

Church of the Covenant

Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ



maybe it's possible

Sunday Worship
December 1, 2024
First Sunday in Advent: HOPE



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December 1, 2024, 10:30 am [Zoom Link](#)

Welcome and thank you for worshipping together for this “hybrid” service where some will be in the sanctuary at 67 Newbury Street, and some in the sanctuary of places far and near. For those joining online, we begin on Zoom at the link above. Please keep your mic muted during the service.

**You are invited to rise in body or spirit.*

Prelude

Savior of the Nations, Come

J. S. Bach

Welcome & Announcements

One: Peace be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

*** Call to Worship**

One: In those days, before the final coming of Christ in glory, there will be mighty signs.

Many: **They will be seen in the heavens and on earth.**

One: They will remind us of God’s eternal presence and power.

Many: **We will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye.**

One: Therefore, let our hearts be glad and our souls rejoice!

Many: **God has reached out to all God’s people with compassion and tender mercy.**

Lighting the Advent Candle: Stories of HOPE

*** Opening Hymn PH (blue) 1**

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Prayer for Grounding in God's Grace

Many: “Make it easy for us to figure out,” we cry as we seek signs of God’s presence. We want it simple. Just tell us and we can take the proper precautions. There are signs all around of God’s presence among us in that which has been created, and in the newness of everyday living. We are quick to notice the signs of death and decay—doomscrolling on social media, endless cable news coverage, and constant push notifications from legacy media—when instead, we should be seeking signs of hope and triumph over adversity. Forgive us, merciful God, when we spend so much time looking for the scary things in life. Focus our attention on ways in which we can be of service with whatever time we have. Forgive us when we seek the darkness of anger and fear and turn our backs on the light of possibilities and peace. Open our hearts once again to your redeeming and transforming hope.

One: Let us now listen to God in silent prayer...

Listening to God in Silent Prayer

Assurance of God's Grace

One: In Christ our hope is renewed. We are healed and forgiven, we are challenged and guided to become those who work for the better rather than those who would destroy and damage. You call us your people, O God, and we are eternally grateful. Therefore, let us celebrate together:

Many: **In Jesus Christ we are set free and made whole. Alleluia! Amen.**

*** Sung Response PH (blue) 576**

Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, Gloria, alleluia, alleluia!

Gloria, Gloria

Scripture Readings

Hebrew Bible Reading – Genesis 21:8-21

God dealt with Sarah as was said, and God did for Sarah as promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Gospel Reading – Luke 2:1

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

One: God is still speaking, the word of God,
Many: **Thanks be to God.**

*** Sung Response PH (blue) 576**

Gloria, Gloria

Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, Gloria, alleluia, alleluia!

Sermon

“A Way Out of No Way”

Call to Offering

Online Giving Option: www.cotcbos.org/give
Click on Give Now, then choose Pledges or Gifts-General.

Offertory

Imagine

John Lennon

*** Communion Doxology**

Tune: *Old Hundredth*

Though what we have in truth is small,
God’s grace shall be enough for all.
So as we bless and break this bread,
Each heart be filled, each mouth be fed.

*** Prayer of Dedication**

Celebrations & Concerns

One: God, in your grace,
Many: **Receive our prayer.**

Pastoral Prayer

Celebration of Holy Communion

* Invitation

* Communion Hymn

I'm Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table

I'm gonna eat at the welcome table,

I'm gonna eat at the welcome table, some of these days.

I'm gonna eat at the welcome table,

I'm gonna eat at the welcome table, some of these days.

* The Great Thanksgiving

One: May God be with you!

Many: And also with you.

One: People of Advent, let us lift up our hearts!

Many: We open our hearts to the Spirit who fills us with hope.

One: Let us give thanks to God our light.

Many: It is right for us to offer our thanks and praise to God.

One: It is right for us to thank and praise you God...

...And so, with your people here on earth, with all the ancestors, and all the saints and the great company of heaven and earth, we glorify your name, praising you together:

Many: Holy, holy, holy One, God of heaven and earth.

All creation is full of your love and grace. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of peace. Hosanna in the highest!

One: Holy are you, O God...

* The Prayer of Jesus

(in unison)

Our God in heaven, holy is your name. Your reign come; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil, for yours are the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Post Communion Prayer

* **Closing Hymn** NCH (black) 131

It Came Upon the 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,
great news of joy we bring.”
The world in solemn stillness 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.

And you, beneath life’s crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way,
with painful steps and slow,
Look now, for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!

For lo, the days are hastening on,
by prophet bards foretold,
when with the ever-circling years
comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and all the world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

* Charge & Benediction

* Exchange of the Peace

(Please exchange greetings of Christ's peace and reconciliation)

One: May the peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Worship Participants

Preacher – Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard

Minister of Music – Tom Handel

Liturgist – Rev. Rob Mark

Lector – Cydney Chikalema

Advent Candle Lighters – Brad & Mocky Day

Covenant Choir

Vocal Soloist – Kathryn Barry

Communion Servers – Mocky Day, Debbie Howland

Ushers – Linda Pursley, Trisha Thompson

Digital Minister – Sandra May

Audio Visual Tech Team – Venkatesh Balasubramanian, Jon Schwarz

Sexton – Jesús Vargas

WELCOME TO CHURCH OF THE COVENANT! We are so glad to have you worshipping with us today! If you are new to our community, we hope you will feel at home and welcomed during this service. If you have any questions about who we are as a community of faith, please reach out to an usher in person or our Digital Minister in the chat.

