

The Gift of Christ



**Christmas Eve
2025**

**Venice United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Dickason, BCC**

On the Way to Bethlehem

Prelude

The Best Christmas Medley Ever

John Dare

Ensemble: Bella Handbell Choir, directed by Lynda Weston

Congregational Introit

(The Congregation should be seated.)

Carol: *One Candle is Lit*

Parrott/Kirkpatrick

Come, listen, the sounds of God-with-us ring clear,
and signs of a Cross in the distance appear.
The Word once made flesh, yet the Word ever here.
One candle is lit for the Christ child here.

Keyboardist: Barb Quinn

Welcome

Rev. Barbara Dickason, BCC

Good evening, and welcome this Christmas Eve to Venice United Church of Christ. Welcome to this Holy Night, when we celebrate the Birth of Christ. Tonight, we come together from many times and many places to journey to Bethlehem together, marveling at angels and dreams, shepherds, bright stars and wisdom seekers from distant lands. Tonight, we come to witness again the Gift of Christ's Birth.

During this service of Carols, Communion, and Candlelight our sanctuary is filled with the beauty of poinsettias honoring and remembering those we love. For each person who contributed, thank you for this beautiful gift. They will be available to join you for your own Christmas celebrations at the conclusion of our service.

Tonight, we will not be collecting an offering. However, should you wish to contribute either to the ongoing ministries of this congregation or to use the purple envelopes in support of our Christmas Fund offering for retired pastors and those in need, there are offering plates at each door. Those of us online are welcome to follow the QR code.

As our worship begins, you are invited to rise in body or in spirit to sing as the Light of Christ processes into the world this holy night.

Bringing in the Light of Christ

Bella Clapham, *Acolyte*
(Readers Process)

Call to Worship

(The Congregation is invited to rise to sing.)

Once in Royal David's City

1. Once in Royal David's City
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,
 Where a mother laid her Baby
 In a manger for His bed:
 Mary was that mother mild,
 Jesus Christ, her little Child.

3. For he is our childhood's pattern
 Day by day like us he grew,
 He was little, weak, and helpless,
 Tears and smiles like us he knew;
 And he feeleth for our sadness,
 and he shareth in our gladness.

Henry J. Gauntlet

2. He came down to earth from heaven
 Who is God and Lord of all,
 And His shelter was a stable,
 And His cradle was a stall:
 With the poor, and meek, and lowly
 Lived on earth our Savior Holy.

4. And our eyes at last shall see him,
 Through his own redeeming love,
 For that child so dear and gentle
 Is our Lord in heaven above;
 And he leads his children on
 To the place where he is gone.

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Bidding Prayer

Rev. Barbara Dickason BCC, *Senior Pastor*

Surprising God,

You bring joy to an unexpecting world. Into our busy days, you place Bethlehem moments -- a stillness that strengthens our hearts, a cry that kindles memories and wrinkles smiles across our faces, visitors who bless us with kind words and warm gifts, angelic music that lifts our weariness.

Surprising God, usher us into the wonder of Bethlehem as we hear again the story of how you came and lived and dwelt among us.

O Lord, you are Born! May our hearts abound with joy.
Amen.

Lighting the Christ Candle

(The congregation is invited to be seated.)

Poem: *Godburst*

Ann Weems

Marianne Dickason, *Reader*

Phil Enesco, *Lighting the Christ Candle*

Please be seated.

Tonight, Christ is Born. During Advent, we have marked the gift of each week by lighting candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. But tonight, we celebrate the Greatest of Gifts. For Immanuel, God With Us, is born again! As our Christ candle is being lit, I invite you to listen to the words of Ann Weems' poem, *Godburst*.

When the Holy Child is born into our hearts
there is a rain of stars
 a rushing of angels
 a blaze of candles
this God burst into our lives.
Love is running through the streets.

Congregation responds to the Light

Carol: *Acts of Kindness*

Quinn/Polish Carol

1. God, we seek through
acts of kindness
To treat everyone on earth
With respect
and great compassion
As we honor Jesus' birth.

2. Help us understand
the yearnings
And the needs of all until
We're a source
 of light for others
As we seek to do your will.

Keyboardist: Barbara Quinn

The Light Shines in the Darkness

First Lesson

God Creates.

Genesis 1:24-31a¹

Marianne Dickson, *Reader*

“Then God said, “Earth: bring forth all kinds of living soul—cattle, things that crawl, and wild animals of all kinds!” So it was: God made all kinds of wild animals, and cattle, and everything that crawls on the ground, and God saw that this was good.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us. Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals, and everything that crawls on the ground.”

