



## CHRISTMAS EVE

LIGHT: "Good News is louder than fear"

December 24, 2025 • 5:00 pm

### WELCOMING MUSIC

### GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### INTROIT

*Carillon on "Joy to the World"*

Mary Beth Bennett

### \*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: On this holy night, we come,

**All: dazzled and awe-struck,  
ready to sing alongside the angels.**

One: On this holy night, we come,

**All: eager and hopeful,  
ready to journey alongside the shepherds.**

One: On this holy night, we come,

**All: quiet and tender,  
ready to worship alongside Mary.**

One: On this holy night, we come,

**All: singing, trusting, believing, proclaiming:  
good news is louder than fear.**

One: Let us worship our good news, with-us God,

**All: and watch the world enter through the candle's light.**

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*\* An asterisk is an invitation to rise as one is able (in body or spirit).  
Please silence your mobile devices before the beginning of worship.*

- |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;<br>O come ye; O come ye to Bethlehem!<br>Come, and behold him, born the King of angels! | 2. Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation;<br>sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!<br>Glory to God, all glory in the highest! <i>Refrain</i>      |
| <i>Refrain:</i>                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                         |
| O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;<br>O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!                                         | 3. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;<br>Jesus, to thee be all glory given;<br>Spirit, Redeemer, now in flesh appearing! <i>Refrain</i> |

## GATHERING PRAYER

### Lighting of Advent Candles

The Priewe Family

One: In a fearful world, where do you see the presence of God?

**All: We see God's fingerprints all around us.  
We see God in the beauty of the stars.  
We see God in the love of this community.  
We see God in the dreams we hold for a better world.**

One: You are right. Even in a fearful world, God is here. God is all around us.

The shepherds lived in fear every day, wondering what wolves and lions they might meet,  
guiding their flocks in the fields by night. Sore afraid, they heard the Angel Chorus:

*"Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth,  
peace to those on whom God's favor rests."*

And they knew they had nothing to fear

*The Candle of Light is lit.*

One: On this holy night, we light the Christ Candle as a reminder of this good news.  
May this flicker of Light help us remember that even in a fearful world,  
God's love is all around us.

**All: Let Christ's Light guide our way. Thanks be to God! Amen.**

### Response

We Are a People of *Hope*, v.5

TABLE OF GRACE

*Words: B. Hamm, © 2009 Hope Publishing*

Christ is the Light of the world,  
Christ is the Light of the world;  
Lighting the candle we witness the dawn,  
Christ is the Light of the world

## PRESENTING OUR HEARTS AND GIFTS TO GOD

### Gathering the Gifts with Praise

*The envelope offering this evening is for The Christmas Fund.*

*Please make your check payable to St. John UCC with memo "Christmas Fund Offering."*

### Offering Song

*God Rest Ye Merry*  
The Bell Choir

Cynthia Dobrinski

### \*Prayer of Dedication (speaking together)

### Doxology (CH #48 lyrics, alt)

OLD 100TH

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!  
Praise Christ, all creatures here below!  
Praise Holy Spirit, evermore!  
One God, triune, whom we adore. Amen.

## THE SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

### Choir Carol

*Carol of the Bells*  
The Bell Choir

Leontovich, arr. Wagner

### The Prophecy

Isaiah 11:1-3, 6-9

Tim Ebbers

### Carol (NCH #116, vv. 1, alt.; 7) *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

VENI EMMANUEL

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here,  
until the son of God appear. *Refrain*

7 O come, Desire of Nations, bind  
all peoples in one heart and mind;  
Make envy, strife, and quarrels cease;  
fill the whole world with heaven's peace. *Refrain*

*Refrain:*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel; shall come to you, O Israel!*

### The Prophecy

Micah 5:2-4

Sara Wittbecker

### Carol (CH #143, vv. 1, 2)

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

ST. LOUIS

- 1 O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.
- 2 For Christ is born of Mary; and, gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth.  
Your voices raise to God in praise; and peace to all on earth;

Gabriel and Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

Kennedy Marcum

Carol (CH #160)

*Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming*

ES IST EIN ROS'

- 1 Lo, how a rose, e'er blooming, from tender stem hath sprung,  
of Jesse's lineage coming by faithful prophets sung;  
it came, a flow'ret bright, amid the cold of winter  
when half-spent was the night.
- 2 Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind;  
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.  
To show God's love aright she bore to us a Savior  
when half-spent was the night.

Gabriel and Mary

Luke 1:26-35, 38

Elliot Fairman

Carol (CH #130)

*My Soul Gives Glory to My God*

MORNING SONG

- 1 My soul gives glory to my God.  
My heart pours out its praise.  
God lifted up my lowliness  
in many marvelous ways.
- 2 My God has done great things for me:  
yes, holy is her name.  
All people will declare me blessed,  
and blessings they shall claim.