NEW TO COTC? We are so glad you are here! Let us know a little bit about how we can welcome you by filling out the form at this QR code, and learn more on our website at cotcbos.org.



COVER ART. EJ Huston (she/they) is a Seattle-based artist and licensed mental health counselor. Their collage and digital work addresses themes of love, liberation, queerness, decolonization, and disability justice. Instagram: @ejheart. Website: ejheart.com.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION AFTER WORSHIP TODAY! Please join Trudi Veldman and Cydney Chikalema today after the worship service to learn about Cydney's early life in a remote village in Malawi and how he has been able to achieve his education with support from Villages in Partnership. Cydney is attending Wheaton College in Illinois for a Masters in Humanitarian and Disaster Leadership. We expect the session to last about 30 minutes.

ADVENT WREATH MAKING AFTER WORSHIP TODAY. Please make an Advent wreath after worship today (or after the Spiritual Education session). Materials will be available until 1:30 pm. Thanks to Kathy Bull for organizing!

WELCOME CHILDREN & YOUTH!! Welcome to all children, youth, and families—those we know already and those who are here for the first time. We offer Christian education through Godly Play for ages 3-9, youth classes for ages 10-13 and 14+, and a nursery for the littlest ones. If you need help finding us, please ask an usher. We share CYCE info regularly via email, so please email Rev. Kate at kate.carlisle@cotcbos.org if you want to receive updates.

UPCOMING WORSHIP. Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 am and during the special services listed below as we come together in community to pray, sing, share celebrations and concerns, and hear God's still-speaking Word proclaimed in these hybrid services (in-person and Zoom options). [Zoom Link for each service.](#)

- Sunday, December 8: Second Sunday in Advent-PEACE, Rev. Rob Mark preaching, Missional Plan Visioning After Worship
- Sunday, December 15: Third Sunday in Advent-JOY, All-Ages, Instant Christmas Pageant, Holy Communion, Festive All-Church Potluck After Worship, Climate Jubilee All-Church Read After Potluck
- Friday, December 20: Winter Solstice Evensong, 4:00 pm, Arthur Fiedler Dock
- Saturday, December 21: Ecumenical Blue Christmas Service, 7:30 pm, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 15 Newbury Street
- Sunday, December 22: Fourth Sunday in Advent-LOVE, Rev. Rob Mark preaching, Reception of New Members
- Wednesday, December 24: Christmas Eve, Candlelight Lessons & Carols
- Sunday, December 29: ZOOM ONLY, Christmas Carol Sing

LIFE ALIVE CHRISTMAS COOKIE PARTY. Life Alivers are invited to participate in our annual Christmas cookie baking party. Join us on **Saturday, December 7, at 3:30 pm**, in Bates Hall to decorate cookies for the gift bags distributed by the Deacons. For more information, reach out to Rev.

Joshua: joshua.lazard@cotcbos.org.

MISSIONAL PLAN VISIONING ON DECEMBER 8. Join us for our final all-church 2025-2030 Missional Plan Visioning session after worship on **Sunday, December 8**, in person and online. Following this session, we trust a finalized missional plan will be brought to the congregation for approval at the annual meeting on February 2, 2025.

ALL-CHURCH READ ON DECEMBER 15. The Climate Jubilee Team invites you to join a hybrid discussion of the book *Jesus for Farmers and Fishers: Justice for All Those Marginalized by Our Food System* by Gary Paul Nabhan, after the festive all-church potluck on **Sunday, December 15**. The author offers an imaginative look at the parables of Jesus to bring us into a heart of compassion for those in the food economy hit by the climate crisis. “Jesus used the fields and lakes as a stage to encourage acts of kindness and restorative justice, and inspire resilience and hope in the face of hardship.” Look for the book at the library or order it online.

OPEN NEWBURY ON DECEMBER 1 AND 8. The City of Boston is once again closing Newbury Street to vehicular traffic for a Holiday Stroll today and next Sunday, **December 1 and 8**. Please plan your travel to church accordingly. There will be no parking on Newbury *or* Berkeley Streets.

DEACONS END OF LIFE PLANNING GUIDE. Planning for the end of our life can make things much easier on us and on our loved ones, especially if unexpected events occur. You might want to consider having some prayer-full conversations with loved ones during upcoming holiday gatherings. Visit this URL (<https://www.tinyurl.com/cotcdeacons>) to access resources prepared by COTC Deacons.

BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS. Our weekly Bible Study meets on Wednesday mornings at 9:45 on Zoom. We are studying the book of Acts, exploring the movement of the Christian community throughout the Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds. If you would like more information or want to be on the list to get regular reminders and Zoom details, contact Jack Ammerman at jwacooks@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY EVENING PRAYERS 6:00-6:30 pm. Join us for our weekly Wednesday evening prayers with intentional liturgy, contemplative song, psalms, and sharing of prayers with our siblings from Newton Presbyterian [on Zoom](#) (link on <http://www.cotcbos.org>).

