

St. John's United Church of Christ

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

10 A.M. Worship Dec 29, 2024

First Sunday of Christmas

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Ringling of the Chimes

*Sharing the Peace of Christ

Peace be with you

And also with you

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*(Please note the * indicates when you should stand*

Members and Visitors please make note of your attendance by signing in on the pew pads.)

*The Call to Worship

Praise the Lord! Praise God, all angels, sun and moon, and shining stars!

I rejoice in the Lord, for God is my salvation!

Praise God from the earth! Young and old, men and women - let everyone praise God's name!

As the earth brings forth new life, God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

We continue to celebrate the birth of Christ,

for God is faithful and worthy of praise for ever and ever.

* Hymn

"The 12 Days of Christmas"

Starting with day 12

**On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love sent to me:
12 Drummers Drumming, 11 Pipers Piping, 10 Lords a Leaping,
9 Ladies Dancing, 8 Maids a Milking, 7 Swans a Swimming
6 Geese a Laying, 5 Golden Rings, 4 Calling Birds,
3 French Hens, 2 Turtle Doves and a Partridge in a Pear Tree!**

The First Day of Christmas: A partridge in a pear tree

Scripture: Matthew 23:37

'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Lesson: Jesus Christ

Last week we celebrated the coming of the Christ child – Jesus has been born! Emmanuel has come! And this week, we consider the words of a hymn that you may not have realized was a statement on Christianity. The first gift the singer wants to give is a partridge in a pear tree. This is the most important gift because it is repeated twelve times if we sing the song in its entirety!

The partridge, though, represents Jesus. And this is not the first time that Jesus has been likened to a bird! He claims himself to be a mother hen in the Scripture we just read. Jesus cares for us like a mother hen, like a shepherd, as our Savior. And we are reminded of his everlasting gift to us – his death on a cross and resurrection on Easter morning. Our partridge on his pear tree.

**What child is this, who, laid to rest
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?**

Refrain:

**This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
haste, haste to bring him laud
the babe, the son of Mary.**

**Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading: [Refrain]**

Time for the Child

Rev Katie Jo Bielke

The Second Day of Christmas: Two turtle doves

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:13

Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

Lesson: Old and New Testaments

Turtle doves make an appearance throughout Scripture. It was one of these doves that Noah sent out to see if there was dry land after the flood. Their plaintive cry has been used as a symbol of mourning in Scripture. They are mentioned in Song of Solomon as an indicator of new life because they are a migrating species, and they arrive in Judea in the spring. And, doves were offered as sacrifices for those who couldn't afford sheep or goats. They allowed rich and poor alike to worship God.

Turtle doves are said to mate for life. And so it is fitting that the author of this hymn uses them as a symbol for Scripture – for the joining of the Old and New Testaments; for the combining of these two books into our one Bible. Because the testaments are to be read together as one continuous story of God's love – of what God has done and continues to do in this world.

"Child of Blessing, Child of Promise"
**Child of God your loving parent,
Learn to listen for God's call
Grow to laugh and sing and worship,
Trust and love God more than all.**

The Third Day of Christmas: Three French hens

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2, 11

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him." ... They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Lesson: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh

All throughout our scriptures, the number three indicates a sense of spiritual time and fullness that leads to completion. Many journeys and instructions from God to the people of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures talk of three days or three months or three years. Visions often come in threes. On the third day, Christ rose again. And of course, there is the Trinity – one-in-three and three-in-one.

During this season of Christmas, we are reminded of the three gifts of the Magi – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These unique presents were not random items, but demonstrate who the Magi believed this child would become. Gold was reserved for the royal or the divine and

proclaims the birth of the Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. The frankincense is a symbol of holiness and is used in priestly worship, pointing to the ways that Christ sacrificed himself for our salvation. The myrrh invokes bitterness and suffering and speaks to how God came to be with us, entering our lives and showing us how to journey through death and into life.

