



Venice United Church of Christ

January 4, 2026

Second Sunday of Christmas

Rev. Barbara Dickason, BCC

“Gratitude”

Sermon: “In Awe: Stopped by a Star”

United in Christ’s love,

A just world for all

Second Sunday of Christmas

January 4, 2026

Singing Prelude *One Bread, One Body* Foley

**One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.**

One Bread, One Body

Refrain (Unison)

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff uses a treble clef and includes chords D7, G, C, G, C, G, D, Em, and B. The lyrics "One bread, one body, one Lord of all," are written below the notes. The second staff uses a bass clef and includes chords Em, D, G, Em, A7, and D7. The lyrics "one cup of blessing which we bless. And" are written below the notes. The third staff uses a treble clef and includes chords G, C, G, C, G, D, Em, and B. The lyrics "we, though many throughout the earth," are written below the notes. The fourth staff uses a bass clef and includes chords Em, D, G, Em, A7, D7, G, C, and G. The lyrics "we are one body in this one Lord." are written below the notes. The score concludes with a "Fine" at the end of the fourth staff.

Welcome and Announcements

Happy New Year, Venice United Church of Christ.

Grace and Peace to you in the name of Jesus who welcomes each and every one of us into this sacred space. I am Pastor Barb, and Rev. Bob Zittel will be our liturgist and assisting with Communion today.

Beautifying our sanctuary today, we have flowers given by Patty Fjetland in celebration of Linda Newton's birthday.

For those of us who are worshipping online, whether today or some point in the future, I invite you to like us, share us, and let your presence be known in the comments so that we can keep each other in prayer.

For those of us here in this space of wreaths with candles and star filled epiphany; for those of us here in this space filled with the warm glow compassionate friendship, if you have a prayer request or a joy to share, please let us know through the app or the office, as I want to make sure that we can lift up everyone's prayers as we worship.

For some of you, this is your first time joining us. I hope that you have been warmly greeted and have notated your presence either as you came in or with the seat back cards. We are excited to get to know you. We have a beautiful gift for you, so please make sure to stop by our welcome table to pick one up.

For in this holy, wonderful, ordinary space,
as Venice United Church of Christ,
we empower and invite everyone
to join us in this divine place
that we share on line and in person.

For when we gather, everyone is invited,
no matter who you are
or where you are on life's journey,
and no one is turned away.

There are a few coming events of which to take note.

Following Worship, everyone is invited to gather for a time of fellowship across the lane in Naar Hall. Thank you to Mel Burrowes and Helen Markus for hosting.

This week all of our regularly scheduled events are resuming post-holiday break: Spirit Fed, Bridge, Bible Study, Bella Handbells, the Shamrock Ringers, Choir, Cut-ups, Men's Coffee Group, and Knit-wits will all be getting together this week. New this week and this week only... at 10:00 Tuesday morning, we will be undecorating the sanctuary and Naar Hall. Volunteer help would be much appreciated. As it is also Epiphany, we will be planning a special treat for those who show up to help.

And then next week, plan to attend our Mission Fair after worship. If you are interested in Joining the church, our next membership class will also be getting together next week following worship. If you have already made the decision to join

or if you are still exploring, feel free to join us for this class to learn more.

Today we start a new sermon series for the month of January called, 'Grateful'. The second if our four primary pillars in the Big Joy project, we will be working with Robert A Emmon's book entitled, "Thanks! How practicing Gratitude can make you happier". Whenever gratitude comes up, someone invariably mentions gratitude journals. A wonderful way of being reminded to give thanks each day, if this is something that interests you there are several different varieties of gratitude journals that you can take a look at. For those who keep reminding me that gratitude is not simply something we practice alone, following worship you will find on each table in Naar Hall gratitude jars. Everyone is invited to write something that you are grateful for and place it in the jar each week. These gratitudes will then be shared with each other in various ways throughout the month.

And now, we come to worship our extravagantly generous, steadfastly loving God, who chose to be born and live among us, naming us siblings and beloved children of God.

So Come, beautifully authentic, humbly transforming, faithfully Good-news following body of Christ, and let us Worship God!

We Approach God's Presence

Meditation/Bringing in the Light of Christ

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

Nicolai

***Responsive Call to Worship¹**

Please rise in body or in spirit as we celebrate the awe and mystery of God.

