

Church of the Covenant

Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ



for all

December 22, 2024
Fourth Sunday in Advent: LOVE



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December 22, 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

Partita on Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

James Woodman

Welcome & Announcements

One: Peace be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

*** Call to Worship**

(adapted from Psalm 89)

One: We come to witness a miracle.

Many: **We sing the miracle of God's steadfast love.**

One: New life bursts forth in unexpected ways.

Many: **We shout the good news: God's covenant endures forever!**

One: The desert blooms; what was barren is fertile!

Many: **Go tell it on the mountain: the Champion of Peace,
Emmanuel, God with us, comes again!**

Lighting the Advent Candle: Stories of LOVE

*** Opening Hymn PH (blue) 12**

People, Look East

People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today: Love the guest is on the way.

Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there:
Give up your strength the seed to nourish, that in time the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today: Love the rose is on the way.

Birds, though you long have ceased to build, guard the nest that must be filled.
Even the hour when wings are frozen God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today: Love the bird is on the way.

Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim, one more light the bowl shall brim,
Shining beyond the frosty weather, bright as moon and stars together.
People, look east and sing today: Love the star is on the way.

Angels, announce with shouts of mirth Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming with the news, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today: Love the Lord is on the way.

Prayer for Grounding in God's Grace

Many: God of all time and space, we need you here and now. All creation cries out for justice and healing. Your children struggle in a world of violence and oppression. The grief of the world and the power of evil seem so big. Sometimes the magic of Christmas and the hope of the Christ Child seem like distant galaxies. And so we pray for your grace O Holy Emmanuel, and ask that you once again enter our world. Come to this planet Earth with comfort and repair. And let us be reborn again into the ways of Love.

One: Let us now open ourselves to God in silent prayer...

Listening to God in Silent Prayer

Assurance of God's Grace

One: Friends, when night is longest, a new light dawns. God will give us a sign. Look, the young one is with child. And this baby will be named Emmanuel, God with us. 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!

Scripture Readings

Hebrew Bible Reading – Micah 5:2-5a

And God says, “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 God shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler's kindred shall return to the Children of Israel.

And the ruler shall rise up to shepherd them in the strength of God, by the power of the name of the HOLY ONE their God.

And they shall live secure, for now the ruler shall be great to the ends of the earth; and shall be the one of peace.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1:39-58

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by God.”

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies you Holy God,
and my spirit rejoices in you my Savior,
for you have looked with favor on the lowliness of a servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for you, O Mighty One, have done great things for me,
and holy is your name.

Your mercy is for those who fear you
from generation to generation.

You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

You have brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

You have filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

You have helped your servant Israel,
in remembrance of your mercy,
according to the promise you made to our ancestors,
to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and to all descendants forever.”

And Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her home.

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Holy One had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

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

“Hallucination Free, Love Actually”

New Members Welcoming

Unison Affirmation:

We welcome you with joy
in the common life of this Church of the Covenant.
We covenant with you our friendship and prayer
as we share the hopes and challenges
of the church of Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Call to Offering

Online Giving Option: www.cotcbos.org/give

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

Offertory

The Gift of Love

Hal Hopson

* 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.

Tune: Old Hundredth

* Prayer of Dedication

Celebrations & Concerns

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

Pastoral Prayer

*** Closing Carol PH (blue) 48**

Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung;
of Jesse's lineage coming,
by faithful prophets sung.
It came, a floweret bright,
amid the cold of winter
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
the rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it,
the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright
she bore for us a Savior
when half spent was the night.

*** 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. Rob Mark

Minister of Music – Tom Handel

Liturgist – Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard

Lector – Merlin Southwick

Advent Candle Lighter – Donald Denniston

Covenant Choir

Ushers – Anne Crane, Trudi Veldman

Digital Minister – Christine James

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.



SANDRA MAY JOINING TODAY! We are overjoyed to welcome Sandra May as our newest member here at Covenant. If you are new to our community, or have been around a good while and have not yet become a member, we would love you to consider it! Contact Rev. Rob if you are interested or have any questions: pastor@cotcbos.org.

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.](#)

- Tuesday, December 24: Christmas Eve, 6:00 pm, Candlelight Lessons & Carols
- Sunday, December 29: ZOOM ONLY, Christmas Carol Sing
- Sunday, January 5: Epiphany, All-Ages Service
- Sunday, January 12: Rev. Rob Mark preaching

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](https://www.instagram.com/ejheart). Website: ejheart.com.

WORSHIP IN BATES HALL IN 2025! Due to repair of the chandelier in the sanctuary, we will hold in-person worship downstairs in Bates Hall starting the first Sunday in January until early February.

BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS. Note that Bible Study will not meet over the Christmas break and will reconvene on January 8. 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 jmacooks@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY EVENING PRAYERS 6:00-6:30 pm. Note that Evening Prayers will be on hiatus for the holidays until January 8. 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](http://cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events) (cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events) to view the weekly calendar of events.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA MEMORIALS

The following congregants have generously donated our sanctuary poinsettias in memory and honor of chosen loved ones identified below:



- In Memory of Ted Goodfleisch by Barbara Darling
- In Memory of Conceição Alves Monteiro by The Santos Schwarz Family
- In Memory of Marjorie Wyman Dollard by The Santos Schwarz Family
- In Memory of my parents Frank & Marjorie Vizza by Liz Vizza
- In Honor of Rev. Dr. So Jung Kim by Abhishek P. John
- In Memory of Doug Kenney (1943-1996) by Steve Laskin
- In Memory of Newell Hendricks by Barbara Englesberg, Anna & Clara Hendricks
- In Memory of Helen "Pickel" Englesberg by Barbara Englesberg, Anna & Clara Hendricks
- In Honor of Rev. Rob & Ms. Becky Evans Mark by Mom & Dad Mark
- In Memory of Martin Gibson by Brian Bigler
- In Memory of my parents Jeannette & Anthony Gratto by Christine Gratto
- In Memory of Rev. Chaplain Keith Stokes Snyder II by Kathryn Barry
- In Memory of Phil Mink, Barbara Mink, & Sonjia Mink by Sierra Mink-Maynard
- In Memory of Anthony & Margaret Gratto by Sandra Gratto May
- In Memory of Mies & Abe Veldman by Trudi Veldman
- In Memory of The Wright Family by Sharon Wright
- In Memory of our parents Leland & Ella Jordening and Gail & LaDonna Southwick by Betty & Merlin Southwick
- In Memory of Richard Sipe & Recently Lost Members by Byron Sipe
- In memory of our parents by Marsha Baker & Harry Forsdick
- In Memory of Neva, John R., John W., & Carolyn Humphreys by Anita Gram & Holly Humphreys
- In Memory of Marge & Bernard Gram by Anita Gram & Holly Humphreys
- In Honor of Lea Clarice Winterberg by Sonya Winterberg
- In Honor of Lucy Williams by Sonya Winterberg
- In Memory of R. Cheryl Donaldson-Davis by Sonya Winterberg
- In Memory of Norman & Mary-Louise Shadman Meyer by Wendy Woodfield
- In Memory of Chris Robison by Wendy Woodfield
- In Memory of Family & Friends Lost This Year by Nancy & Jack Ammerman
- In Memory of Betty & Wally Huston and Joan & Chip Stockford by Mark Huston & Nancy Stockford

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. A weekend discount is also available for longer periods: \$10 for up to eleven (11) hours. Parking voucher available at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/cotcsundayparking>

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*

Soyoung Cho, *Childcare Provider*

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*