Hymn	"We Three Kings"	#172 vs 1&5
<p>We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.</p> <p>O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.</p>		<p>Glorious now behold him arise, Christ and God and sacrifice: alleluia, alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies.</p> <p>O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.</p>

The Fourth Day of Christmas: Four calling birds

Scripture: John 21:24-25

"This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

Lesson: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

The four calling birds are said to represent the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—which tell the stories of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. But the concluding verse of the Gospel of John says that these books are not sufficient; that the works of Jesus are so numerous, they cannot be contained in books. Indeed, as Christians we proclaim that the incarnation means God is loose in our world--the work of Jesus is still being done. The Gospels cannot contain the story because the story is still being written!

While we sing of the four calling birds, let us also add our voices to their song and continue telling the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Special Music

"A Baby in a Manger, Gloria!"

Frombach/Courtney

The Fifth Day of Christmas: Five golden rings

Scripture: Luke 24:25-27

"Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures."

Lesson: The Pentateuch

Those of us with love for the Lord of the Rings might associate these five golden rings with power, control or dominion. We might also be tempted to think of the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible which these five rings actually represent, as the story of a powerful, controlling God who decrees harsh laws. In that thinking, Jesus comes along and corrects this stringent law and ushers in a more loving way of life. But the law of Moses does not symbolize constraint. Rather, the Pentateuch or the law of Moses is a gift from a God who cares enough about the people to tell them how they can live in covenantal relationship with their God. Rather than walking in confusion and darkness, these five golden rings tell us that God loves us enough to give us a law to follow, loves us enough to show us what is evil and what is good in this world. And as our friend Sam in Lord of the Rings tells us, that good is "worth fighting for."

Hymn*"Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"*

#164 vs 1-2

**Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Listen now to what we say:
News! News!
Jesus Christ is born today.
Ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!**

**Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Now you hear of endless bliss;
Joy! Joy!
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest for evermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!**

The Sixth Day of Christmas: Six geese a laying**Scripture: Genesis 1:31-2:2**

"God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that [God] had done, and [God] rested on the seventh day from all the work that [God] had done."

Lesson: 6 Days of creation

Eggs are generally the provision of another Christian celebration and not often associated with Christmas. But these geese a-laying eggs represent new life, just like eggs at Easter. There are also six of these geese to represent the six days of creation, the days in which God created all that is, and was, and will be. The number six here is important, but don't discount the geese themselves: after all, in the Celtic tradition, the wild goose is often the symbol of Holy Spirit, not the more peaceful dove. These six loud, squawking, excitable ladies represent the beautiful chaos of God's creation and the new life found in Christ.

Hymn*"Lord of the Dance"*

**I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth.
At Bethlehem I had my birth.**

**Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.**

The Seventh Day of Christmas: Seven swans a-swimming**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-5**

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Lesson: Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Every year since 1984, a group of economists have figured out how much it would cost to actually buy all the things on the "Twelve Days of Christmas" list. It's called the Christmas Price Index and its used to measure inflation and the increasing costs of certain goods. In 2016, for instance, if you were really going to buy everything on that list, including hiring drummers and dancers and milking maids (per hour), it would run you almost 35 thousand dollars. Compare that to 1995, when you could get away with the whole set for just under 16 thousand. And the most expensive item, by far, is the swans. Seven swans, whether they a-swim or not, will cost you \$13,125. As a gift, seven swans will set you back more than turtle doves, golden rings, and almost everything else combined. How strange, then, that the seven swans actually represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, gifts that are given freely by a loving God. Maybe its irony, and maybe it reminds us just how precious these spiritual gifts are. Either way, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are a great deal cheaper, and yet more lasting, than any swimming swan.

Invitation to Give Generously

(Thank you for being so generous in your care of St. John's UCC and its mission, through your participation and giving. Your stewardship makes a difference. You may make your offering several ways including in church, online, by text at 833-502-0657, or mail. We are grateful for your support.)

Offertory

*Doxology *(In Unison)*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly hosts;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.**

*Prayer of Dedication *(In Unison)*

O God, may these offerings exalt you and make visible the good news of Christmas. Take away the fear that prompts us to hoard your blessings, and thus to find the joy of them diminished. Increase our capacity to share, and thus to participate in your ministry of redemption and righteousness. Amen.

