



The Gift of Being Present

An Advent/Christmas Worship Series

December 3, 2023

8 and 10:30am

Advent One: Being Present with Hope



WORSHIP
DESIGN STUDIO
WDS

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 Susan Steinmann, 10:30 Doug Kuntz

Ushers: 8:00 Phil Wehr, Ron Pope, Leoma Kern

10:30 Eric Minnich, Scott Nagle, Tami Wassum, Don Penrod, Jennifer Haley, Suzanne Schneider

Greeters: Doug & Angie Kuntz, Ralph & Connie Gioelli

Sound: Dawn Dengler

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.

For Communion Today:

Everyone is welcome to this meal of love and grace. You will be served in your seats. Please wait to eat and drink until the Pastor invites you to do so.

If you are at home, we invite you to find something to eat and drink that represents communion for you.

A non-gluten option with juice is available in a prepackaged container on the bread tray. Both red wine and white grape juice are on the tray of cups. Please choose either.

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

Prelude Music

Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella Renaissance Carol
Blake Hoppes

Welcome

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

What Can I Give Him Arr. Mark Hayes

READER NAMES: 8:00 Susan Glosan
10:30 Sherry, Brooke and Don Penrod

Leader: 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. The 19th century poet, Christina Rossetti, wrote "In the Bleak Midwinter" that became a popular Christmas carol. Modern composer, Mark Hayes, set the last verse of that poem to music as our theme song for our Advent/Christmas series. It reminds us that even if we are feeling poor — in resources, in body or spirit — we can simply be a gift of presence, we can give our hearts.

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 first 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 Hope is the Divine Gift we receive.

People: And what will we do with it?

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

Hope is not simply a wish.

Hope calls us into action based on a belief that things can be different.

We can work to bring about the better world that we hope for.

People: We light this Candle of Hope as a sign that we will be Present with Hope 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 Hopeful Presence.**

**Let this hope grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Hope 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**

**#370 What Gift Can We Bring?
Black Hymnal/New Century Hymnal**

**What gift can we bring, what present, what token?
What words can convey it the joy of this day?
When grateful we come, remembering, rejoicing,
what song can we now offer in honor and praise?**

**Give thanks for the past, for those who had vision,
who planted and watered so dreams could come true.
Give thanks for the Now, for study, for worship,
for mission that bids us turn prayer into deed.**

**Give thanks for Tomorrow, full of surprises,
for knowing whatever Tomorrow may bring,
the Word is our promise always, forever,
we rest in God's keeping and live in God's love.**

**This gift we now bring, this present, this token,
these words can convey it the joy of this day!
When grateful we come, remembering, rejoicing,
this song we now offer in honor and praise.**

Please be seated.

Christmas Song Blake Hoppes

10:30 Worship Children's Time

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

Scripture Gospel Reading Mark 13: 24-37

Reader: The first Gospel reading of Advent from the Book of Mark describes life as calamity. In the midst of it, Jesus reminds his disciples to make sure they pay attention and don't get distracted by all the bad news. Stay awake, stay alert, he says. Watch for the signs of a new day.

“But in those days, after that time of distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will fall from the sky and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.’ Then they will see the Promised One coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then the angels will be sent to gather the chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the Promised One is near, right at the door. The truth is, before this generation has passed away, all these things will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it — neither the angels of heaven, nor the Only Begotten — no one but Abba God. Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will

come. It is like people traveling abroad. They leave their home and put the workers in charge, each with a certain task, and those who watch at the front gate are ordered to stay on the alert. So stay alert! You do not know when the owner of the house is coming, whether at dusk, at midnight, when the cock crows or at early dawn. Do not let the owner come suddenly and catch you asleep. What I say to you, I say to all: stay alert!"

Video: The Gift of Being Present

The Message Waiting on Hope 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 bodies this season.

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: In our time of prayers during this Advent and Christmas season, we will take the opportunity to practice being fully present in the moment. Mindfulness has deep roots in our Judeo-Christian tradition. The scriptures say "be still and know that I am God" and, as we have heard, Jesus

speaks often about “staying awake” to what God is up to. Prayer is an intentional way to stay awake and alert to the presence of God among us.

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 Hope 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, for-
ever. 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



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 @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

At the Table of the Lord Jay Althouse

Heritage Choir & Horizon Choir

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.

Holy Communion

Invitation to the Table

Leader: Everyone is welcome to this meal of love and grace. You will be served in your seats. Please wait to eat and drink until the Pastor invites you to do so.

If you are at home, we invite you to find something to eat and drink that represents communion for you.

A non-gluten option with juice is available in a prepackaged container on the bread tray. Both red wine and white grape juice are on the tray of cups. Please choose either.

Leader: We are all invited to this table of Jesus. This is one of the ways that we acknowledge the continual gift of his presence with us. We remember the rituals of his Last Supper with his disciples in which he offered a poignant invitation for all of his followers to be together at meals, break bread and lift cups, and know that we are never alone. This is the invitation now. The gift of presence — with each other and with Christ.

This is the mystical union that binds us to Christ, present in this moment, and to all who have ever gathered at this table... no matter where, or when.

