*For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,*

*and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.*

*For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
and holy is your Name.*

*Your mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear you.*

*You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;*

*you have deposed the mighty from their thrones
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,
mindful of your mercy —
the promise you made to our ancestors —
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever."*

Video: The Gift of Being Present

The Message Waiting on Joy Pastor Kris

Book suggestion for the season:

Right Here Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness
Amy G Oden

Our adult classes are reading the book now. Extra copies
are available in the lobby.

How can you be more present, offer more presence, to
those around you this season?

Oden invites us to practice mindfulness and Christian prayer
practices to help anchor our hearts, minds, spirits and bod-
ies this season.

10:30 Music Offering High School Choir

Were You There on That Christmas Night? Natalie Sleeth

Prayer

Song: Right Here, Right Now Chuck Bell, Marcia McFee

*Solo/Choir: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.*

Leader: As we have done for the last two weeks, we will begin our prayers by taking time to stay fully present in this moment as we approach the holy mystery of Christmas. Too often we are afraid to allow joy to creep in, buoyed by small, ordinary things. How can we have joy when there is so much suffering? Being present with joy in the world is a subversive act as we proclaim that despair is dispelled when we make a connection with another. And in that connection, is connection to the ever-present God.

We will begin our prayers with three questions, each followed by a short silence. Focusing intentionally on thoughts and memories can be a kind of prayer, bringing our lives into a conversation with the Holy. I invite you to take a deep breath and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing that.

The first question is this: Who was a gift of presence to you this week? Did you experience their attention in a way that felt like a special connection?

Take a moment to recall this in your mind's eye, seeing it emerge like opening a gift. If you cannot recall such a moment, it is OK... this week you will notice these moments more deeply.

The second question is this: How did you offer yourself as a gift of presence? What did it feel like to extend your attentiveness and availability beyond yourself? Did you notice how it made a difference to someone else for you to be truly present to them?

The third question is this: Is it possible that God's presence is felt more acutely in these moments when we truly tend to one another? What could you do this coming week that would allow God's gift of Joy to flow through you to someone else? It may be as simple as finding opportunities to

Speak an encouraging word. Or as complex as actually lifting up someone's circumstances through volunteering or donating.

***ALL SING: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on those who are in distress.
We pray this week for...

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on thanksgiving and joy.
We give thanks this week for...

In this prayerful, present moment we ask you, Christ Jesus, the Greatest Gift of All, to help us savor our journey toward the celebration of Christmas. Help us recognize and create moments of sweet presence rather than filling the voids with the things that do not last. Help us to stop, notice what we are experiencing, and accept it with open hearts and minds. In doing this, we allow you to meet us in the right here, right now, right where we are.

The Lord's Prayer

**ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.**

**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

***ALL SING: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

Thank you for the many ways in which you support God's work and God's people here in Neffs and in the community and world.

NEWS ABOUT THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH



OFFERING

Christmas Mission Offering

Please share your financial support by using the Christmas Mission Offering envelope in your envelope packet, or blank envelope marked - Christmas Mission, or donate online at <http://www.unionucc.org/resources/giving-and-sponsorship/ways-to-give/ChristmasMission>.

Sixth Street Shelter -Located in Center City Allentown, Sixth Street Shelter provides safe, short-term housing for families who are experiencing homelessness of any configuration and size, this includes mothers, fathers, girls, boys, multi- generational families, or those from the LGBTQ+ community. They help guests grow as an individual and a family unit, increase academic progress, find work, find affordable housing, so they can be successful when they leave. The property has 25 private apartments, a family resource center, playground, and full-choice food pantry for residents.

World Central Kitchen -World Central Kitchen is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization devoted to providing meals in the wake of natural disasters. They have organized meals in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Zambia, Peru, Cuba, Uganda, The Bahamas, Cambodia, Ukraine, Puerto Rico, the United States, and most recently Morocco, Turkey, Syria, and Hawaii. In August 2023, World Central Kitchen set up kitchens in Maui and provided over 6000 meals per day with the help of volunteers.

**Donate to God’s Mission and Ministry at UNION UCC
Because of YOU our church changes lives....**

Here are some of the ways you can share your financial generosity at Union.