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-7

Carl Roderick

Carol (CH #162 vv. 1, 2)

*What Child is This*

GREENSLEEVES

- |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 What child is this, who, laid to rest<br>on Mary's lap is sleeping?<br>whom angels greet with anthems sweet,<br>while shepherds watch are keeping? <i>Refrain</i> | 2 Why lies he in such mean estate<br>where ox and ass are feeding?<br>Good Christian, fear: for sinners here<br>the silent Word is pleading: <i>Refrain</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Refrain:*

*This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
haste, haste to bring him laud; the babe, the son of Mary.*

The Angels and Shepherds

Luke 2:8-14

Levi Graybill

Choir Carol

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

arr. S. Eithun

The Chancel Choir

*During this song, the angels, shepherds, and animals gather at the Manger.*

**Carol (NCH #124, vv. 1; 2, alt)**

*Away in a Manger*

AWAY IN A MANGER

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

2 The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes,  
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky  
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

**The First Proclamation**

Luke 2:15-20

Addisyn Shaffer

**Carol (NCH #132, alt)**

*Joy to the World!*

ANTIOCH

*During this song, the angels and shepherds return to their families*

1 Joy to the world! the Lord is come:  
let earth its praises bring;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns!  
Let all their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 Christ rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
The glories of God's righteousness  
and wonders of God's love,  
and wonders of God's love,  
and wonders, wonders of God's love.

**The Light of the Word**

John 1:1-14 (adapted)

Colin Ebbers

**Choir Carol**

*The First Noel*

Dan Forrest

The Chancel Choir

**PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS**

**A Christmas Reflection**

**The Lord's Prayer (Unison)**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

## LIGHTING THE CHRISTMAS CANDLES

The Bell Choir

*The ushers will pass among us light from the Christ candle.  
Please keep lighted candles upright when passing the flame.*

### \*HYMN(GTG #122)

*Silent Night, Holy Night*

STILLE NACHT

*The Chancel Choir begins:*

*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!  
Alles schläft, einsam wacht  
nur das traute, hochheilige Paar.  
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,  
schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,  
schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!*

*The Congregation joins:*

1 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.

2 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!"

3 Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
radiant beams from thy holy face,  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

### \*BENEDICTION

*You may take your candle with you as you depart.  
Please leave the safety cup in the box near the main sanctuary door for next years' service.*

### \*POSTLUDE

*Cantilena on "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"*

James Biery

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## WELCOME TO WORSHIP TODAY!

**We are delighted** that you are here in celebration and worship at St. John UCC. The members and friends of our faith community hope that you will encounter God in a meaningful and profound way, and that God's Spirit will inspire you today to live your faith out loud.

We hope that you want to discover more about the congregation and its ministry in the community of Freeport, across our state and nation, and around the world. Please ask one of our ushers or visit us:

on the Web: [www.stjohnuccfreeport.org](http://www.stjohnuccfreeport.org)

on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport](http://www.facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport)

**Assisted Listening Devices** are located at the **Sound Board in the back of the Sanctuary**. Earpiece and "Induction Loops" for hearing aids are both available. Please ask an usher for assistance in their use.

**If you cannot join us in person**, you will always have a front row seat on our live stream at [facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport/live](https://facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport/live).

**Scan this code to access our Online Giving Portal:**



**We thank you for your continued  
generous support of St. John UCC.**

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## THE CHRISTMAS FUND for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

For over 100 years, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world. One of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an opportunity to reach out in kindheartedness to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing unexpected financial needs.

Our joy at Christmas is a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called to share widely, through our witness and gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors.

You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund Offering.

