



*An Open and Affirming Congregation
of The United Church of Christ*



**Order of Worship for
December 24, 2023, 4:30pm**

**Welcome to Worship at Center Church!
We are delighted that you are with us today.**

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

**Please rise in body or spirit.*

CHIMES

PRELUDE: *Music for Flute and Organ*
Greensleeves
He Shall Feed His Flock

Catherine Thompson Maclean, Flute
arr. J. Nishimura
G. F. Handel

CHORAL INTROIT: *How Great our Joy!*

H. Jungst

WELCOME

BECOMING PRESENT – THE RITUAL OF LIGHT

Leader: Welcome, friends, to this special night when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. This year in this church, we have been spending time preparing for this night by becoming more “present.” You can see we have many presents here in the sanctuary. Being surrounded by them all Advent long has helped us be inspired to be more present — to ourselves, to each other, and to God. It all started with the idea that we can spend a lot of time worrying 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. Relationship is the most needed gift in our world. Loneliness and isolation is, according to some experts, the “pandemic of our time.” So no matter how able you are to offer gifts that the world considers “valuable,” really what we need the most is simply to “be with.” That is what one of the names for Jesus — “Emmanuel” — means: “God with us.” And this is the best gift of all.

Dan Theriault, Soloist:

*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 have unwrapped a present on each Sunday of Advent with great anticipation for the gifts that God reveals.

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

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.
And tonight we celebrate the presence of the Light among us.
I invite you to stand as you are comfortable and face the light as it comes into our midst from the back.

[congregation joins singer]

**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 (*unison*)

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

OPENING HYMN: *O Come, All Ye Faithful* (vs. 1, 2, 4)

tune: ANTIOCH
CAROLS PRINTED IN THE CAROL PACKET

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

We encourage you to greet each other verbally or by a friendly wave of peace

SCRIPTURE: *Isaiah 9: 2-8, excerpts*

Reader 1: We have been reading the words of the prophet Isaiah in the past few weeks as we begin to understand why we are called to be fully present with one another. Isaiah wrote in a time of occupation and exile of his people and by the end of the Book of Isaiah, the people have been freed. But the scripture we read tonight is toward the beginning of the book and the people are scattered and afraid, feeling alone and despondent. Isaiah speaks what perhaps felt like an impossible prophetic word to remind the people that God is present with them always. Let us read responsively:

The people walking in darkness are seeing a brilliant light —
upon those who dwell in a land of deep shadows light is shining!
God, you have made the nation greater — you have brought them abundant joy!
They celebrate in your presence as with the harvest celebrations...
For a child is born to us, an heir is given us,
upon whose shoulders dominion will rest.
This One shall be called:
**Wonderful Counselor, the Strength of God,
Eternal Protector, Champion of Peace.**

This dominion, and this peace, will grow without end,
**with David's throne and realm sustained with justice and fairness,
now and forever.**

GOSPEL READING: *Luke 2: 1-14, 15-20*

Reader 2: As we have considered the presence of God, we have encountered an image that winds itself through the scriptures — that of the gentle presence of the Holy holding us close as a shepherd holds a lamb. And tonight the image of those shepherds — who know how to care deeply in each present moment with the flock — are again at the center of the story. They are the ones who first hear the Good News. And while the light initially frightens them, they run toward it, not away. Hear the story from the Gospel of Luke:

In those days, Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole Roman world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to “the city of David” — Bethlehem, in Judea, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David; he went to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant.

CAROL: *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (VERSES 1 AND 4)

Reader 3: While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn.

CAROL: *Away in a Manger* (VERSES 1 AND 2)

Reader 2: There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid. The angel said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you — news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David's city, a savior — the Messiah — has been born to you. Let this be a sign to you: you'll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth, peace to those on whom God's favor rests.”

CAROL: *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* (ALL VERSES)

Reader 3: When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see this event that God has made known to us.” They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw this, they reported what they had been told concerning the child. All who heard about it were astonished at the report given by the shepherds. Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds went away glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told.

CAROL: *What Child is This?* (VERSES 1 AND 3)

Reader 1: 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.

SOLO: *O Holy Night*

arr. J. Rutter
Katie Suarez and Chris Dukes, soloists
Center Church Choir

SERMON: *Unto **You** a Child is Born*

Rev. Liza Arulampalam

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Dan Theriault, Soloist:

*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.*

PRAYER & QUESTIONS

Soloist and Congregation:

***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.***

PRAYER

Soloist and Congregation:

***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.***

CALL TO OFFERING

OFFERTORY: *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*

G. Holst
Elizabeth Stassen and Stewart Battle, soloists & Center Church Choir

*DOXOLOGY: *O Come Let Us Adore Him*

The image shows a musical score for the doxology. It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him, Christ, the Lord! A-men." The piano accompaniment features chords and moving lines in both hands.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

*CANDLE-LIGHTING CAROL: *Silent Night* (ALL VERSES)

