



Brecksville United Church of Christ

23 Public Square • Brecksville • Ohio • 44141 • 440-526-4364

***Loving, Serving and Accepting All People
with God's Life-Changing Power***

*"Towering genius
disdains a
beaten path.
It seeks regions
hitherto
unexplored."*

*- Abraham
Lincoln*

*See, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you... the voice of one crying
out in the wilderness:*



Illustration by Elizabeth Gadus. John the Baptist.

*"Prepare the way of
the Eternal;
make God's paths
straight."*

- Mark 1:2-3

Second Sunday of Advent, December 10th, 2023 • 10:00 AM

Pastor

• John King

Director of Music

• David Debick

Financial Secretary

• Joy Garapic

Office Manager

• Anne Melfo

Ministers – All of Our Members

Affirmation of Welcome

We are an Open and Affirming Congregation, welcoming ALL of God's children.

*Whether you are single, married, divorced, separated,
or partnered,*

You Are Welcome Here!

Whatever your race, ethnicity, or age,

You Are Welcome Here!

Whatever your gender identity or sexual orientation,

You Are Welcome Here!

Whatever your religious background, creed, or spirituality,

You Are Welcome Here!

Whatever your social or economic circumstances,

You Are Welcome Here!

Whatever your health conditions, impairments, or mobility needs,

You Are Welcome Here!

Whoever we may be, wherever we are on our life's journey,

We welcome one another to this place,

Even as God welcomes us all in Jesus Christ!



- *Please sign our guest book in the narthex before you leave - if you are interested in learning more about our church, please feel free to speak to our pastor.*
- *Hearing difficulty? Please talk to any usher about a Personal Sound receiver available for your use.*

Office Hours:

Mon., Tues., Wed., Thurs.: 9:30am - 1:30pm

Church Phone: 440-526-4364

e-mail: buccoffice23@gmail.com – web address: www.BrecksvilleUCC.org

Please submit your announcements by noon on Wednesday – Thank You!



Second Sunday of Advent December 10th, 2023

Prelude *There's a Voice in the Wilderness Calling*
Welcome & Announcements
Quiet Meditation

Bancroft

*Before the fields have finished,
Before the Christmas tree,
Wonder upon wonder
Will arrive to me!
- Emily Dickinson*

Gathering in God's Presence

** Please Stand as you are able*

***CALL TO PRAYER:** *(based on Isaiah 40 and Mark 1)*

Leader: Isaiah calls from the distant past: The Reign of God is drawing near!

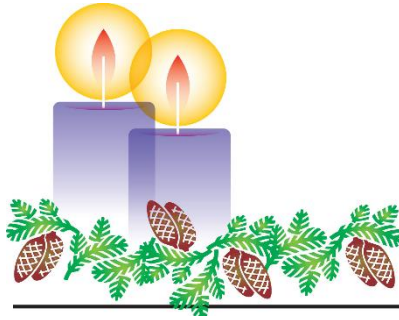
People: Make straight a highway for our God!

Leader: John the Baptist calls out,

People: Prepare the way of the Lord!

Leader: Welcome one another, for Christ welcomes you:

People: A just and peaceful path! For the glory of God!



Lighting of the Second Advent Candle - PEACE

One: Last week, the first week of Advent, we lit a candle symbolizing hope. In this second week, we light another candle, the candle of peace,

All: We reflect on the proclamation of John the Baptist more than 2,000 years ago and working to spread the good news today.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: We cry out and work for a world where everyone's basic needs are met.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: We smooth the rough ways and build new paths in order to end injustice and violence.

One: We light this candle of peace,

All: We await the arrival of Jesus Christ, light of the world. There is darkness everywhere. Let us be the light.

[Lighting the Advent Candles]

Advent Hymn

In the Bleak Midwinter

#128, verse #4

What can I offer, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
but what I can I offer: all my heart.

(Words: Christina G. Rossetti, 1872, alt.)

ADVENT CANDLE PRAYER: [UNISON]

Eternal God, we thank you that through all the years you have given peace to your people. Lead us to discover peace in our lives, guide us to build pathways of peace in places of conflict Amen.

