

**DECEMBER 17, 2023**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)**



**ST. JOHN UNITED**  
**CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*

*Liturgy – Rev. Mia M. McClain*

*Ushers – Christina Hardin-Weiss and Eric Moayer*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal

CCLI LICENSE #11164431

\*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**PRELUDE: “At the Manger” Eugene McCluskey**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: UCC Christmas Fund**

# SING-A-LONG CHRISTMAS CAROLS

## **\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(Psalm 34 in conversation with the Magnificat)

Leader: O magnify our God with me and let us exalt  
God's name together.

**All: Our souls magnify the Lord.**

**Our spirits rejoice in God our Savior!**

Leader: We will bless the Lord at all times;  
God's praise shall continually be in our mouths.

**All: Our souls magnify the Lord.**

**God's mercy endures from generation to generation.**

Leader: Let our souls make their boasts in the Lord;  
Let the humble hear and be glad.

**All: Our souls magnify the Lord**

**for the Mighty One has done great things.**

## **\*INVOCATION (Inspired by Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11)**

God of Mary, Mother of Jesus – and all of the lowly who  
seek to be lifted –

God of Isaiah, who felt the Spirit upon him calling him to  
bring Good News—

Let your Spirit fall upon us in this hour.

Out of the ruins, remind us of your everlasting covenant.

Anoint us as we seek to share and experience your Good  
News. Bind our broken hearts.

Awaken us to the liberation within and among us.

Embolden us to proclaim your favor

As we seek you more deeply.

Amen.

**\*OPENING CAROL:**

**“Angels from the Realms of Glory”**

**Angels, from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o’er all the earth.  
You who sang creation’s story,  
Now proclaim Messiah’s birth:  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the newborn King.**

**Shepherd’s, in the fields abiding,  
Watching o’er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
yonder shines the infant light:  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the newborn King.**

**Sages, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam a-far;  
Seek the great desire of nations,  
you have seen the natal star:  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the newborn King.**

**\*RITUAL OF JOY AND GRATITUDE**

We gather together in this season of Advent anticipating hope, praying for peace, attempting to cultivate joy and share love amidst commotion, grief, despair and uncertainty. In the midst of the ancient ruins, what has brought you joy this week? Or what are you grateful for this morning?

The practice of naming our joys – or counting our blessings and naming them one by one, as the hymn

says – can sustain us as we wait for the long, anticipated thing.

When days get bleak and the weight of the world falls on our shoulders, we re-member God, what God has done, and what God can still do for us, through us, and by us.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION:**

**Womb of Creation, we often get caught up in what we do not have – The material things we lack, the access and privilege we may lack, the answers, even, that seem to escape us in crucial moments.**

**Forgive us for the times we forgot to remember you.**

**Hold us accountable for the moments we failed to see you in the blessings of ages past.**

**Help us reconnect with our joy and our gratitude.**

**Remind us to name our joys, our miracles, our deliverances, our redemptions**

**One by one by one, for you are there in them all.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE**

God hears what is named aloud, what is named within, and what is yet to be named. Go forth knowing that the Spirit of the Lord is upon you, and this joy you have – the world didn't give it and the world can't take it.

Amen.

**\*RESPONSE: Chorus to “Angels We Have Heard on High”**

**Glo – ria in excelsis Deo.**

**Glo - ria in excelsis Deo.**

## SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

### Joyful proclamations

**61** The LORD God's spirit is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me.

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release for captives,  
and liberation for prisoners,

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and a day of vindication for our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,

<sup>3</sup> to provide for Zion's mourners,  
to give them a crown in place of ashes,  
oil of joy in place of mourning,  
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.

They will be called Oaks of Righteousness,  
planted by the LORD to glorify himself.

<sup>4</sup> They will rebuild the ancient ruins;  
they will restore formerly deserted places;  
they will renew ruined cities,  
places deserted in generations past.

<sup>8</sup> I, the LORD, love justice;  
I hate robbery and dishonesty.<sup>[a]</sup>

I will faithfully give them their wage,  
and make with them an enduring covenant.

<sup>9</sup> Their offspring will be known among the nations,  
and their descendants among the peoples.

