



Brecksville United Church of Christ

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

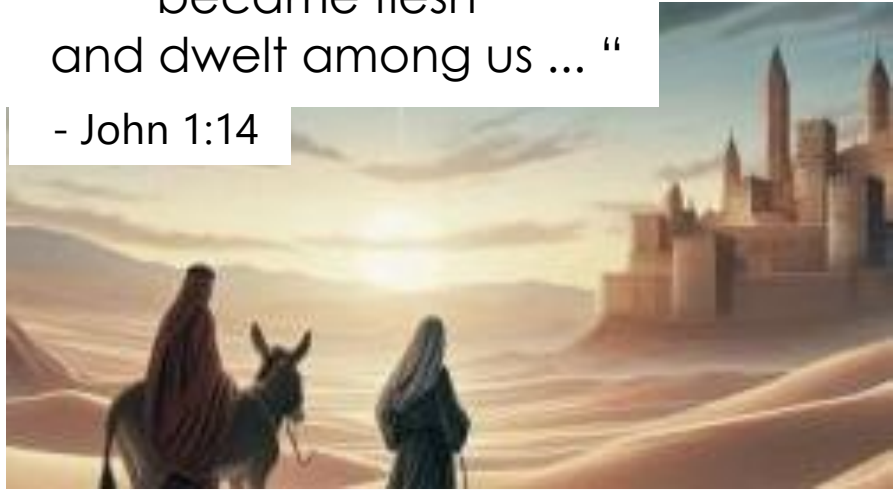
***Loving, Serving and Accepting All People
with God's Life-Changing Power***

“And the Word
became flesh
and dwelt among us ... “

- John 1:14

*“May we all
become the light
the world so
desperately
needs in this
season of
Advent.”*

- Rose Kaval



4th Sunday of Advent / Christmas Eve Service

4th Sunday of Advent, December 24th, 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!

4th Sunday of Advent / Christmas Eve Service

December 24th, 2023

Prelude ***Now the Heavens Start to Whisper*** Welsh melody
 *"Christ, eternal sun of justice, Christ, the rose of wisdom's seed,
 Come to bless with fire and fragrance hours of yearning, hurt, and need.*
 (Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953; © 2006, GIA Publications, Inc.)

Welcome & Announcements

Quiet Meditation

*"Jesus pointed the way to peace and justice;
 accomplishing it is up to us."* - Rob Grow

Gathering in God's Presence

** Please Stand as you are able*

***CALL TO PRAYER:** *(Based on Psalm 96 and Luke 2: 1-14)*

Leader: Sing to our God a new song; sing to our God all the earth.

People: Glory to God in the highest heaven, peace on earth to all!

Leader: The heavens are telling the glory of God, let the earth rejoice, let trees of the forest sing for joy!

People: Glory to God in the highest heaven, peace on earth to all!

Lighting the Advent Candle - Love

One: Rejoice, and do not be afraid! For see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: those who have walked in the gloom of discouragement and despair have seen a great Light.

Many: ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel, v. 1***

O come, O come, Immanuel,
 and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
 until the Son of God appear.

(Continued on next page)

Lighting the Advent Candle (*continued*)

**Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.**

One: Rejoice, rejoice, and do not be afraid! For those who have lived in lands shadowed by oppression and unspeakable violence, even on them the Light has shined.

Many: ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel, v. 7***
 O come, O King of nations, bind
 in one the hearts of all humankind.
 Bid all our sad divisions cease
 and be yourself our King of Peace. **(Refrain)**

One: Again I say, rejoice! For though the night of grief and sorrow should cover us, and the Light around us become night, still there is One for whom even the night is as bright as the day.

Many: ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel, v. 6***
 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
 and bring us comfort from afar!
 Dispel the shadows of the night
 and turn our darkness into light. **(Refrain)**

One: And yet again I tell you, rejoice! For though hate and fear reign today, in truth the shadow is only a small and passing thing. The light of love shines even in darkness, and darkness cannot overcome it.