The Eighth Day of Christmas: Eight Maids a Milking

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-10

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lesson: Eight Beatitudes

When young maids, or unmarried women, were asked to "go-a-milking," wedding bells were on the horizon! It was an invitation to join your heart with another and to forever be changed. In many ways, the Beatitudes are that same kind of invitation. These eight statements of Jesus teach us how we might love God and love our neighbor in a way that will forever change our lives. Pastor Glen Stoudt notes that we might divide up these blessings into two different categories. We are blessed by being and we are blessed by doing. The first few beatitudes remind us that there are circumstances we face in life we might not have any control over - hunger, grief, or oppression. God comes to us in those moments and reminds us we are not alone. But the second half of these blessings are an invitation to share God's love with others. This Christmas, we remember that not only has Christ entered our lives right where we are, but invites us to join our hearts and help change this world.

Hymn	"Joy to the World"	#143 v 1-2
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 world, 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.

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (In Unison)
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.

The Ninth Day of Christmas: Nine ladies dancing

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23a

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Lesson: Fruit of the Spirit

A stage, a car, a ballroom, a living room - when the music starts playing, no matter where they may be feet start tapping, bodies sway, hands wave in the air like they just don't care. Rhythm pulses out a beat and the dancing begins. "Humans dance because dance is human."

The nine fruits of the Spirit, divine gifts made manifest in human beings, join in this dance. Together they dance in and through us, moving our feet, our hands, our bodies, our hearts to a holy rhythm. We join in the dance and move in measures filled with loving, humble service.

Hymn	<i>"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"</i>		#150 vs 1-2
<p>Hark! the herald-angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King; peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies; with the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem." Hark, the herald-angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"</p>	<p>Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, offspring of a Virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased in flesh with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel. Hark, the herald-angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"</p>		

The Tenth Day of Christmas: Ten lords a leaping

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-19

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Lesson: 10 Commandments

The definition of the word promise is a declaration assuring that one will do or will not do something. We all make promises—little promises and big promises. We make promises to each other and we make promises to ourselves. Over 4,000 years during the time of the Exodus, when the people of Israel were freed from slavery in Egypt, their leader, Moses, met with God face to face on a mountain where God through Moses offered to the people, a promise and a relationship that was so special that people of Israel could only be called chosen. As a part of that relationship, God gave the people of Israel and to us, the Ten Commandments, written on stone tablets. The Ten Commandments are more than just a list of "thou shall nots..." they are a sign of who we are—God's people, God's chosen people—people who live differently because of who God is and what God has done for us and what God has promised to us. Just as we mean when we say something is written in stone, God intended the Ten Commandments to be a promise that would

last forever for all of God's people throughout time. With God's own hands, the tablets were cut. With God's own fingers, the words were engraved. God's love for these people, God's love for us was written in stone.

Hymn

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

#144 v 1 & 3

**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.**

**How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the joys of highest heaven.
No ear my hear Christ coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still,
the dear Christ enters in.**

The Eleventh Day of Christmas: Eleven pipers piping

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Lesson: Eleven faithful apostles

The eleven pipers piping remind us of the eleven disciples who saw Jesus at the mountain after his resurrection and went forth into the world to share the music of the Gospel. These eleven disciples were sent out into the world to make disciples of all nations, to baptize those who put their weight down on Jesus, and to teach the world all the things Jesus had taught them. These disciples were not considered faithful because they were free from questions or doubt. Indeed, the text we just read from the end of the gospel of Matthew reminds us that even with the risen Lord right in front of them, "some doubted". These disciples were not considered faithful because they had certainty about where they were going next. They never could have imagined the far flung corners of the earth they would be sent to to proclaim Christ's message, nor could they have imagined the persecution that lay ahead of them for embodying Christ's love. These disciples were considered faithful simply because they showed up and then they went. They showed up at the place Jesus had promised to meet them, at the mountain. And then they indeed went at Jesus' command to "Go!" We join these eleven by showing up here on Sunday mornings, at the place Jesus has promised to meet us. May we also join these eleven pipers piping as we go out into the world to share the song of Christ's pursuing love.