VIDEO CAMERAS/POSTING FULL SERVICE RECORDINGS. To best serve our diverse community and new worshippers, we livestream and record each service, including Celebrations & Concerns. If you would prefer not to be in occasional camera shots, you are welcome to sit on the outside aisles on either side of the sanctuary. Recordings of each service are available on our [Worship Recordings Page](#) (cotcbos.org/worship-recordings).

WEEKLY CALENDAR. Click [here](#) (cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events) to view the weekly calendar of events.

*Church of the Covenant is focused on following Jesus in our world through accompaniment,
compassion, peace, joy and creative beauty.*

We are passionate about hospitality, committed to justice, and wild about faith.

We embrace an embodied spirituality that is not afraid of questions.

*We advocate for a just climate for our earth, liberation in our world,
and equality in our neighborhoods.*

*We are a community where ALL are welcome and celebrated as beautiful reflections of God—
all genders, all faiths, all orientations, all backgrounds, all abilities, all ages,
all struggles, and all hopes. Come journey with us!*



Visitor or Newcomer? Welcome to Church of the Covenant!

We are glad you are here. Please let us know if there are ways we can help you connect to the church community. Learn more about the church by visiting our website at www.cotcbos.org. To sign up for email updates about worship services and other events in our community, please fill out a visitor's card in your pew, or email us at info@cotcbos.org.

Parking Bargain – Worshippers may park at the Back Bay Garage [Clarendon Street, between Boylston and St. James] on Sundays between 6:00 am and 9:00 pm for the first three (3) hours for only \$5. To get this discounted rate, please ask an usher before or after the worship service for a parking discount voucher.

Prayers of Celebration or Concern May Be Shared in the Red Book – At the rear of the Sanctuary is a red book where prayers that you wish to have spoken aloud during the Pastoral Prayer time may be written. The book will be available until the time of the offering.

Time of Greeting – After worship this morning, we hope that you will take a few minutes after going outside the sanctuary to connect with others worshipping with you, especially people you may not know as well.

Hearing Assisted Devices – **Speak with an usher** if you would like to use these devices that work with or without a hearing aid. These devices are specifically designed to work only with our sound system. Please remember to return the device at the close of the service. Thank you!

Building Accessibility – Our building includes an exterior ramp on Newbury Street and an elevator (in the Parish House part of the building) which allows access to the fellowship hall, meeting rooms, offices, and other parts of the building. We also have accessible restrooms. Please ask an usher to help you locate these resources.



Church of the Covenant
Boston Massachusetts

67 Newbury St., Boston MA 02116 | (617) 266-7480 | www.cotcbos.org

Worship at Church of the Covenant is the heart and soul of our life together as a community of faith. Since 1932 we have been a federated church, maintaining membership in the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA) and welcoming pilgrims from all traditions to our life and work. Through our prayer and praise, in our concerns and celebrations, by word and sacrament, art and silence, we seek empowerment, together and individually, as a covenant people, for the work of Christ.

Jesus taught that the Spirit invites all people, including society's marginalized, to enjoy seats at God's table. This congregation seeks to demonstrate that vision by welcoming individuals and families without regard to race, gender identity, age, physical/mental condition, or sexual orientation. We rejoice in the presence of children among us as integral to our community. We maintain vital ties of faith with the Church of the Poor in the community of the Sweet Name of Jesus, in Northwestern Nicaragua.

We believe God's blessings are found in marriage equality for all. Thus, we joyfully welcome the opportunity afforded us by our Commonwealth and both denominations to join couples of any sexual orientation in fully legal and holy marriage.

Covenant's sanctuary resides on the ancestral and unceded lands and waterways of the Massachusetts people. We lament the pain of displacement, honor the ongoing work of repair, and give thanks for all past, present and future stewards of this sacred place.

In our worship we use language and imagery that reflect the wonderful diversity of the image of God in humanity and all of creation; that transcend the exclusive language of the church's past. And as stewards, we seek to live into the Spirit's blessing as we move in solidarity on this shared and sacred, common home we call earth. We invite you to join us in the journey toward God's justice and peace for all of Boston and beyond!

CHURCH STAFF

Rev. Rob Mark, *Lead Pastor*

Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard, *Associate Pastor*

Thomas Handel, *Minister of Music*

Bill Brown, *Building Manager*

Rev. Kate Carlisle, *CYCE Coordinator*

Nancy Stockford, *Parish Administrator/Financial Secretary*

Jesús Vargas, *Sexton*

Alan Lane, *Food Cupboard Coordinator*

Venkatesh Balasubramanian, *Digital Communications & Audio Visual Tech Manager*

CHURCH OFFICERS

Kathryn Barry, *President of the Corporation*

Trudi Veldman, *Clerk of the Council*

Jon Schwarz, *Moderator of the Board of Deacons*

Faith Perry, *Treasurer*