Rise and shine — the Light is revealed.
Look! God's dwelling is now among us.
From the sea comes abundance,
 from the desert comes hope;
 all creation moves toward joy.

**Like frankincense, we offer our prayers,
 that our longing may breathe with God's longing,
 that our voices rise with all who seek peace.**

Like myrrh, we offer compassion—
 balm for the broken, mercy for the wounded.

Where rivalries have ruled, grace now gathers;
 the scattered come home, nations share their treasures

**Let us desire what God desires—
 life for all creation,
 justice that sets every captive free,
 and joy where justice is fulfilled.**

For the end of God's justice is joy.
The end of God's compassion is peace.
Look! God's dwelling is now among us.

***Prayer of Praise**

Let us pray:

Radiant and Revealing God,
 You dwell not in temples or thrones but among us—

in caravans of mercy,
in the faces of those returning home,
in the shimmering abundance of the sea.

**You are the star that stirs our seeking,
the Presence that refuses to be hidden,
the Word made flesh in neighbor and stranger alike.**

As we gather,

let your justice take root in our hearts,
your joy rise on our lips,
your compassion steady our hands,
and your peace settle upon this world you so dearly love.

**Lift our eyes, O Holy One, so that we may see as you see—
creation radiant, humanity restored, and your dwelling now among us.
Amen.**

Let us join our voices together to sing of the Light of the World: *Arise, Your Light Is Come.*

*Hymn *Arise, Your Light Is Come* Duck/Walter

**Arise, your light is come!
The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God
which shines on you today!**

**Arise, your light is come!
Fling wide the prison door;
proclaim the captive's liberty,
good tidings to the poor.**

**Arise, your light is come!
All you in sorrow born,
bind up the broken-hearted ones
and comfort those who mourn.**

**Arise, your light is come!
The mountains burst in song!**

Rise up like eagles on the wing;
God's power will make us strong.

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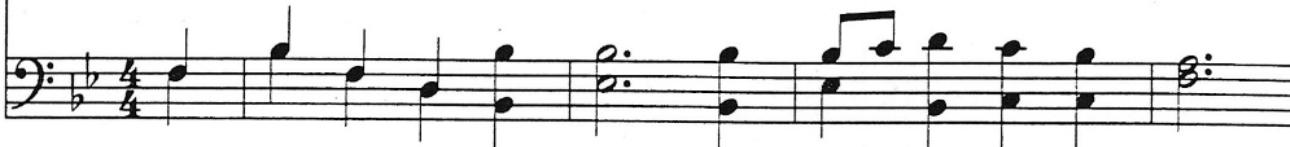
Arise, Your Light Is Come

Isa. 60:1; 61:1-2; Luke 4:14-21

Ruth Duck, 1973



1 A - rise, your light is come! The Spir - it's call o - bey;
2 A - rise, your light is come! Fling wide the pris - on door;
3 A - rise, your light is come! All you in sor - row born,
4 A - rise, your light is come! The moun-tains burst in song!



Show forth the glo - ry of your God which shines on you to - day!
Pro - claim the cap-tive's lib - er - ty, good tid - ings to the poor.
Bind up the bro-ken - heart-ed ones and com - fort those who mourn.
Rise up like ea - gles on the wing; God's power will make us strong.



This hymn was first published by the Ecumenical Women's Center of Chicago in the 1974 collection of hymn adaptations, Because We Are One People. Ruth Duck later included it in her own collection, Dancing in the Universe.

Tune: FESTAL SONG S.M.
William Walter, 1872

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Celebrating the Light of the World *Boxed*² poem by Ann Weems

Please be seated.

During the Twelve Days of our Christmas season, the Advent candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love continue to point us towards the center candle of our advent wreath, our Christ Candle. This week, as we move into the season of Epiphany, the nativity, wreathes and Christmas tree will once again be packed away.

We have been marking our celebrations each week with a poem by Ann Weems. This week, the final week of our Christmas season, we share her poem, *Boxed*.