The Twelfth Day of Christmas: Twelve Drummers drumming

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25

"So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another."

Lesson: The twelve points of the apostles' creed

The Apostles' Creed was composed in the First or Second Century. It is a statement of faith used by numerous denominations – with perhaps slight variations – as a way of affirming our faith. This creed provides twelve statements of our beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. As our way of remembering this lesson, let us now say the Apostle's Creed together.

***Apostle's Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*** Hymn**

"Go Tell It On the Mountain"

#167

Refrain:

**Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.**

**While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold throughout the heavens,
there shone a holy light. [Refrain]**

**The shepherds feared and trembled
when, lo! above the earth,
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed the Savior's birth: [Refrain]**

**Down in a lonely manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn. [Refrain]**

Benediction

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Pastor: **Rev. Katie Jo Bielke**

Director of Music: **Ruth Notch**

Liturgist: **Mike Kelly**

Readers: **Helen Stortz, Monica Hart, Carol Tindira, Janice Ittner,
Susie Pisoni, Jane Lindberg, Todd Armstrong, Rich Brandon**

Usher Team: **Jim Pisoni**

Technology: **Steve Hawkinson**

Fellowship/Lockup: **Phil Difani**

Chancel Choir: **Mary Bowers, Ellen Brandon, Rich Brandon, Jeanne Buchner, Don Duperrett,
Mary Jane Duperrett, Carolyn Golfin, Helen Stortz, Susie Pisoni, Evelyn Weber**

Percussion: **Jim Pisoni**

Feel free to take your poinsettias after the service today.

Announcements

We pray for
**Karen (Scooter) Beatty, Kevin Beatty, Rev. Dwayne Dollgener,
 Elizabeth Hart, Cherie Messina and Gloria Vaclavik.**

Please let us know your prayer concerns.
 If you have private prayer concerns please speak with Rev Katie Jo Bielke..

Global Ministries requests that we pray with **Middle East region** this week

<p style="text-align: center;">01/05/25 Service Liturgist: Craig Bielke Usher Team: Larry Sontag Technology: Steve Hawkinson Fellowship/Lockup: Helen Stortz Special Music: Vocalist, Meher Arora Communion Service: Donna Switzer & Helen Stortz</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">01/12/25 Service Liturgist: Helen Stortz Usher Team: John Bartelt Technology: Steve Hawkinson Fellowship/Lockup: Helen Stortz Special Music: Flautist</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">01/19/25 Service Liturgist: Susie Pisoni Usher Team: Phil Difani Technology: Steve Hawkinson Fellowship/Lockup: Helen Stortz Special Music: Clarinet</p>
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... Looking Ahead

<p>Fri 1/3/25 8:00 AM Sun 1/5/25 Wed 1/8/2025 11:00 AM Thu 1/9/2025 5:00 PM Thu 1/16/2025 1:00 PM Fri 1/17/2025 8:00 AM Sun 1/19/2025 11:00 AM Tue 1/21/2025 10:00 AM Thu 1/23/2025 5:30 PM Sun 1/26/2025 9:20 AM Sun 1/26/2025 11:00 AM Sun 1/26/2025 11:00 AM Sun 1/26/2025 5:00 PM Tue 1/28/2025 6:30 PM</p>	<p>Bimonthly Newsletter Communion Sunday Senior Ministry Meeting Newsletter Articles Due EOD Movie Day "The Ultimate Gift" Bimonthly Newsletter Budget Cafe Book Club "The God of the Woods" Table Fellowship Loaves & Fishes Mission Meeting canceled for January Annual Meeting Newsletter Articles Due EOD Women's Game Night</p>
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Please check your News Notes/Website for specific information around upcoming activities
<https://www.stjohnsuccchesterfield.org/fellowship>



online giving



St. John's News & Events

Join us on Sundays
 9:00 a.m. - **Fellowship** in Fellowship Hall
 10:00 a.m. - **Sunday School**
 10:00 a.m. - **Worship**
 In-Person, Facebook Live, or Virtual

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