Confession and Assurance

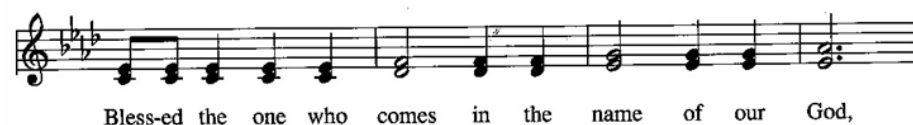
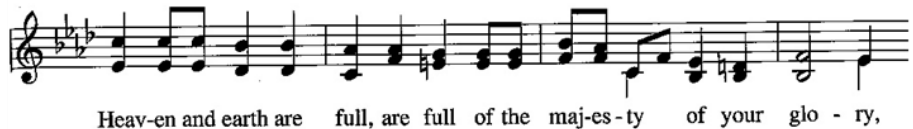
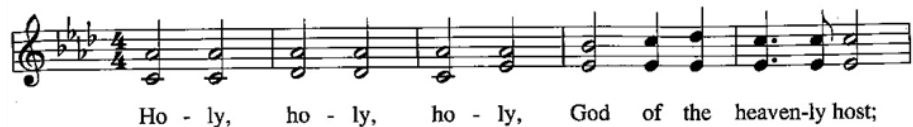
Leader: There are times when we have cut ourselves off from this gift of presence. We distance ourselves from the [hope/peace/joy/love/light] that is ours as heirs in the family of God. It seems too wonderful a gift. And yet the Shepherd comes to find us, leading us gently back into safety, back into care, back into relationship. In this moment, we take a deep breath we feel our bodies relax into the right here, and right now, and we acknowledge those regrets that are best let go...

Know this... there are gifts with your name on them called "Grace," called "Forgiveness," called "Assurance." They are yours whenever you accept and open them. They are already and always there for you... you do not have to "be good enough" to get them. They are there because that is the nature of our loving God, God-with-us, Emmanuel.

Great Thanksgiving

Leader: It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, Gift-Giver of all that exists.
You formed us in your image
and breathed into us the breath of life.
When we turned away, and our love failed,
your love remained steadfast.
You delivered us from captivity,
made covenant to be our sovereign God,
and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so,
with your people on earth
and all the company of heaven
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Leader: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
so that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his love.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

BREAKING BREAD AND POURING WINE

L: The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.

L: The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.

L: The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all things are ready.

SHARING THE MEAL

Everyone is welcome to this meal of love and grace. You will be served in your seats.

Wait to eat and drink until the Pastor invites you to do so.

A non-gluten option with juice is available in a prepackaged container on the bread tray.

Both red wine and white grape juice are on the tray of cups. Please choose either.

THE BREAD

Music Offering

Communion: What Child Is This (Greensleeves) Traditional
Blake Hoppes

L: Take and eat, the body of Christ, broken for you.

THE CUP

HYMN #169 O Come, o Come, Emmanuel Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

**2. O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel**

**3. O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

L: Take and drink, this is the cup of the new covenant,
poured out for you.

The Blessing

L: May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
keep and preserve you unto eternal life.

COLLECTING OF CUPS

HYMN #185 Away in a Manger Gold Hymnal/Hymns for
the Family of Faith

**1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky all looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.**

**2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes
I love Thee, Lord Jesus,
look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle 'til morning is nigh.**

**3. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray
Bless all the dear children
in thy tender care
And fit us for heaven
to live with Thee there.**

Please stand in body or spirit.

***Benediction**

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

“The good news of Jesus Christ is that God is with us,
no matter what, no matter where, no matter when.
There is no place you can go where God is not,
no time of the day when God is off the clock.
This is the teaching of the Incarnation, God with us,
Emmanuel.”

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.

***Closing Carol**

Leader: We close our service with a Christmas carol. While singing carols in Advent has been, for some, too soon to proclaim the birth, we sing carols in this worship series just like we

are opening presents a bit early, to remind ourselves that God is with us already and always. The carol we sing today has a restored third stanza that says "oh hush the noise and cease the strife to hear the angels sing." May we give ourselves the time and room this season to hush, to hear, to listen, to just be... present.

*** Hymn #197 It Came Upon the Midnight Clear**
Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God

**1. It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to [all],
from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.**

**2. And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!**

**3. For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
When the new heaven and earth shall own
The Prince of Peace their King,
And the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.**

Postlude Music

Christmastime Michael W. Smith

Blake Hoppes

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:

December 3 Worship Committee

Dec 10 and 17 – Everyone please bring cookies to share!

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)	
Last Week	
Calendar Year 2023 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 308,275.00
Calendar Year 2022 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 309,414.00
Change from Last Year	-0.4%
Budget FY 2023-24 (July-Oct.)	\$ 128,120.00
Actual Fiscal Year-to-Date (July-Oct.)	\$ 11,2,231.00
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-12.4%
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>	

Attendance Last Week	
8:00 am	28
10:30 am	89
Education Hour	n/a
Online Views	248
Breathe	15

2023 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
Last Week:	\$, lbs
Total YTD:	6,9707lbs, \$1310

Presentations to the Glory of God

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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