I must admit to a certain guilt
about stuffing the Holy Family into a box
in the aftermath of Christmas.
It's frankly a time of personal triumph when,
each Advent's eve, I free them (and the others)
from a year's imprisonment
boxed in the dark of our basement.
Out they come, one by one,
struggling through the straw,
last year's tinsel still clinging to their robes.
Nevertheless, they appear,
ready to take their place again
in the light of another Christmas.
The Child is first
because he's the one I'm most reluctant to box.
Attached forever to his cradle, he emerges,
apparently unscathed from the time spent
upside down to avoid the crush of the lid.
His mother, dressed eternally in blue,
still gazes adoringly,

² Ann Weems. *Kneeling in Bethlehem*. “Christmas Gifts.”

in spite of the fact that
her features are somewhat smudged.
Joseph has stood for eleven months,
holding valiantly what's left of his staff,
broken twenty Christmases ago
by a child who hugged a little too tightly.
The Wise Ones still travel, though not quite so elegantly,
the standing camel having lost its back leg and
the sitting camel having lost one ear.
However, gifts intact, they are ready to move.
The shepherds, walking or kneeling,
sometimes confused with Joseph (who wears the same dull brown),
tumble forth, followed by three sheep in very bad repair.
There they are again, not a grand set surely,
but one the children (and now the grandchildren)
can touch and move about to reenact that silent night.
When the others return,
we will wind the music box on the back of the stable
and light the Advent candles and go once more to Bethlehem.

And this year, when it's time to pack the figures away,
we'll be more careful that the Peace and Goodwill
are not also boxed for another year!

Congregational Sung Response *Still, Still, Still* *Gotsch*
Tune: Still, Still, Still, Austrian folk song

**Dream, dream, dream
Of the joyous day to come
While guardian angels without number
Watch you as you sweetly slumber
Dream, dream, dream
Of the joyous day to come.**

Prayer for Transformation and New Life

Let us pray:

Holy One who dwells among us,

You call us to rise, to see, and to rejoice—
yet too often we turn inward, protecting our comfort instead of pursuing
your justice. When your radiance invites us to lift our eyes, we close
them against the pain of the world. When your abundance flows like the
sea, we grasp rather than share. When your caravans of mercy draw
near, we hesitate to join the journey.

Forgive us, O God.

Lift us once more into your light of love.

Transform the fear that keeps us small

into courage that acts with compassion.

Renew the weariness that dims our hope

into joy that moves us toward peace.

Amen.

*Words of Grace

Please rise, in body or spirit, as we hear and respond to words of God's Grace:

People of God, hear this good news:

In every act of justice, in every gesture of compassion,
in every moment of peace, Christ is revealed.

Look! God's dwelling is now among us.

By grace, we are made new.

Amen.

*Response

A Star Shone Bright

Garland

Tune: The Gift of Love

**A star shone bright across the plain,
and calmed the earth so love could reign.
‘Twas in a child that hope was born,
a dream fulfilled! O happy morn!**

**O star shine forth, once more this night,
and flood our streets with heav'nly Light;
‘til every heart in Christ shall see
the glory of eternity!**

We Encounter God in the Word

First Lesson

Psalm 127 NRSVue

Please be seated as we hear our first lesson from Psalm 127:1-11.

1-11 alleluia!

How good it is to praise our God!

How pleasant and how fitting to sing God's praise!

YHWH rebuilds Jerusalem, and gathers Israel's exiles.

God heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

God knows the number of the stars and calls each one by name.

Great is YHWH, and mighty in power;

there is no limit to God's wisdom.

YHWH lifts up the oppressed,

and casts the corrupt to the ground.

Sing to our God with thanksgiving;

—sing praise with the harp to our God—

who covers the heavens with clouds,

who provides rain for the earth.

who makes grass sprout on the mountains

and herbs for the service of the people.

who gives food to the cattle.

and to the young ravens when they cry.

God does not thrill to the strength of the horse,

or revel in the fleetness of humans.

YHWH delights in those who worship with reverence

and put their hope in divine love.

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God!**

Special Music *I Wonder as I Wander* American Folk Tune/ Niles
Sue Jack, Soloist

Second Lesson

Matthew 2:1-12

NRSVue

1-5 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth
And the mediations of all of our hearts
Be acceptable to you, O God,
The Light of our Salvation. Amen

Have you ever been stopped by a star?

Have you ever been stopped by a moment filled with awe, a moment filled with reverence, a moment filled with such wonder and joy that it was all that you could do to keep from falling to your knees with the sheer power of it?