CLOSING CAROL: *Joy to the World* (ALL VERSES)

tune: ANTIOCH

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE: *Good Christian Friends Rejoice*

arr. G. Martin

LET THERE BE LIGHT MEMORIALS

The Meeting House steeple will be lighted this week as follows:

December 21 ~ In memory of Mr. and Mrs. George Roberts by their daughter, the late Louise Roberts

December 21 ~ In memory of his grandmother, Esther L. (Erikson) Pelletier, 1916-2007, on her birthday, by Jason Charneski

December 21 ~ In memory of Dorothy Tuthill, Dwight Tuthill and Irene Schneiderman, given by their daughters Deborah Tuthill, Sarah Schneiderman and Barbara Sodergren

December 22 ~ In loving memory of Miss Alice Wilder Smith by the late Mrs. Lena M. Colvin

December 23 ~ In memory of Robert and Lydia Persons by their son, the late Sandford Z. Persons

In honor of David and Lorraine Berg by the late Ethel A. Benson

December 24 ~ In memory of Francis Cleveland Browne by the late Virginia F. Browne

December 25 ~ In memory of the late Alice Browne Cooley by the late Virginia F. Browne

December 26 ~ In memory of Jane Peterson Markham by her many friends

December 27 ~ In memory of Elizabeth Ramage Dee by her friends at Center Church

Center Church News & Announcements

Subscribe to our E-News newsletter for up-to-date news and happenings at Center

Church: <https://centerchurchhartford.org/>

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/OzymYij/CenterChurch>

And, don't forget to follow us on FB!



THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HARTFORD

A member of the United Church of Christ (UCC)

CENTER CHURCH, 60 Gold Street, Hartford, CT 06103

Office Hours: Tuesday thru Thursday, 9:30am to 2:30pm

Library Hours by Appointment

P 860.249.5631 F 860.246.3915 www.centerchurchhartford.org

Senior Pastor: The Reverend Liza Arulampalam (ext. 202)

Coordinator for Justice & Faith Formation Ministries: Dr. Eric Hearst (ext 209)

*If you'd like to meet with Pastor Liza,
please schedule a time by
sending her an email at pastor@cchartford.org*

Minister Emeritus: The Reverend J. Alan McLean

Director of Music/Organist: Robert F. Gilbert (ext. 204)

Church Office Manager: Emily McKenna (ext. 200)

Bookkeeper: Brenda Russell (ext. 201)

Sexton: Thomas St. Amant

Meals Program Coordinator: Carrie Howe (ext 205)

Nursery Care: Tina Franklin

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[Would you like to learn more about Center Church? Email us at info@cchartford.org](mailto:info@cchartford.org)

AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING Congregation. "We include into full participation in the life of this church persons of any age, race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and physical, emotional and mental capacity" (from the statement adopted October 23, 1994.) In recognition of the richness of backgrounds of our congregation, a **DIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES** will find expression in our worship services. Center Church offers an **OPEN COMMUNION**. Adults and children from all religious backgrounds are invited to partake. **TEXT ALERTS** To receive text alerts regarding church activities and cancellations, please text the word CENTER to (860) 300-3697. (Message and data rates may apply according to your data plan.)

FACEBOOK LIVE We livestream our worship services on Facebook each week, and your presence here constitutes your permission for your image to be shown. If you prefer not to be seen, speak with the minister or whoever is operating the phone up front to determine where a good seat might be to avoid the camera. Our viewership is growing and we are excited to welcome a congregation in cyberspace!

Church Information

ON STREET PARKING is available during Sunday Worship Services on Gold Street and on the west side of Lewis Street, and is FREE on Sundays. The church is maintaining our relationship with the Traveler's Garage which is temporarily closed due to Covid-19. Stay tuned as we partner with other garages in the area.

REST ROOMS are located in the basement of the Meeting House. Please use the stairs in the southeast corner of the building. For safety, please have an adult accompany your child to the restroom.

CHURCH SCHOOL is held at the Church House (60 Gold Street) for preschool to 12th Grade. Children are to remain with their families in the Meeting House during worship until they depart for Church School following the Children's Moment. Please pick your child up promptly at 12:00pm. For their safety, children will remain with their Church School instructor until an adult picks them up. Church School is not held during the Summer.

CHILDCARE and NURSERY care are provided by trained, capable, and nurturing staff and volunteers, and is available in the Meeting House basement for infants and toddlers (up to two years of age.) A nursery without staff is also located on the second floor of the Church House.

CURRENT SUNDAY ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CLASSES Announcements regarding Adult Education classes are announced in our publications.

HANDICAPPED ACCESS to the sanctuary is via the lift outside at the south end of the portico. If possible, please call the church office in advance for assistance in using the lift.

The latest issue of **CENTER CHURCH E-NEWS** is available on our church website. If you would like a paper copy mailed to you, please contact us at info@cchartford.org / 860-249-5631



IN MEMORIAM

At Christmastime and always, we remember those we've lost this year and before. So many of our loved ones have lived on in our hearts for many seasons, and they are all with us as we worship this day. May your memories of those you love shine as the brightest star in the sky, bringing love and peace to you this Christmas.