Humankind was created as God’s reflection:
in the divine image God created them.

God blessed them and said, “Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth—and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things on the earth!”

... And So it was. God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good—very good.

¹ All passages are from the Inclusive Bible

Carol: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

John. F. Wade

(The Congregation is invited to rise to sing.)

1. 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)

2. Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
All glory in the highest.
(Refrain)

3 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)

Refrain: O Come, let us adore him,
O Come, let us adore him,
O Come, let us adore him,
Christ, the Lord!

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Ensemble: Bella Handbell Choir, directed by Lynda Weston

Second Lesson

(The congregation should be seated.)

*God promises that the nations of the earth
will be blessed through Abraham.*

(Genesis 22:15-18)

Marianne Dickson , *Reader*

“The angel of God called Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “I swear by myself— it is YHWH who speaks— because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only child, I will shower blessings on you; I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. . . . and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing.”

Carol: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Sears/Willis

(The congregation is invited to sing.)

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 the dark streets shineth
the everlasting Light,
The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

2. O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Third Lesson

*The Birth of Christ is foretold by Isaiah.
(Isaiah 9:2, 6)*

Pat Fischer, *Reader*

The people walking in darkness are seeing a brilliant light —
upon those who dwell in a land of deep shadows
light is shining!

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,
Everlasting Protector, Champion of Peace.

Carol: *Come, O Long-Expected Jesus*

Wesley/Prichard

(The congregation is invited to sing.)

Come, O long-expected Jesus,
born to set your people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Christ, in whom our rest shall be.
You, our strength and consolation,
Come salvation to impart;
Dear desire of many a nation,
Joy of many a longing heart.

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Fourth Lesson

*The peace of Christ is foretold by Isaiah.
(Isaiah 11:1-4,6, 9)*

Pat Fischer, *Reader*

Then a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse; from Jesse's roots, a branch will blossom.

The spirit of YHWH will rest on you —
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and reverence for YHWH.

You will delight in obeying YHWH, and you won't judge by appearances or make decisions by hearsay.

You will treat poor people with fairness and will uphold the rights of the land's downtrodden.

Then the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child shall lead them.

There will be no harm, no destruction anywhere in my holy mountain, for as water fills the sea, so the land will be filled with knowledge of YHWH.

Carol: *Christmas Grace*

Ruth Elaine Schram

Ensemble: Venice UCC Choir, directed by Barbara Quinn

Keyboardist: Barb Quinn

Fifth Lesson

*The angel Gabriel visits Mary.
(Luke 1:26-38)*

Mel Burrowes and Ellen Schleicher, *Readers*

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary; she was engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary,

“Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you. Blessed are you among women!”

Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel’s greeting meant.

The angel went on to say to her, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You’ll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus — ‘Deliverance.’ His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have never been with a man?”

The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you— hence the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God. Know too that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a child in her old age; she who was thought to be infertile is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God.”

Mary said, “I am the servant of God. Let it be done to me as you say.”

With that, the angel left her.

Carol: *Away in a Manger*

Anonymous/Murray

(The congregation is invited to sing.)

Away in a manger, no crib for his 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.

Keyboardist: Barb Quinn

Sixth Lesson

*The birth of Jesus is foretold to Joseph.
(Matthew 1:18-23)*

Ellen Schleicher, *Reader*

This is how the birth of Jesus came about. When Jesus' mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, an upright person unwilling to disgrace her, decided to divorce her quietly.

This was Joseph's intention when suddenly the angel of God appeared in a dream and said, "Joseph, heir to the House of David, don't be afraid to wed Mary; it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She is to have a son, and you are to name him Jesus—'Salvation'—because he will save the people from their sins.

All this happened to fulfill what God has said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and give birth, and the child will be named Immanuel" —a name that means "God is with us."

Carol: Joy to the World

Handel/Mason

(Congregation please rise to sing.)

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart
 prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing.

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 the sounding joy!

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Seventh Lesson

(The Congregation may be seated.)

The shepherds go to the manger.

(Luke 2:8-16)

Gayle Davis, *Reader*

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.”

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.

Carol: *The First Nowell*

Traditional English Carol

(The congregation is invited to sing.)

The first Nowell, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter’s night that was so deep.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Eighth Lesson

*The Wise men are led to Jesus.
(Matthew 2:1-11)*

Gayle Davis, Reader

After Jesus' birth...scholars from the East arrived in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage."

At this news Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they informed him. "Here is what the prophet has written:

'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, since from you will come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

Herod called the wisdom seekers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, "Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, report back to me—so that I may go and offer homage, too."