When I think of moments like that, I immediately think of the birth of my children. Perhaps it's because of the sheer marvel of it... that a mass of cells that was once within me could be born, take their first breath, and exist and grow outside of me into their own beautiful people just feels miraculous.

And yet, I would also like to think that there are more moments in my life like this, not just those big and glaringly obvious ones. Surely those weren't the only time I felt awe... at least I hope not.

Hmmm...

As a young girl, the church camp I attended had a quiet tree. And every evening after dinner, we would gather at the steps where we held our morning watch to walk down the lane, past the quiet tree, and toward the grassy point that jutted into the lake. And there, each evening, one of our cabin groups would prepare and

share a reflection and worship about what we had learned that day.

I remember the drone of the cicadas, the murmur of the voices of my peers as they read scripture and led us in a few reflective prayers, stories, and songs. But most of all, I remember the light dancing on the water. The feel and structure of the blades of grass as we plucked a few strands and pulled them apart and then wove them together with our fingers. The incredible hush of silence as over fifty kids sat at that point, watching as the sun began to dip below the horizon. And then, on the walk back past the quiet tree, the re-emergence of human sound as those fifty kids, a few at a time, passed that tree again.

It was quieter, more hushed, but it was there, too... in both the silence of the point and the babble of voices — the awe, the mystery, the wonder, the power of worshipping God.

Yes, you heard me correctly — for while passing that tree on the way to the point was a way for us to learn to practice reverence and gratitude by silencing our child-like voices so that we could notice what was around us and give thanks to God, somehow, even when we returned back past that tree and could speak and laugh and start talking about other stuff, the time of silence that we spent there, that time of meditation and worship which we cultivated there at the point did not simply disappear, it emerged with us on the other side of the tree into our every day, every moment, ordinary conversations and child-like cares.

Stopped by a star, stopped by a tree, the result was the same:

In awe, we stopped. In awe, we noticed something new, and it

shaped our lives. In awe, we stopped, we noticed, and we were able to reorient ourselves within the context of the entirety of God's creation, give thanks and sing.

So I am going to ask my first question again, but this time a little differently: Have you ever been stopped by a star, or a tree, the birth of a child or the song of bird?

Perhaps you have been stopped by a song or a prayer or a conversation. Perhaps you have witnessed a kitten or a puppy being born, perhaps you have marveled at the stillness of an anole as it waits for its next meal. Perhaps you have flipped over rocks to discover an ants home or nearly stepped on a garden snake with your bare feet.

Perhaps you have ... but on this amazing planet of ours, the list is endless, isn't it?

And perhaps the question really is, what do you stop long enough to really pay attention to around you, what do you choose to notice?

This week, many of us have been celebrating a new year. And while I will admit that it was not my plan to stay awake long enough to watch the ball drop, as the time edged closer and I was still awake, there wasn't a chance that I was going to turn off the TV with only eight minutes remaining of the countdown. And as I stopped, and really looked at the ball as it made its really slow Time Square descent I marveled: I had never really paid attention each year long enough to see that at midnight was not when the ball dropped... at midnight was when the ball reached the end of its slow downward descent. If I had not stopped to really notice, I

would have completely missed that marvel of human ingenuity and engineering. Can you imagine the creativity in it's construction?

But I had to stop first. And choose to notice.

And as we begin this new year, instead of recommending resolutions, I am offering us this question. A question not just to be used whenever a new star or a new satellite appears in the sky, but each and every morning:

What was the first thing you noticed this morning? Yes, take some time, and really think about it.

For me, it was the song of the birds. Bill Wither's song 'Lovely Day' softly playing to let me know that it was time to get up. The movement and quiet but insistent noises of our two pups as they woke up and prepared for their morning walk. The walk around the lake watching as the birds start their day, and counting the alligators resting just under the water.

Now, I will admit that I haven't always woken up this way, and I imagine that many of us had mornings that were very different. For some of us, mornings start with a gasp and the weight of everything that has to still happen. For some of us, the pre-caffeinated brain fog leads us stumbling to the kitchen for our first cup of alertness. For some of us, our constant pain roots our heads or our bodies to the pillow or the recliner. For some of us, the roar of the most recent acts of global injustice stream across our TV sets, raising our anxiety in what feels like direct proportion to the immediate futility of our ability to change it.