[The candle of Love is lit]

Many: ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel, v. 2***
 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
 who ordered all things mightily;
 to us the path of knowledge show
 and teach us in its ways to go. **(Refrain)**

*** INVOCATION: [UNISON]**

God of love – ferocious love, fierce love, unending love, everlasting love – we gather with gratitude for the ways your love has called us out of bleakest night and into your marvelous light. Throughout this season of Advent, we have been waiting, watching, reading, praying, reflecting, and growing. As we now conclude the season of Advent, we invite you to be with us, God of Love, Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

Hymn of Praise

O Little Town of Bethlehem

#133

*** 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.

Advent Readings

First Reading - Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSVUE translation)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to leave her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

(Continued on next page)

Advent Readings

First Reading (*continued*)

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Continuing Testament - by Sherrill Witt

I am at an age now where the whole idea of gifts for anything often leaves me disappointed as the recipient, or anxious as the giver. Giving unexpected small gifts throughout the year has become a newer methodology. But it is all still just stuff, heartfelt though it may be. May I suggest an alternative? The two biggest and most costly gifts we can all give are reconciliation and grace.

Reconciliation – Think about someone with whom you have a rupture, someone with whom you have lost harmony, where the emotional distance between you is an ache. If you can, reach out with love and no expectation. Just say something, anything, to show you care and that you love them. Perhaps you and this person will have a little peace and harmony between you for just a moment. It's a start.

Grace – Out of the fullness in your heart come up with a gift of friendship for someone who you think might not need it, or someone you don't know well, or someone you have just met. A phone call, a handwritten card, an email, a text message, a baked good left at their door – these are gentle touches of humanity and grace that could lighten that person's day and perhaps their entire holiday season.

The secret to these gifts is that they are very selfish. The Giver always benefits as much as or more than the Recipient. Go ahead, be selfish this Holiday Season. Share the gifts of reconciliation and grace, and receive the gift of Christ's peace.



Time with Young Worshipers & Lighting of the Christ Candle



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.)

Christmas Hymn *O Come, All Ye Faithful (See carol insert)* English melody

INVOCATION: [UNISON]

Today is Christmas Eve! O God of the Baby of Bethlehem, we come into your presence with praise and thanksgiving. We hear the glad tidings of the angel voices, we come to experience this good news of great joy for all the people. As the shepherds traveled to Bethlehem, we have traveled here – some are eager, expectant, hopeful; some are mourning, some are a bit skeptical. Let the words of sacred scripture seep into our hearts, to be treasured and pondered anew. We are here; we are ready, O God! Let the light of your love break forth! Amen.

Christmas Hymn

Angels, from the Realms of Glory

#126

Christmas Eve Readings

First Reading - Isaiah 9:2-6 (NRSV)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

(Continued on next page)

Christmas Eve Readings

First Reading (*continued*)

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Gospel Reading - Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

Christmas Eve Readings

Gospel Reading (*continued*)

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Christmas Hymn

What Child Is This

#148

Continuing Testament - By Kate Matthews

We celebrate Christmas in many ways, among them gathering with family and friends, exchanging gifts, holding pageants, and sending cards. Perhaps the most moving and memorable way we celebrate Christmas, however, is singing Christmas carols. Our musical memory lasts through the years, from our childhood into our old age, the melodies familiar and comforting, the words hauntingly beautiful and instructive at the same time.

The readings for this morning are like songs, too, and their lyrical celebration of God at work in the world, saving, vindicating, calling, and comforting, links us to our ancestors in faith who shared our common hope and longing. We sing along with them today.

What is the good news we are waiting to hear, or waiting to see fulfilled this Christmas? Perhaps we are waiting for a messenger who will tell us that the tide has turned, that the day of vindication and hope has arrived, that God is still with us. Or, perhaps we have secretly, privately, given up hope, in spite of our best efforts at decorating, cooking, visiting, and even gift-giving.