***Hymn of Praise**

The Baptist Shouts on Jordan's Shore

#115, v. 1-3

*** INVOCATION: [UNISON]**

Holy God, we long for your peace, and trust in your promise; we hear your call to turn toward you, to change our lives and welcome you in. Meet us here and fill our minds with your wisdom. Guide our hearts toward pathways of peace. May our worship together open us to the challenge to your dream of wholeness for all. In the Name of the One who is coming, we pray. Amen!

*** Words of Grace**

***Song of Praise:**

Glory to God

Pablo Sosa 1988



Glo - ry, glo - ry, glo - ry! Glo - ry to God in the high - est, And on earth be



peace to all peo - ple, for God loves us all.

Readings

(See back of bulletin for complete readings)

First Reading - Isaiah 40:1-5 (The Message Translation)

Gospel Reading - Mark 1:1-8 (NRSVUE translation)

Continuing Testament - by Heidi Spangler



Time with Young Worshipers



Christmas Cantata

Sing CHRISTMAS (see program)

The Church at Prayer

Sue Renovetz, Jon Thompson, Cliff Stenzel, Allison Colbert, Marilyn Pay, Frances Posey, Russ King, George Snider, Mac Hoppel, Dassie Matsuoka, Kathy Smith, Jon Thompson, Rose Kaval, Bee Ortiz, Terry Heiman, Cindy Burton, Elizabeth Gadus, Ann Klonowski, Sheila Day, Jan Wardlaw, Stan McCain, Kathleen Stewart & Joe Blasko (her father), “Edna House”, people who are unemployed and under employed.

(Please let the office know of any additions, corrections, or changes to our prayer lists.)

Silent Meditation

Prayers of the Church

OUR LORD’S PRAYER: [UNISON]

Our Father-Mother, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen.

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

*** Invitation to the Offering**

*** Offertory Hymn**

**We long for the Messiah's birth,
a bold new age upon the earth
of justice, peace, and hope renewed.
Receive our gifts for greater good. Amen.**

*** PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING: [UNISON]**

With these gifts, dear God, accept the gratitude of our hearts. Let our gifts point to your presence among us, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

Going with God's Love

* Hymn of Departure

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

#116, v. 1-3

Carrying the Light of Christ into the World – Acolyte

*Circle of Community

As we move to form a circle around the pews, we will sing **Halle, Halle, Hallelujah (3 times) Hallelujah, Hallelujah**. After the benediction is pronounced, we will sing it once more. Our circle is open near the door as a symbol of our welcome to new people to our community of faith.

Hal-le, hal-le, hal - le - lu - ja. Hal-le, hal-le, hal - le - lu - ja.

Hal-le, hal-le, hal - le - lu - ja. Hal-le, hal-le, hal - le - lu - ja.

The musical score is written on two staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is simple and repetitive, with lyrics 'Hal-le, hal-le, hal - le - lu - ja.' repeated four times. Chords are indicated above the notes: A, E, A, D, Bm, E, C#7, F#m, Bm, E7sus4, E7, and A.

Benediction

Postlude

Prepare the Way, O Zion

From *Then Svenska Psalmboken*, 1697



Readings

First Reading

Isaiah 40:1-5 (The Message Translation)

“Comfort, oh comfort my people,”
says your God.
“Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem,
but also make it very clear
That she has served her sentence,
that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!
She’s been punished enough and more than enough,
and now it’s over and done with.”

Thunder in the desert!
“Prepare for GOD’s arrival!
Make the road straight and smooth,
a highway fit for our God.
Fill in the valleys,
level off the hills,
Smooth out the ruts,
clear out the rocks.
Then GOD’s bright glory will shine
and everyone will see it.
Yes. Just as GOD has said.”

