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THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHESTER

An Open & Affirming Congregation of
The United Church of Christ
December 24, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
Fourth Sunday of Advent

WELCOME — Jennifer Gill, Deacon

PRELUDE — *Bring a Torch/ He is Born* — French Carols arr. H. Hopson

INTROIT — *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* — J. Carter

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH
Leader: Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Love.

People: Jesus shows us God's perfect love. Christ is God's perfect love in human form. All who believe and live in Christ, live in love. Love transforms and perfects all things; love never ends.

Leader: We light this candle today to remind us that God is love. We thank God for hope given us, for the peace Christ bestows, for the joy poured into our hearts, and for the love that redeems us and shows us the way.

(Light the First, Second, Third and Fourth Candle)

All: O God of Love, Emmanuel, send your light into our hearts at this time. Help us to be ready for the time of Christ's appearing. Grant that we may so dwell in

Christ that perfect love fills our entire being. Make our worship a time in which we celebrate your love and are made ready to show that love to the whole world, today and always. Amen.

(Sing verse 4, *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,* # 119)

At his feet the six-winged seraph; cherubim, with sleepless eye, veil their faces to the presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Lord most high!"

*HYMN *Angels We Have Heard On High* 135

Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains, and the mountains in reply echo back their joyous strains. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong? Say what may the tidings be, which inspire your heavenly song. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see Christ whose birth the angels sing; come adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

As dependent on its parents as is the newborn child, so Lord, are we dependent on you. You are our source of light, of life and of love. You are our sustenance and our nurture, you are our morning dawn and evening dusk. You are our encouragement, our journeying partner, our trailbreaker. You are in our every chuckle and grimace, you are in our tears of sorrow and joy. You are the inspiration of every breath we take. You have lived in the hearts and souls of our ancestors before we were born, and will be so in our descendants long after we are gone. You will be our heritage and inheritance, our past, present and future. May we live lives that are worthy of such tender love and care that we know from you O God, in the name of Jesus your Son, Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Micah 5.2-4

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has

brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

ANTHEM *Rise Up Shepherds in the Night!* M. Haydn arr P. Liebergen

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON Matthew 1.18-25; 2.13-15, 19-21

SERMON *"The Joe Next Door"* Jennifer Gill & Rev. W. Alan Froggatt

"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."
(Matthew 1.20-21)

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

OFFERTORY *Hush, My Babe* Appalachian Carol arr W. Rogers
Jennifer Gill, soloist

*DOXOLOGY
Praise God from whom all blessings flow / Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that love has done / Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER *("trespasses")*

POEM *BC:AD* Ursula Askham Fanthorpe (1929–2009)

*HYMN *In the Bleak Midwinter* 154

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the midnight air; but his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a wise man, I would do my part; yet what I can I give him; give my heart.

*BENEDICTION

BENEDICTION RESPONSE *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* J. Carter

LOOKING AHEAD

December 24	No Soup Kitchen		December 28	**7:00 pm**	**Choir Rehearsal**
December 25			December 29	**8:15 am**	**No Coffice Hours**
December 26	8:30 am	Yoga	December 31	**10:00 am**	**Worship** No Soup Kitchen

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome! No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here at the United Church of Chester, an Open and Affirming Church and a member of the United Church of Christ. **The United Church of Chester is centered in Christ's love, embracing, nurturing, serving all, and committed to justice and peace**.

The Deacon for the month of December is **Jennifer Gill.** Our Greeter for today is **Diane Lindsay.** Poinsettias on the altar for **those we remember, things we celebrate, and of prayers for peace & world health.** Coffee hour is being hosted by **Karla Tessitore, Jennifer Gill, Ed Sypher and Diane Lindsay**.

The Remembrance Tree is in the narthex. Please add the name of a loved one to the tree that we will include in prayer during worship on January 7th.

Offering envelopes for 2024 are available in the Narthex. We have ordered fewer boxes this year, so your number may have changed. If you do not find your name on a box, please see Diane Lindsay, Financial Secretary.

ALAN'S OFFICE HOURS: Alan will be off this week.
CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday - Friday 9am-1pm.