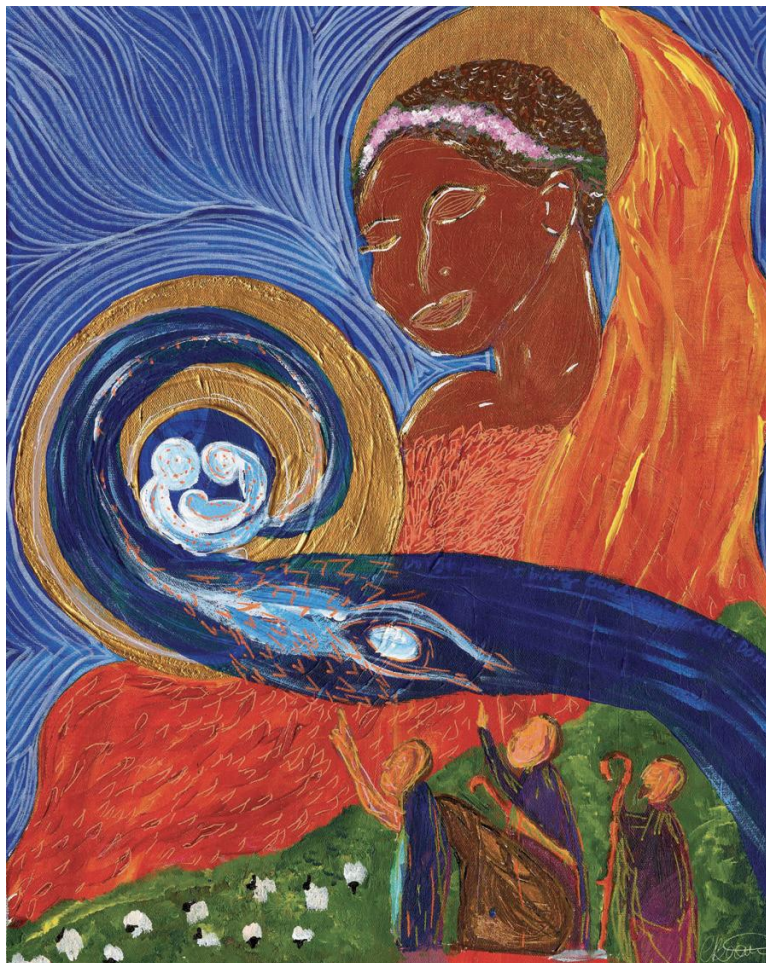
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Good, New | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell  
*Inspired by Luke 2:1-20, 16"x20" Acrylic on canvas*



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Freeport, IL 61032  
[www.stjohnuccfreeport.org](http://www.stjohnuccfreeport.org)



Thank You for providing to our “Poinsettia Garden!”



**In Honor and Celebration of:**

Our expected first-born son by Colin & Kathryn Ebbers

Our Kids and Grandkids by Tim & Lisa Ebbers

Family near and far, and the light of Christmas by Hank, Christina, and Elliot Fairman

Don Siegmund by the Siegmund Family

Our Children and Grandchildren by Pam & Dan Wessel

**In Memory of:**

Our parents, Allen J Biesemeier and Claire A Biesemeier  
by Jann Crabill & John & Deb Biesemeier

Our parents Robert & Carolyn Moyer & William & Elizabeth Boll  
by Larry & Marsha Boll

Ruth Olson by Colin & Kathryn Ebbers

Puttcamp & Knapp parents by Sarah & Hugh Knapp

My husband, Edward Orde, parents, Robert & Carolyn Moyer,  
& Great grandson, Oliver Staska by Connie Orde

Our parents, Bill & Jane Kuntz and Roy & Betty Wessel  
by Pam and Dan Wessel

Michael & Sandra Backer, and Kayla LaBarge by Jeff & Dana Williams

## Cuetlaxochitl: The unusual story of Christmas' Red Flower

With cheerful red bracts and delicate yellow flowers framed against velvety green leaves, colorful poinsettias are an indisputable symbol of Christmas. In fact, poinsettias are the most commercially important potted plant in the world because of their endearing association with the December holiday season. But how did this warm-weather shrub native to western Mexico become so closely associated with Christmas?

The original Nahuatl name for the plant we call "poinsettia" is *cuētłaxochitl* (*kvet-la-sho-she*), cultivated by the Aztecs long before the European colonization of the Americas. The Aztecs used *cuētłaxochitl* for a variety of purposes, including decoration and the production of red and purple dyes, as well as for medicines derived from the plant's milky white sap.

However, it wasn't until the 17th century that *Cuētłaxochitl*, now an established decorative plant in Mexican tradition, began its journey into Christmas traditions. This part of its adoption began in the small town of Taxco de Alarcón, Mexico where Franciscan monks began using the shrub in their Nativity processions. Coincidentally, it is also around this time that the Mexican legend of Pepita and the story of *la flor de Nochebuena*, literally "the Christmas Eve flower," began, forever tying the red and green shrub to Christmas folklore.

The flower was used in local celebrations for almost two hundred years before a man by the name of Joel Roberts Poinsett introduced it to the United States. This co-option forever changed the way we decorate for the holidays.

Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. In the winter of 1828, Poinsett took a diplomatic trip to Mexico visiting the Taxco area where he wandered the beautiful countryside and became enchanted by the brilliant red leaves of an unfamiliar plant. It wasn't long before Poinsett began sharing the plants among his friends and colleagues around Christmas time. This was when the upper leaves of the shrub would turn red.

Around 1836 the *cuētłaxochitl* began being marketed as the "Poinsettia," after the man who first brought the plant to the United States and ignited a holiday tradition that continues to this day.

With many names stemming from its complex history, *cuētłaxochitl* has long captured the human imagination with its magnificent seasonal transformation. Understanding the difficult aspects of the plant's past does not dim its beauty—rather, it helps us reflect upon its intersectional, multicultural legacy.