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:1-8 (NRSVUE translation)

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Eternal; make God’s paths straight,’ ” so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Readings

Continuing Testament – by Heidi Spangler

(John the Baptist's message was, "*Prepare the way for the Holy One, make your paths straight.*")

When I first read the passage, I couldn't help but think of the chorus from my favorite Indigo Girls song:

*"I went to the doctor, I went to the mountains
I looked to the children, I drank from the fountains
There's more than one answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line
And the less I seek my source for some definitive
Closer I am to fine"*

So much conflict and hatred come from assuming there is only one straight path. People are often so certain that they know which path is the correct one, the straightest one, and the one that everyone else should follow. With the growing influence of social media and a 24-hours news cycle, we often create heroes overnight and then demonize them by the end of the day. We cling to our definitions of good and evil so strongly, we assume anyone not on *our* chosen path must be going down a crooked one.

I've really been struggling with this since the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and the coverage of the war in the weeks that followed. I saw politically left news outlets sharing antisemitic views and politically right news outlets sharing anti-Islamic views – both hateful, unhelpful, and divisive. I heard people offer prayers for one group and only advice with no sympathy for the other. But I don't think any of us truly knows what the straight path is, and all we can do is extend each other grace and make the best decisions for ourselves, the people we love, and the world around us.

Announcements:

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE – For the next two Sundays, (December 17th & 24th), we'd like to invite volunteers to light the Advent Wreath candles. Please sign up via the weekly email from Breeze, or contact the office at 440-526-4364. Sign up is open to individuals, couples and/or groups – thank you!

HB 51 POSTCARD WRITING – The Ohio Statehouse is now considering HB51, also known as The Second Amendment Preservation Act. This bill would ban Ohio from enforcing federal gun safety legislation. On **Monday, Dec. 11 at 6 pm**, BUCC will host a postcard writing event, supporting common-sense, evidence-based gun safety laws that keep communities safe. Writing supplies, assistance finding your state legislators' address, and more information will be provided. There will be presentations by Pastor John, Rep. Richard Dell'Aquila (State Rep., House District 15), Connie Schultz (Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, columnist, and author), Rev. Michael Howard (Living Water Association of the UCC), and Laura Pulliam (Moms Demand Action). Please join us in making our voices heard – and bring a friend!

THE CHRISTMAS FUND FOR THE VETERANS OF THE CROSS & THE EMERGENCY FUND – “*Grace upon Grace.*” - John 1:16

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

“Grace upon grace” is a reminder of the great gifts of God to us, and an expression of our grateful response to that fullness. Your gifts to the Christmas Fund allow the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance to provide grace, hope, and joy through financial relief to UCC pastors, lay church leaders, and their families. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

Attendance on Sunday, December 2nd, 2023 – Adults: 69; Kids: 6; Livestream: 11; Total: 86

Special Thanks:



DECEMBER 10, 2023

Head Usher:	Evie Novak
Ushers:	Evelyn Seager Heidi Spangler Jim Duffy
Lay Reader:	Jim Duffy
Greeter:	Volunteer Needed
Advent Candle:	Peg Duffy Volunteers Needed
Acolyte:	Arthur Cook
Peace Candle:	Dorothy Cook
Counters:	Marge Culver Jeff Thompson
A/V Team:	Annette Pedersen
Flowers:	Volunteer Needed
Snack:	Lois Lorenzo Sue Stenzel
Set Up/Serve:	Sue & Cliff Stenzel
Clean Up:	Kathy Pastor Sue Stenzel
Snow Herder:	Volunteer Needed



DECEMBER 17, 2023

Head Usher:	Jill Zedan
Ushers:	Evelyn Seager Sue Stenzel
Lay Reader:	Kate Matthews
Greeter:	Lori Molesky
Advent Candle:	Cait Moury & Family
Counters:	Marge Culver Janet Renovetz
A/V Team:	Jim Duffy
Flowers:	Janet Renovetz
Snack:	Mindy Harris Wade Jesse Wade
Set Up/Serve:	Mindy Harris Wade Casey Oliver
Clean Up:	Volunteers Needed
Snow Herder:	Volunteer Needed



(Please let us know if you would like to keep your poinsettia or leave it here for shut-ins and others.)