Now I imagine there are as many ways that we start the day as there are those of us here, and if I were to ask this question tomorrow our answers might already be different. But we are not to tomorrow yet, so let's just keep thinking about our morning.

What was the first thing you noticed this morning? What have you noticed since? And... here's the part of that question that is more challenging for some of us... What have been your primary emotions so far today? Joy, anger, frustration, contentment, exhaustion, sadness, delight, awe? For some of us, our emotions may feel deep and solid while for others of us, emotion may be more fleeting, one following quickly upon another. So let's just take some time to ponder a moment. What do you notice?

In our scriptures this morning, our psalmist's poetry described the clouds in the sky, the grass on the mountains, the rain for the earth, the food for both cattle and ravens, and the herbs given for the health of the people. The psalmist marvels at the greatest of the divine who knows and names each and every star. The psalmist sings of their gratitude for the God who tends to the universe and still cares about justice and healing for each one of us. And whether they are feeling this emotion as they begin to sing or not, as the psalmist is choosing to praise God, and imagining God's delight in God's creation, by the end of the stanzas we heard today, In awe, they stop to offer their gratitude.

We next heard about the magi. And in hearing, I stopped to wonder: what emotions prompted them to choose a very long journey of discovery, all because they noticed a new star in the sky? What did they leave behind to make this journey? What did they sacrifice as they headed out to follow? We often look to the extravagance of the gifts they gave to the Christ-child and

imagine that they were quite wealthy. And perhaps they were, but what if they weren't? Did they have a community or families at home waiting for their return? And yet, once they noticed the star they couldn't unsee it. So their next steps led them on a journey that would take them far from their familiar roads to the home of a child in Bethlehem where, in awe of their discovery they fell to their knees.

But as with all journeys, there were perils that they could not foresee.

For when they entered the region of Judea, they stopped off at Herod's. They were looking for the one who was born to be the new king, after all, so it would have been protocol to stop first at the palace. But here is where things get really real, really fast. For while I might wonder at what the magi were thinking, the first emotion mentioned in this passage is Herod's — and he is afraid. A new child had not been born to his household or to the elite of Jerusalem; the star that the magi were following did not stop over his city.

And instead of celebrating and joining the magi on their quest, he chooses to instead notice and act out of his sense of fear and feelings of divine betrayal even as he sends the magi on their way to Bethlehem. And to eliminate any emotional or potential physical comparisons which allowed him to think of this new child as a threat, he decrees an assassination of young male children around Bethlehem, just to be sure that even God cannot displace him from his position of power.

In awe, the psalmist noticed; observing both God's vastness and intimate care for everything and everyone, and gave thanks.

In awe, the magi noticed; their curiosity of the star that heralded a new king, and set out on an immense journey of discovery that ultimately led to their great joy and homage of the Christ child.

In fear, Herod noticed; and embarked on a path of destruction that challenged God and murdered innocents.

Earlier, I asked you to ponder your morning.

When you woke up this morning, what did you notice? What were you grateful for? What sparked delight? Where did you experience awe, or reverence? The connection between God's universe and ourselves is both vast and intimate. We are each distinct, and yet intimately connected to all that God has created.

And as we travel into our new year, I invite you to stop, and notice our connectedness. I invite you to stop, to notice, and give thanks.

Instead of resolutions, I propose we choose, In awe, to stop and notice our gratitude. To allow Gratitude to shape our lives in new ways. It is, perhaps, a somewhat different way of approaching the new year than the way we are used to. But, it is not without precedent.

For example, the Aymara people of Bolivia, Peru, and Chili teach that the future is not something that we face... it is not even something that we face together.

I know. That sounds off, right? Why wouldn't we face the hard stuff together?

Instead, and wait for it... the future is behind us.

Anyone else feel like they just did a 180 in their seats?

For the Aymara people, instead of facing the future, they would say that the future is behind us. It is invisible. We cannot yet see it. We don't even know what direction it will be coming from. And so, we walk backwards into the future, with our eyes fixed on the wisdom, lessons, suffering, and joy from our past, using it to inform and shape what we choose to notice in our present moment.

It's a different way of entering a new year. Instead of focusing on goals and productivity, it invites us to instead pay attention. To notice what is around us. To hold all of our story gently within our being, to think of our lives not as a blank slate but within a long story. One that includes us, and our ancestors.