Worse, we may have reached the point of assuming that it is all up to us to bring the peace our hearts long for, all up to "little old us" and our best efforts, with God not bothering to intervene at all. Can we even begin to make everything right?

And yet, Christmas, the Incarnation, is about God intervening in human history, so it's also about God telling us not to give up hope after all, God, telling us not to believe that we are all on our own...

(Continued on next page)

Christmas Eve Readings

Continuing Testament (*continued*)

Looking around, we see many broken things, malfunctioning systems, situations and things that need to be made right. Christmas doesn't just remind us of what God has done but also proclaims that God is active in the world today, in this setting of history as well. What is the new thing that God is doing in the life of our congregation, in your own life, in the life of the United Church of Christ? In this day, how is God revealing God's own self in the life of the community?

[The beginning of John's gospel answers this way: "The Word became flesh and lived among us."] On this Christmas morning, what is the Word that we long to hear, that we long to feel anew in our lives? The baby is small and vulnerable and sweet, yet the God revealed in this human flesh is clearly - from our readings - a mighty God, above our imaginings or description. We can hardly begin to relate to such a Presence and such a Reality. And yet we can relate to a baby, a mother, and, strangely enough, the shepherds who came to give homage.

Perhaps this paradox explains why singing the carols begins to express the inexpressible: we cannot put into words the incredible mystery of God-made-flesh, and yet we have known it in our bones. We have felt God with us even when we could never explain how that could be. Christmas is our communal recognition, our shared celebration, that God is with us still, God is still speaking, God is still acting in our lives and in the life of the world that God loves so well. God is still with us, and we celebrate, and we sing our songs this Christmas morning.

Choir Anthem

Where Shepherds Lately Knelt

Schalk

1. *Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the angel's word,
I come in half-belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred.
But there is room and welcome there for me; (twice).*
2. *In that unlikely place I find him as they said:
sweet, newborn Babe, how frail, and in a manger bed:
a still, small voice to cry one day for me; (twice).*
3. *How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
his prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart, I stare:
a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me; (twice).*
4. *Can I, will I forget how Love was born and burned
its way into my heart: unasked, unforced, unearned:
to die, to live, and not alone for me; (twice).*

(Music: Carl F. Schalk, 1986; words: Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1986; Music © 1986 GIA Publications, Inc.;
Text © 1987 Concordia Publishing House)

Sermon by Pastor John King

Christmas Hymn

O Holy Night (See carol insert)

Adam

The Church at Prayer

Ann Kelley, Sue Renovetz, Jon Thompson, Cliff Stenzel, Allison Colbert, Marilyn Pay, Frances Posey, Russ King, George Snider, Mac Hoppel, Dassie Matsuoka, Kathy Smith, 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 celebrate 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]**

O God of Hope, God of Peace, God of Joy, God of Love, God of Light, we pray you bless these gifts, that they might become a blessing to this world you love so very much. May those who receive them know that you are with them, in this holy season and in all their days to come. In the name of the Child of Bethlehem, Emmanuel the Light of the World, we pray. Amen.

Communion

Communion Music

Irish Carol

Irish traditional

*"Christmas Day is come; let's all prepare for mirth,
which fills the heavens and earth
at this amazing birth."*

Prayer of Thanksgiving: [UNISON]

Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood, that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Candle Lighting (see insert)

Christmas Hymn

Silent Night, Holy Night

#134

Going with God's Love

*** Hymn of Departure**

Joy to the World!

#132

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 treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is simple and repetitive, with lyrics written below the notes. Chords are indicated above the staff: A, E, A, D, Bm, E, C#7, F#m, Bm, E7sus4, E7, and A.

Benediction

Postlude

Fanfare for Christmas

Shaw



Announcements:

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!