All who see them will recognize  
that they are a people blessed by the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> I surely rejoice in the LORD;  
my heart is joyful because of my God,

because he has clothed me with clothes of victory,  
wrapped me in a robe of righteousness  
like a bridegroom in a priestly crown,  
and like a bride adorned in jewelry.

<sup>11</sup> As the earth puts out its growth,  
and as a garden grows its seeds,  
so the LORD God will grow righteousness and praise  
before all the nations.

**CAROL: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”**

**O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.**

**For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to all on earth.**

**EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always. <sup>17</sup> Pray continually. <sup>18</sup> Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Don’t suppress the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Don’t brush off

Spirit-inspired messages, <sup>21</sup> but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid every kind of evil. <sup>23</sup> Now, may the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him; and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept intact and blameless at our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. <sup>24</sup> The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: John 1:6-8, 19-28**

<sup>6</sup> A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. <sup>8</sup> He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

**John's witness**

<sup>19</sup> This is John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup> John confessed (he didn't deny but confessed), "I'm not the Christ." <sup>21</sup> They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" John said, "I'm not." "Are you the prophet?" John answered, "No." <sup>22</sup> They asked, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup> John replied,

*"I am a voice crying out in the wilderness,  
Make the Lord's path straight,<sup>[a]</sup>  
just as the prophet Isaiah said."*

<sup>24</sup> Those sent by the Pharisees <sup>25</sup> asked, "Why do you baptize if you aren't the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup> John answered, "I baptize with water. Someone greater stands among you, whom you don't

recognize. <sup>27</sup> He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie his sandal straps." <sup>28</sup> This encounter took place across the Jordan in Bethany where John was baptizing.

**GOSPEL RESPONSE: "How Great our Joy"**

**While by the sheep we watched at night.**

**Glad tidings brought an angel bright.**

**How great our joy! Great our joy!**

**Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**There shall be born, so he did say,**

**In Bethlehem a Child today.**

**How great our joy! Great our joy!**

**Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**There shall the Child lie in a stall.**

**This Child who shall redeem us all.**

**How great our joy! Great our joy!**

**Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!**

**MESSAGE: "Witnessing"**

Have you ever had the opportunity to witness a joyous event? Personally, I was able to be present when three of my grandchildren were born. Birth is one of the true miracles of God.

When we witness such an event, what's the next thing we want to do? We want to announce it to the



world! We want to shout it from the roof tops, and tell anyone who will listen, the exciting news. That describes what John the Baptizer was doing. He brought the good news of the gospel to all who would listen.

As John describes the miracle that God was doing, he told us to be ready to experience it by repenting and being baptized. When I was in the labor room with my children, we had to wear masks and stay calm as the physician tended to the birthing mother. The new parents had been preparing for this event for months; cribs, baby clothes, diapers, painting the nursery. That's what John was telling us to do; prepare for the presence of someone very special in our lives who will bring us closer to God.

John was also carefully explaining that **he was not "the good news". He was just the messenger.** He was the one who called others to be prepared for the presence of the Messiah. John also encouraged the newly baptized to proclaim the good news to others, all the people from near and far.

John preached that the Messiah was coming and then proceeded to prepare the people for this huge event that the people had been waiting for so long. And part of being a witness, John told us to shout the news to others, near and far.

According to Webster's dictionary a witness is "someone who attests to a fact or event, gives evidence, or has personal knowledge of something. The word can also mean to testify, act as legal witness, or bear witness."

From what we can read in these Bible passages, do you think John took his role as a witness very seriously?

Did he perform his duty well? Should he be an example for us as we prepare to be witnesses for Christ to the world. Share this good news to as many people as possible. Part of being a witness is to testify. Can you do it? Amen

**SPECIAL MUSIC: “Breathe of Heaven” Video**  
**St. John Choir**

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

Creator God, thank you for continuing your activity in creation, maintaining and sustaining the forces that keep our physical world in balance. Redeemer God, who has entered our sphere of life in Jesus of Nazareth, complete your saving work in our world, repairing the ravages of human disobedience and conflict so that peace may be more than a cessation of war, bombings, plots and counterplots, so that a perfect humanity finally will be regained.