It shapes how we take each step, inviting us to be intentional about what we allow to shape and inform who we keep becoming.

It invites us to notice. It invites us to notice what is welling up within us. It extends an invitation of a safe place to others to express what is welling up within them without judgement or comparison to any shoulds or oughts.

And then, after we notice what is within, we are invited to either challenge or act upon what we notice.

Perhaps we noticed that we woke up grumpy this morning. Ok. It is ok to wake up grumpy. But is this really how we wanted to wake up? As we walk backwards into tomorrow, is there

something we can do tonight to help prepare us for the step of waking up tomorrow less grumpy?

Perhaps we noticed that we woke up this morning to delight in the sound of the birdsong. Perhaps you also noticed an enduring suffering. Coexisting, woven together, perhaps you noticed many emotions following one after the other.

The question, though, is which ones do you allow to inform and shape your next backwards step?

The Psalmist chose gratitude and awe. The magi chose curiosity, reverence, and joy. Herod chose fear.

What they focused upon shaped their next backward step into the future.

So each week, instead of trying to keep resolutions, I invite you to notice. Notice the birds. Notice the stars. Notice your emotions. Notice your gratitude. And when gathered at those tables, I invite you to take a few moments to write down what you are choosing to focus on. What you are choosing to give thanks for. And each week, as we gather at the tables, let's take out the papers from the bowls and read them. Let's notice together. Let's give thanks together. And together, let's step backwards into the future.

May it be so.

We Respond to God's Grace

Congregational Prayers

Joys:

Each beautiful new day, slow mornings, gorgeous sunsets, that we are able to celebrate our joys — for celebrating joy reminds us that we share the same source of our joy, the depth of human creativity and spirit, skilled medical professionals, friendship, safe travels, gathering together to study God's word, rebirth and recreation in communities that empower and hold us as we ask tough questions of God and each other, those who pitch in and help out, birthdays, anniversaries, milestones...

When we pray for our loved ones, we have a duty of care to not spread their business without explicit permission. Instead, as we pray, we hold our loved ones close to our heart and lift them up to God, trusting that the Spirit intercedes in all of our prayers, especially those too deep for words.

Intercessions:

Jimmy	Christine	John
*Sarah	Bob	Mark
Barbara T	Stacy	CHET
Rev. Kim and Darlyne, their family and friends		
The family and friends of Nancy's mother		
The family and friends of Dick, Loren's brother		
Family and friends of Nicholas		Rev. Ryan's her family
Karen	Cyndi	Fred
Sue	Rev. Karen	
Joann, Kathy, Jim	Luanne	Jerry
Gay, Vicki, Pam, Jack, Clark, Pastor Attila		

Those whose bodies are currently hosting unwanted cancer cells.

Those who are grieving.

We pray for those people who have lost their jobs and their means of supporting their families, and for pets who have lost their people.

Everyone impacted by the decisions of governments that choose violence and war instead of diplomacy; all essential workers and all frontline healthcare workers; everyone impacted by recent hurricanes, fires, tornadoes, and flooding; and

The staff and participants of Word Made Flesh in Sierra Leone, Immokalee Farm Workers, black and brown fathers and their sons, everyone living through domestic violence, people of all religions who are being persecuted because of their faith, all who struggle with or are affected by mental illness and depression. We also pray for law enforcement officers, service men and women, missionaries and rescue workers doing God's work in dangerous places.

(First Sunday: sung)

Silent Prayer

Prayers of the People and our Lord's Prayer³

Holy One who dwells among us,

You are here.

We see you in the faces of those sitting next to each other. We hear you in songs of gratitude and joy. We feel your nearness as the breeze whispers past our faces.

In awe, o God, we stop. We noticed your goodness. We notice your steadfast compassion and desire for all of your creation to be in right relationship with you.

We pray this morning for those who are grieving, for those who are suffering, for those who are sitting in that place of waiting and not knowing. Soothe our fears, nourish our bodies, and feed our souls with the bread and cup of your compassion and mercy.

We praise you for your vision of a new heaven and a new earth, in which everyone treats each other as your beloved children, as together we sing the prayer that you have taught us:

**Our Father which 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.

We Share God's Love

Invitation to Generosity⁴

People of God,
the caravans are moving again—
hands open, hearts lifted, bearing what creation has always
longed to give. From the abundance of the sea, gifts rise;
from the fragrance of the earth, praise ascends.

