



The Gift of Being Present

An Advent/Christmas Worship Series

December 31, 2023

10:30am Worship Only

Sunday after Christmas:

Being Present with Assurance



WORSHIP
DESIGN STUDIO
WDS

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

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/unionneffs .

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 Reader: Sue Steinmann
Sound: Mike Baer

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

Prelude Music

“The Peace May Be Exchanged” by Dan Locklair
Jacob Roth

Welcome

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

What Can I Give Him Arr. Mark Hayes

Leader: The overwhelming message of the Christmas story is the assurance that we, too, are children of the Holy One. In this, our very presence is a gift if we will only allow the Spirit to move in and through us. Every day of our ordinary lives, we can show up — be present — and proclaim the assurance of hope, peace, joy, and love to those who need it most.

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.**

Reader: We come giving thanks that the gifts we've been
given
are the gifts we can give.

**People: We open our hearts, readying them for the gift of a
new year!**

Reader: The promises of Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Light
are the Divine Gifts we receive.

**People: We will use them to reassure those who need to
know that they are the recipients of these gifts as well.**

Reader: The gift of hope is an essential survival tool because it reminds us that the hard times do not have the last word.

The gift of Christ's peace reminds us that we can have peace even in the midst of non-peaceful situations.

The gift of joy is not the equivalent of happiness, but rather the deep call to delight in the small things.

The gift of love is the clarion call to us as Jesus' disciples. The more love we put into the world, the better the world will be.

The gift of Christ's light is the reassurance that we are never alone.

People: We light these candles as a sign that we will be Present with Assurance 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 Reassuring Presence.
Let this assurance grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Assurance 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 #473 Blessed Assurance
(New Century Hymnal)**

- 1. Blessed assurance, Jesus Is mine! O what a foretaste of
glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born
of the Spirit, washed in Christ's blood.**

**Refrain: This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all
the day long, This is my story, this is my song, praising my
Savior all the day long**

- 2. Perfect submission, perfect delight! Visions of rapture now
burst on my sight; Angels descending, bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.**

Refrain

- 3. Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy
and blessed; Watching and waiting, looking above, filled
with God's goodness, lost in Christ's love.**

Refrain

Please be seated.

Christmas Song Jacob Roth

10:30 Worship Children's Time

**Today is Church Family Worship—children will return to
their seats after the children's time. Activity bags are**

available for all 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** and will return before worship is over. If worship ends early, parents are welcome to meet their children downstairs.

Christmas Song Jacob Roth

Scripture Gospel Reading
Luke 2: 22-40

Reader: Luke's gospel account of the life of Jesus also includes the story of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, a part of every Jewish family's rituals regarding a first-born heir. There were people present who recognized him not just as an heir to the household of his earthly father's household that came from the lineage of David, but also his extra-ordinary lineage as the Messiah they were waiting to see. Hear this account:

When the day came for them to be purified, as laid down by the Law of Moses, the couple took Jesus up to Jerusalem and presented him to God. For it's written in the Law of our God, "Every firstborn heir is to be consecrated to God." They likewise came to offer in sacrifice "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," in accord with the dictate of the Law of our God.

Now there lived in Jerusalem a man named Simeon. He was devout and just, anticipating the consolation of Israel, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. She had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't see death until he had seen the Messiah of God. Prompted by her, Simeon came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child to perform the customary rituals of the Law, he took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Now, O God, you can dismiss your servant in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the peoples to see — a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." As the child's mother and father stood there marveling at the things that were being said, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, the mother, "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that is rejected, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare. And a sword will pierce your heart as well."

There was a woman named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, who was also a prophet. She had lived a long life, seven years with her husband, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple, worshiping day and night, fasting and praying. Coming up at that moment, she gave thanks to God and talked about the child to all who anticipated the deliverance of Jerusalem. When the couple had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the Law of God, they returned to Galilee and their own town of Nazareth. The child grew in size and strength. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him.

The Message Pastor Carrie

Book suggestion for the season:

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

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 bodies this season.

Prayer

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

*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.*

Leader: In this last week of this series, we turn again to God in prayer with the assurance that the experiences we have had of being truly present in the moment will linger long past our attention to it for these few weeks.

We will begin our prayers as we have all along, with questions, each followed by a short silence. 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 Assurance 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-Z51X/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

• **Venmo @unionuccneffs** Make a donation or

pay for a fundraiser or event. Complete “What’s this for?” See QR code.

· **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

“Some Children See Him” by Alfred Burt
Jacob Roth

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.**

Please be seated.

***Benediction**

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

As we have focused on the gift of
being present in this season,
we have “discovered God’s presence with us
in the middle of our messy lives and messy world.
We alone cannot heal our lives or heal the world,

but, if mindful, we can participate
in what God is doing and where God is leading.”

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 Assurance that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.

Amen.

***Closing Carol**

Leader: While this year's texts do not include the story of the Wise Ones following the star to bring gifts to the Christ child, how could we miss out on this wonderful part of the story — especially as we have been focusing on the greatest gift that we can offer — the gift of ourselves, the gift of being present to those who need it most. And so our closing carol is the favorite, “We Three Kings” who lavished the child with precious gifts only they could afford. As we have seen in this series, expensive gifts may be impressive, but it is the guiding light of the presence of Jesus in the world that outshines all other material wealth. May it shine brightly on all of us.

*** Carol #206 We Three Kings (Hymns for the Family of God; Gold)**

1. We three kings of Orient are,

bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star

Refrain: O Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light

2. Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign

Refrain: O Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light

3. Frankincense to offer have I,
incense owns a deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
worship Him, God on high

Refrain: O Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light

4. Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb

Refrain: O Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright

**Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light**

**5. Glorious now behold him rise,
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia! Sounds thru the earth and skies**

**Refrain: O Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light**

Postlude Music

**"Angels from the Realms of Glory" by Henry T. Smart
Jacob Roth**

Holy Grounds Coffee Hour on Sundays

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

Upcoming hosts include:

Jan 7– Sunday Staff

Jan 14– Fellowship Committee

Jan 21– Consistory

Jan 28– Christian Ed

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)		Attendance Last Week	
Last Week		12/22	122
Calendar Year 2023 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 308,275.00	3pm	306
Calendar Year 2022 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 309,414.00	5pm	247
Change from Last Year	-0.4%	8pm	255
Budget FY 2023-24 (July-Nov.)	\$ 128,120.00	Online Views	921
Actual Fiscal Year-to-Date (July-Nov.)	\$ 11,2,231.00	2023 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-12.4%	Last Week:	\$, lbs
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>		Total YTD:	6,9707lbs, \$1310

Christmas Mission Donations	\$1,446.00
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Presentations to the Glory of God

In memory of Mr. & Mrs. Gordon Rothrock Lucille Kuhns, Lana Reitz, and Leoma Kern and family

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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