Timeless Father, Eternal Brother, Mothering Spirit: you have set the units of families and seek to teach us to love others as we love ourselves, honestly and graciously. May we be teachable in every generation from the oldest to the youngest knowing how great your wisdom is and how fallible we can be. Grant us the spirit of forgiveness that, confessing our faults to one another, we may forgive and be forgiven.

God of the past and of the future, hear our prayers for the people of your world in which you live, but in which there are also powers of evil and of death. Overcome evil in and through us. Call the nations of the world to new experiments in cooperation so that all the

gifts of the earth's people may be put to good use for the common good. Guide the leaders of both management and labor to new ways of achieving economic justice in the sharing of profit and in serving fairly the needs of consumers.

Gracious God, give continuing wisdom and skill to all in the medical community who look for new ways of healing and helping us to live longer. Bless as well all who are involved in hospice and others also dedicated to helping us through the final valley of the shadow of death. Bring comfort to all who are sick, lonely, depressed, and oppressed. May the birth of your son, Jesus, be a bright light into their hearts.

We pray all these things in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ. . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

#### **CAROL: "Away in a Manger"**

**Away in a manger, no crib for a 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.**

**The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes,**

**but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my side until morning is high.**

**Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
and fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

We come in the name of the One who filled the hungry, who lifted up the lowly, and brought the powerful ones down from their thrones. We aim to share our gifts and resources so that we may continue the mission of God and become the Good News we wish to see.

**OFFERTORY CAROL: "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"**

**It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
to touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,  
From heaven's all gracious King."  
The world in solemn lay to hear the angels sing.**

**Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled,  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
they bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its Babel sounds  
the blessed angels sing.**

**For lo, the days are hastening on,  
By prophets seen of old,  
When, with the ever-circling years,  
shall come the time foretold,  
when peace shall over all the earth  
its ancient splendors fling,  
and all the world give back the song  
which now the angels sing.**

### **PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

We dedicate these gifts that have been shared for the fortification of the beloved community. Let these gifts usher joy into this world and signal to the people that God is still setting captives free. Amen.

### **\*CLOSING CAROL: "Joy to the World"**

**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 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, repeat the sounding joy.**

**He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders, wonders of his love.**

**\*BENEDICTION (Inspired by 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)**

May the God of peace sanctify you entirely;  
May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound.  
May you go forth knowing you are held by The One who  
calls you faithful. Amen.

**POSTLUDE: "The Song of Bethlehem"  
Randolph Johnston**



**PRAYER LIST:** Becky Ballard, Urban and Mary Lou Baum, Ronald Bopp, Jackie Canterbury, Carson Edwards, Amy Iverson, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, David Seneczyn, Amy Smith, Yvonne Weber, Rosemary Williams.

Millstadt Community Choir Concert on Sunday,  
December 17 at 7 pm at Zion Evangelical Church in  
Millstadt (177 West White St., Millstadt).



# CHRISTMAS GARDEN OF MEMORIES

## POINSETTIAS

### FOR

### FROM

Joe

Ginny Ganschinetz  
& family

Judy

Russ Hartmann

Loved Ones

Sue Williams

Loved Ones

Jackie, Ellen & Chris

Loved Ones

Judy Schmitt

Loved Ones

Sue & Gene Ganschinetz

Parents Ed & Bernice  
Warning, Walter &  
Agnes Eisenhauer

Jim & Nancy Eisenhauer

Loved Ones

Larry & Becky Riess  
& family



# CHRISTMAS GARDEN OF MEMORIES

## MEMORIALS

FOR

FROM

Family Members  
Baum

Urban & Mary Lou

Loved Ones

Cheri Schutzenhofer

Alan Canterbury

Jackie Canterbury

Olen, Arlene and Jim Hagebusch

Beth & Stuart  
Schneider

Clarence

Dorothy Ovelgoenner

Alvin & Verna Koch,  
Emil & Dorothy Banjavcic,  
Janice Lohman

Steve, Sharon  
Scott, Shannon, Sean,  
Timothy, Stacie,  
Trenton,  
Alister & Garrett

Olen, Arlene Jim Hagebusch  
Ed, Ruthann, Steve, Danny Miller

Tom & Jan Miller

Judy Hartmann

Vicki Hartmann