We come with the treasures of our lives—
our time, our care, our courage, our hope—
the offerings that make justice visible and joy possible.
Let what we bring become blessing,
a sign that God's dwelling is among us,
that generosity itself is revelation.

(The offering plates are found by each doorway for your use. For those of us online, please follow the QR code.)

*Song of Gratitude

Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise God all creatures here below,
Praise God above, ye heavenly host,
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving and Dedication⁵**

Holy One, receive the gifts we share.

**Turn them toward compassion,
stretch them toward peace,
and let your joy be known through all we do.**

⁴ Raised Above: Service Prayers for the Second Sunday of Advent Year A was written by the Maria Mankin. <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/advent-2a-december-7/>

⁵ **R Raised Above: Service Prayers for the Second Sunday of Advent Year A** was written by the Maria Mankin. <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/advent-2a-december-7/>

Invitation to Holy Communion

(Break bread) All the parts of this shared meal together 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.

(Pour cup) The grapes used to prepare this cup were also grown with patience, tenderness and love. Pruned and fertilized, they were gathered by the hands of migrant workers and pressed into juice to be shared together.

We too, are from the Earth. With patience, tenderness, and love we find ourselves here collectively willing to partake of elements that are meant to spark a new type of living in the world.

By sharing the bread and cup we live into God's vision and deep desire for us — to be reconciled to God and to each other as we participate in a feast of unconditional love and grace — for all people. For this table is not our table, it's Christ's table. And at Christ's table we welcome everyone to his this community of extravagant grace and radical hospitality.

So, together, we come to this table to be nourished by the bread that gives us life.

**We gather to eat the bread and drink of the cup
that fills us with God's abundant love,
that reforms us to be a reflection
of God's original blessing, and
that reconnects us to God, God's creation,
and each other.**

Let us pray,

Just as Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and offered it to his disciples, revealing himself in the image of a stranger along the road to Emmaus, so too, O God, we ask you to bless this bread and this cup, so that your presence and extravagant love may be revealed to us along the roads we are traveling and in the faces of everyone we meet. Breathe your Spirit among us, and make us whole: a beautiful, fragile, divine image of You. Amen

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.)*

Communion Meditation *Star of the East* Kennedy

We Go to Carry the Light

*Hymn

For the Beauty of the Earth

Pierpoint/Winter/Kocher

**For the beauty of the earth, for the splendor of the skies,
for the love which from our birth, over and around us lies,
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.**

**For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light,
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.**

**For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild,
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.**

**For the good that love inspires, for a world where none exclude,
for a faith that never tires, and for every heart renewed,
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.**

For the Beauty of the Earth

St. 1-3, Folliott S. Pierpoint, 1864; alt.
St. 4, Miriam Therese Winter, 1993



1 For the beau - ty of the earth, for the splen - dor of the skies,
2 For the won - der of each hour of the day and of the night,
3 For the joy of hu - man love, broth-er, sis - ter, par - ent, child,
4 For the good that love in - spires, for a world where none ex - clude,



For the love which from our birth o - ver and a - round us lies,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light,
Friends on earth, and friends a - bove, for all gen - tle thoughts and mild,
For a faith that nev - er tires, and for ev - ery heart re-newed,



Refrain



God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grate - ful praise.

Folliott S. Pierpoint, author of numerous hymns, penned these
verses near his native city of Bath, England, on a late spring day
when flowers were in full bloom and all the earth seemed to rejoice.

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Tune: DIX 7.7.7.7. with refrain
Conrad Kocher, 1838
Adapt. William H. Monk, 1861

*Blessing and Benediction⁶

People of God,
lift your eyes and see:
the Holy One's presence fills the earth.
The sea still carries abundance,
the caravans still bring gifts,
and the world still waits for the radiance you bear.
Go now as stargazers of the Spirit—
seeking justice, sharing compassion, celebrating joy,
and walking in peace.
Let your lives be light enough to travel and bright enough to
reveal love's way.

Look! God's dwelling is now among us.

We lift our eyes and go in joy.

Amen.

*Sending Blessing

Christ, Be Our Light
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your church,
Gathered today.