• **ELECTRONIC GIVING** <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-751X/home> or use the QR code with your cell phone. Choose an ongoing regular donation or a single donation with your credit or debit card. (Help us with fees if you can.)



Vanco

• **FREE Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app** Look for our church Union United Church of Christ, Neffs, PA and register your information to contribute.

• **Venmo @unionuccneffs** Make a donation or pay for a fundraiser or event. Complete “What’s this for?” See QR code.



Venmo

• **Cash or checks (to “Union UCC”)** Place in the offering plate with a member offering envelope or guest envelope (in the seat racks) or drop in the mail if you’re not in person.

Contact John Harting (610-799-2508) or Don Penrod (610-972-8719) or Pastor Kris if you have questions or if you’d like to learn more about other giving options or legacy gifts to Union.



Musical Offering

Go Tell It on the Mountain Spiritual

Jazz Ensemble

Please stand in body or spirit.

#128 In the Bleak Midwinter
Black Hymnal/New Century Hymnal

ALL Sing:

**What can I offer, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
But what can I offer:
all my heart.**

***Benediction**

[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

“No matter how busy one’s day is with chores or service, or
even religious duties,
we must stop and become aware, in the present moment,
of God right here, right now.
Throughout the week, pause just for a moment
to ‘practice the presence of God,’
so as to be filled with joy.”

So now go and be truly present
so you may be a gift of presence for others.
That’s all that is expected —
that the gift that is YOU
is the best gift you can give.
In the name of the Holy Presence,
the Divine Gift,
and the Spirit of Hope that is just waiting for us

to unwrap abundant life.
Amen.

Please be seated.

8 and 10:30 Music Offering

We Wish You A Merry Christmas Arr. Linda McKechnie

Chime Players

Please stand in body or spirit.

***Closing Carol**

Leader: We close our service with a Christmas carol as a way of remembering that Christ is born into our hearts every day. "Hark" is an old word that is a strong version of the phrase "Listen up!" Charles Wesley wrote over 6500 hymns in his lifetime in the 18th century. This was his way of inviting people to discover the presence of God resonating in their hearts, minds, and bodies through the music. We have recalled Isaiah's prediction that we are the heirs to cloaks of joy instead of despair, we have heard the sound of the Psalmist's laughter and joy, and we have experienced the prophetic Song of Mary. Now, along with composer Charles Wesley, we also give a thank you nod to the angels of the birth narrative for filling the skies with joyful praise at God present in the flesh with us.

* **Carol #184** Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God

**Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise,**

**Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"**

Refrain:

**Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

**Christ, by highest Heav'n adored;
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th'incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.**

Refrain

**Hail the heav'nly Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that [we] no more may die;
Born to raise [us all from] earth,
Born to give [us] second birth.**

Postlude Music

O Tannenbaum, Arr. Vince Guaraldi

Jazz Ensemble

Holy Grounds Coffee Hour on Sundays

Enjoy some coffee, tea, juice, hot chocolate, and snacks on Sundays in Memorial Hall after both worship services.

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)		Attendance Last Week	
Last Week	\$6,983.00	8:00 am	36
Calendar Year 2023 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 308,275.00	10:30 am	109
Calendar Year 2022 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 309,414.00	Education Hour	
Change from Last Year	-0.4%	Online Views	603
Budget FY 2023-24 (July-Oct.)	\$ 128,120.00	Breathe	
Actual Fiscal Year-to-Date (July-Oct.)	\$ 11,2,231.00	2023 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-12.4%	Last Week:	\$75, 160lbs
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>		Total YTD:	6,9867lbs, \$1310
Christmas Mission Donations		\$723.00	

Presentations to the Glory of God

In memory of Veronica "Roni" Fabian

**In loving memory of parents, Ruby and Donald Peters.
Love, Ann.**

**In memory of Richard Correl. Love and miss you,
Deana, Ryan, and Brooke**

Be a sponsor for \$20, send to Union UCC through your offering envelope or online marked Spread the Good News or \$8 for Children's Bulletin. Contact Marissa to sign up for a certain date or to sponsor in honor or memory of someone.

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