After their audience with the ruler, they set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They knelt down and paid homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Carol: *O Holy Night*

Cappeau/Adolphe Adam

Ensemble: Venice United Church of Christ Choir

Soloist: Susan Jack

Keyboardist: Barbara Quinn

God's Gift of Covenant and Communion

Rev. Barbara Dickason, BCC, *Officiant*
Rev. Mel Burrowes, *Officiant*

Invitation and Words of Institution

Truly, Jesus has taught us to love one another, for his law is Love and his Joyous News is Peace. Whether through the feeding of the multitudes, the conversion of water into wine, or any number of meals where Jesus gathered with followers and skeptics alike to break bread together, miraculous transformations happen when we gather around Christ's table.

Tonight, we are sharing this meal together in remembrance of the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples prior to his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. All the parts of our shared meal come from our Communal Earth. The various ingredients of this gluten-free bread were grown with patience, tenderness and love. They were then gathered and baked into a loaf to be broken and shared together.

The grapes used to prepare this cup were also grown with patience, the vines watered and tended with care. Sweet enough to need no added sugar, they were gathered by the hands of laborers and pressed into juice to be shared together.

Just as Jesus made room at his table for those who loved him, those who questioned him, those who followed him, and for the one who would betray him, so we also practice an open table where everyone is invited to join with us at Christ's table in the community of extravagant grace and radical hospitality.

According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took the bread, and blessed and broke it, saying,

“This is my body, which is given for you”

Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the cup and shared it among all his disciples saying,

“This cup that is poured out for you
is the new covenant of God.”

“As often, then, as you eat this bread and drink this cup, do so in memory of me.”

Prayer of Communion

Let us pray,

**Thank You, Loving God
For sharing this meal and your life with us
so that every time we break bread together
we see your face revealed among us
and run to share the Good news.**

As you prepare to come forward to share in God’s promise, the ushers will dismiss and direct you so that everyone may safely share in God’s bounty. For those of you who would like assistance in your seat, please let the ushers know so that we can share God’s promise with you where you are.

Come, for the meal is ready!

*(The ministers and servers will prepare the elements;
the congregation is then invited to come
and receive the bread and the cup.*

If you cannot come but wish to receive, the servers will come to you.)

Holy Eucharist

Carol: *Christmas Medley*

arr. Quinn

Keyboardist: Barbara Quinn

We Share the Gift of Christ's Light

Ninth Lesson

*The mystery of the incarnation is unfolded.
(John 1:1-5,14)*

Rev. Barbara Dickason BCC, *Reader*

IN THE BEGINNING

there was the Word;
the Word was in God's presence,
and the Word was God.

The Word was present to God
from the beginning.

Through the Word all things came into being,
and apart from the Word
nothing came into being that has come into being.

In the Word was life, and that life was humanity's light—
a Light that shines in the darkness,
a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and
stayed for a little while among us;
we saw the Word's glory—
the favor and position a parent gives
an only child —
filled with grace,
filled with truth.

The Candles are Lit

(The congregation is invited to rise to sing
and to share Christ's light with each other by tipping the unlit candle
into the flame of the lighted candle of the person next to you.)

Carol: *Silent Night, Holy Night*

Franz Grüber/German Carol

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,
Heav'nly 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!

Keyboardist: Barbara Quinn

Dismissal

Rev. Barbara Dickason BCC, *Senior Pastor*

Christ, Our Savior is born! Jesus, Immanuel, God is here!
God is with us! Amen!

Recessional

Carol: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*

Felix Mendelssohn

1. 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 hosts proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Hark! the herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King.”

2. Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come
Offspring of the virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail th'incarnate Deity!
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King.”

3. Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings;
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise the souls of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King.”

Acolyte: Bella Clapham
Organist: Barbara Quinn

Ensemble: Bella Handbell Choir directed by Lynda Westin

Descant: Venice UCC Choir directed by Barb Quinn

Postlude

Carol: *Joy to the World*

Watts/Handel

Organist: Barbara Quinn

Supporting Our Service Tonight

Greeters: Mer Zovko and Paul Chebator

Communion Stewards: Barbara and Bob Zittel

Head Usher: Wendy Seeley

Usher Team: John Brex, Nancy Brex,
Bonnie Thistle, Don Worthington, Judy Worthington

Technology Team

(Live Streaming, Camera, and Sound Technicians)

Gary Leidheiser, Linda Newton, Sharon Leidheiser

The **Lord's Table** was decorated by Victoria Augustine

The **Church Sign** was changed by Faye Newton and Lisa Sclafani