Farrell

*Postlude

Arise, Your Light is Come!

Walter

**Please remain seated in silence for the Postlude as the
Light of Christ is carried into the world.
The worship has ended; our service begins.**

⁶ Lift Up: Service Prayers for Epiphany Year A was written by Rev. Michael Anthony Howard who serves as Minister of Faith in Action for Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast. Michael's work supports congregations as they weave theology, justice, and place-based ministry into faithful action that bears prophetic witness to God's dwelling among us. <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/epiphany-a-january-6/>

Supporting Our Service Today

Liturgist: Rev. Mel Burrowes

Advent Lighting: Lynda Westin,
Charlene Frick

Ellen and Dick Schleicher

Welcome Table: Gayle Davis

Greeters: Loren Matasek and
Helen Helgren

Acolyte: Allison Rowe, Bella
Clapham

Head Usher: George Ikeda

Usher Team: Jim Forristall, Chet
Hamlin, Steve Hemping, Dick
Schleicher, Bonnie Thistle

Technology Team

Gary Woodrum, Debra Mensely,
Maria Groody, David Jack,
Linda Newton, Wally Davis,
Patty Fjetland

The Lord's Table was decorated
by Victoria Augustine

The Sanctuary Flowers are given
by Helen Markus and Mel
Burrows in memory of Helen's
daughter, Susanne Wiltberger

The Church Sign was changed by
Faye Newton & Lisa Sclafani

Sunday Librarian:

Nancy Brex

Fellowship Hosts:

VUCC Volunteers



Senior Minister

Rev. Barbara Dickason, BCC

Staff

Gary Leidheiser: *Custodian*

Barb Quinn: *Office Assistant*

Music Staff

Barbara Quinn: *Music Director*

Lynda Weston: *Bella Handbell
Director*

This Week at a Glance

Monday, December 8

SpiritFed at noon

Pack a lunch and join us **on ZOOM** for prayer, study and connecting with each other. It's a come-as-you-are space designed to help us confront the loneliness epidemic while growing closer to God.

Click on the link below to join.

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83576594637?
pwd=U2024sKmOPiy3CyMqV4OarYUtofaom.1](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83576594637?pwd=U2024sKmOPiy3CyMqV4OarYUtofaom.1)

Meeting ID: 835 7659 4637
Passcode: 913882

6:00 PM Bridge — P

Tuesday, December 9

9:00 AM Staff Meeting
10:00 AM Mission Committee -P
3:00 Game Group — P
4:00 PM Vision Team — Library
6:00 PM Girl Scouts
6:30 PM Blue Blues Christmas

Wednesday, December 10

9:00 AM - Noon Library Hours
10:00 AM Bible Study—CR
3:30 PM Shamrock Ringers
6:30 Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, December 11

4:00 Bell Choir Rehearsal
6:00 Daisies

Friday, December 12

8:30 AM Men's Coffee—Panera

Sunday, December 14

Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 AM Choir Rehearsal — S
9:00-9:45 AM Library Hour
10:00 AM Worship: Communion
Mission Moment: Christmas Fund
Fellowship Time Follows
11:00-11:15 AM Library Time
11:30 AM Usher Training

Coming Events

The church office is open
M-Th, 9-1.

Would you like to donate to
VUCC online?

Use this link:

<https://veniceucc.org/give>

Or...Use your Smart Phone
to scan the QR code:
and it will take you
directly to our
donations page.
It is really easy!



- 7:00 PM Wednesday, December 24,
Christmas Eve Worship Service

2026

- Sunday, January 11, Mission Fair—Naar Hall
- Tuesday, January 20, Women's Trip to Spanish Point in Osprey
- Sunday, January 25, CROP Walk
- 5:30 PM, Tuesday, January 27, Word Made Flesh Dinner, Naar Hall
- 10:00 AM-4:00 PM, Saturday, January 31, Venice Garden Club Flower Show—Naar Hall
- Friday/Saturday, February 6-7, Venice Coin Club Show—Naar Hall
- Sunday, February 8, On the Spot Mission Moment
- 8:00 AM-1:00 PM, Saturday, February 14, Women's Fellowship Rummage Sale
- Saturday, February 28, Christian Education Event TBA
- Sunday, March 8, Immokalee Sunday with Alan Penick