

Church of the Covenant

Boston, MA



maybe it's possible

December 3, 2023
First Sunday of Advent: HOPE

Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ

[ZOOM LINK \(click here\)](#)



Church of the Covenant
First Sunday of Advent
HOPE

December 3, 2023, 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 above link. Please keep your mic muted during the service.

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

Prelude

Fugue in a minor

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 creation of everyday living. We easily find the signs of death and decay by doomscrolling on social media and push notifications from mass media sources, while we should be looking for signs of hope and triumph over adversarial forces. 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 love and transforming peace.

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

Listening to God in Silent Prayer

Assurance of God's Grace

One: In Christ we are made new. 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

Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, Gloria, alleluia, alleluia!

Readings from Scripture

Hebrew Bible Reading – Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1:1-23

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed.

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Most High. But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Most High to offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Most High, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Most High. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Most High their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I

know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

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

“An Unreliable Witness”

Call to Offering

Online Giving Option: <http://www.cotcbos.org/give.html>

Click on Give Now, then choose Pledges or Gifts-General.

Offertory

Sleepers Wake, A Voice Astounds Us

J. S. Bach

*** 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**

Farewell Blessing & Commissioning for Seth Eriksen

Concerns & Celebrations

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 Covenant, let us lift up our hearts!

Many: We open our hearts to God 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 the One who loves us.

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

...And so, with your people here on earth, with all the ancestors, saints and the great company of heaven, 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**

adapted from the Minnesota Conference UMC

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Parent, Prince of Peace—hallowed be your name. Immanuel, God with us—hallowed be your name. In us, through us, and around us, your kingdom come where the wolf will live with the lamb and the lion will feed with the calf. Bread of life, feed us with your truth. For our indifference to the wonder of your coming, forgive us. Protect us from the constant dangers and enticing temptations we face each day. Word who became flesh and lived among us, we have seen your glory, full of grace and truth. As You come to us now, and You will come to us again in glory, we will join all heaven and earth in giving you blessing and honor and glory and might forever. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread and Sharing of the Cup

You are invited to come forward to receive communion and then gather around the table for the remainder of the service. Please bring your valuables and bulletin with you.

When you approach the table, you will receive and then eat the bread.

Then you will take a glass from the table, a server will fill it with juice, and you can drink and then place the empty cup on a side table on either side of communion table.

Instead of returning to your pew, please form a circle around the communion table for the closing prayer, hymn, and benediction. If you chose not to partake in communion, please join us in the circle gathered around the table.

*** 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 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 – Charlene James

Advent Candle Lighters – Charlene & Ed James

Covenant Choir

Ushers – Holly Humphreys, Denice Thornhill

Communion Servers – Betty Southwick, Liz Vizza

Digital Minister – Christine James

Audio Visual Tech Team – Venkatesh Balasubramanian, Abhishek John

Sunday Sexton – Hallie Lavin

ALL-CHURCH POTLUCK TODAY, DECEMBER 3! Please join us today after worship downstairs in Bates Hall to share a meal and conversation. All are invited to bring a dish to share, but please join us whether or not you brought a dish.

ADVENT WREATH MAKING TODAY, DECEMBER 3. The Children and Youth Christian Education Committee invites everyone to make your own Advent wreath today after worship (during the potluck) in Bates Hall.

DEACONS MEETING TODAY. The Deacons are meeting after worship in the Josephine Black Room today, **December 3.**

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.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIAL POINSETTIAS. This holiday season you can honor your loved ones through beautiful flowers in our sanctuary. To learn more and order, go to <https://tinyurl.com/cotc2024poinsettias>. Deadline December 11.

WELCOME CHILDREN & YOUTH!! We welcome 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. We meet downstairs in Bates Hall. 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!

LIFE ALIVE HOLIDAY PARTY. On **Saturday, December 9, at 4:00 pm** in Bates Hall, Life Alive will gather to bake cookies for the Deacons to use in holiday care packages. Come and help roll some dough and decorate cookies in the spirit of Christmas. For more information, email Rev. Joshua at joshua.lazard@cotcbos.org.

HOLDING SACRED SPACE. As a follow-up to our wonderful church retreat, we welcome you to join us in Bates Hall following worship on **December 10** to continue any conversations, insights, and visions you may have.

KAY CARLETON MEMORIAL SERVICE. We will remember our beloved “angel” Kay Carleton and celebrate her life at a memorial service in the Covenant sanctuary on **Saturday, December 16, at 1:00 pm**.

LIFE ALIVE BRUNCH. Our Life Alive young adult group will meet after worship on **Sunday, December 17**, to eat brunch and share fellowship together. If you have any questions or would like to join us, please email Rev. Joshua at joshua.lazard@cotcbos.org.

WINTER SOLSTICE EVENSONG. **Thursday, December 21, 4:00 pm**, Arthur Fiedler Dock, Esplanade. Join us snow, rain, sleet, or shine! We will gather outside in the blessed cold of nature and the warmth of community to observe together the sacred setting of the sun with holy words and silence. Invite a friend!

BLUE CHRISTMAS/LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE. Thursday, December 21, 7:30 pm, Emmanuel Church, 15 Newbury Street. For many, this time of year is hard. Join us to face and lift the loneliness, longing, and roughness of this season to God in community and worship.

UPCOMING WORSHIP. Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 am 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 10, Second Sunday of Advent, Rev. Rob Mark preaching
- Sunday, December 17, All-Ages Worship, Instant Christmas Pageant
- Sunday, December 24: 10:30 am: Zoom-only worship; 5:00 pm: hybrid service of Lessons & Carols
- Sunday, December 31: Christmas Hymn Sing

FREE COVID TESTS. As the winter viral-spreading season is once again upon us, we want to help you stay healthy and safe. To this end, we have received free COVID rapid tests from the Commonwealth that we want to distribute to all in our community and beyond to help reduce the spread this year. For all of Advent, as long as our supply remains, we will have a table at the back of the sanctuary with free COVID tests. Please take a few for your household and share with neighbors and friends, with a special focus on anyone who might find it hard to obtain tests.

BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAY MORNINGS. Our weekly Bible Study meets on Wednesdays at 9:45 am on Zoom. We are studying the book of Isaiah. If you'd like more information or want to be on the list to get regular reminders and Zoom info, contact Jan Gough at revjangough@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 cotcbos.org).

PLEDGE FOR 2024 IN? Thank you if you have already submitted your financial pledge for the church's 2024 operations. If you haven't yet, it's not too late! Simply fill out this simple pledge form (which only Financial Secretary Nancy Stockford sees): <https://tinyurl.com/cotc2024pledge>.

VIDEO CAMERAS/POSTING FULL SERVICE RECORDINGS. To best serve our diverse community and new worshippers, we livestream and record each service, including Celebrations and 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](http://cotcbos.org/worship-recordings) (cotcbos.org/worship-recordings).

WEEKLY CALENDAR. Click [here](http://cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events) (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 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. for the first (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 rest rooms. 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 outcasts, 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, and we strive to include them in our ministry. We maintain 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 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church USA to join couples of all sexual orientations in fully legal and holy marriage.

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, *Sunday Sexton*
Alan Lane, *Food Cupboard Coordinator*
Kelsie Lawhorn, *Child Care Provider*
Venkatesh Balasubramanian, *Digital Communications & Audio Visual Tech Manager*

CHURCH OFFICERS

Liz Vizza, *President of the Corporation*
Trudi Veldman, *Clerk of the Council*
Anita Gram, *Moderator of Board of Deacons*
Faith Perry, *Treasurer*