THE UN-HANGING OF THE GREENS - PLEASE mark your calendar for next Sunday, December 31st, following worship, so we can take down Christmas decorations in preparation for Epiphany. The more folks who participate, the faster it goes! We are beyond grateful for your willing hearts and hands.

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - BUCC Council has set the annual Congregational Meeting to approve the Budget and Slate of Officers for the 2024 Church Year for Sunday, January 14, 2024 immediately following the regular worship service.

In lieu of the usual December meeting for presentation of the Slate of Officers and preliminary Budget, Council has agreed to prepare and send out this information to all congregation members via e-mail no later than December 27th. Hard copies will be available at the office or mailed upon request to anyone who would prefer it. This will allow proper time for church members to review the Budget and Slate of Officers and respond to Council with comments or questions prior to the January 14th meeting.

Sanctuary TV Artwork: VanArsdale, Anthony. The Madonna and Child. 2017, for the National Black Catholic Congress Convention. anthony-vanarsdale.artstation.com.

Attendance on Sunday, December 17th, 2023 – Adults: 87; Kids: 18; Livestream: 8; Total: 113

Special Thanks



DECEMBER 24, 2023

Head Usher:	Betsey Wilson
Ushers:	Peg Duffy Evelyn Seager
Lay Reader:	Sherrill Witt
Greeter:	Sherrill Witt
Advent Candle:	Zach, Sydney & Sloane Novak
Counters:	Lori Molesky Kathy Pastor
Nursery Assistant:	Evie Novak
A/V Team:	David Pastor
Flowers:	Janet Renovetz
Snack:	Peg Duffy Lois Lorenzo
Set Up/Serve:	Carol Miller Annette Pedersen
Clean Up:	Annette Pedersen Volunteer Needed
Snow Herder:	Volunteer Needed

DECEMBER 31, 2023

Head Usher:	Diane Gressley
Ushers:	Volunteer Needed Evelyn Seager
Lay Reader:	Bridget Sproul
Greeter:	Peg Duffy
Counters:	Marjorie Culver Janet Renovetz
A/V Team:	Volunteer Needed
Flowers:	Janet Renovetz
Snack:	Jenn Elting Volunteer Needed
Set Up/Serve:	Volunteers Needed
Clean Up:	Volunteers Needed
Snow Herder:	Volunteer Needed





Poinsettias dedicated by:

Julie Bernard & Linda Kriynovich	In memory of Anton, Julie, and Lori Gorenc
Bob & Caroline Chandler	In memory and in honor of those who came before
Allison & Gayle Colbert	In memory of Martha & Donald Colbert – the best parents Allison could have; and Sandra Wibert – the most wonderful caring mom Gayle could have
Jane & Cliff Cribbs	In memory of loved ones
Joy Garapic	In memory of William Garapic, loving husband, father and grandfather.
Claudia Griesmer	In memory of my father, Donald Repasky
Mary Kidd	
Lois Lorenzo	In memory of Rudy Lorenzo
Carol Miller & Pat Rehm	In memory of John & Lorraine Urban, and Jack & Max Urban In honor of the Miller, Rehm, Olle, Dutle & Unetic families
Wes & Evie Novak	In honor of Wesley & Pamela Novak, Nancy Karras & Jayson Kopp
Fred & Annette Pedersen	In honor of family
Eric Rahnenfuehrer	In memory and in honor of Jan & Marjorie Rahnenfuehrer
Janet & Dan Renovetz	In honor of our families, near and far
Miriam Rosewicz	In memory of loved ones
Kim Smith	In memory of Mr. & Mrs. Clifford Adair, Drew Smith, Fred Miller & Amanda Horkey In honor of Shirley Smith & Kenny Miller
Sherrill Witt	In memory of Shirley & Arch Duncan In honor of all the new BUCC members, those who work for peace & Rev. John King and family
Jill Zedan	In memory of Bobby, Pres, Joan & Jack In honor of Jacob Brock, my son-in-law who has served 3 tours of duty in the Mideast