

Church of the Covenant

Boston, MA



Christmas: The Feast of the Nativity

Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ

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



Church of the Covenant

Christmas Day: The Feast of the Nativity

December 25, 2022, 10:30 am

ZOOM LINK: tinyurl.com/cotcworship

Merry Christmas!! Welcome and thank you for worshipping together for this Zoom service where we will be joining each other from many different sacred spaces. Please keep your mic muted during the service. The full service is recorded and later posted online. Please find a Christmas candle to light.

Welcome & Announcements

One: Peace be with you.
Many: **And also with you.**

Prelude *Silent Night - Christ the Savior is Born!* arr. Kate Salfelder
Anita Gram and Barbara Englesberg - violin

Call To Worship

One: Starlight & song have once again summoned us home to the stable.
Many: **And so, with the non-human animals of the field, and the humble and the high, we have come to gaze on the face of God.**
One: Story, scripture and song have once again drawn us home to God's table.
Many: **And here, through words worn smooth with telling, and gifts given life through sharing, may we once again see and know you, Emmanuel – God with us and within us.**

Opening Hymn: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

Unison Prayer for Grounding in God's Grace (Kenneth I. Morse)

Many: We were heavy with sorrow, but joy interrupted.
We were deep in the night, but a star appeared.
We were silent with sadness, but the heavens rang.
And the splendor shone around them
When the time had fully come.
We were hardened by conflict, but love intervened.
We were frightened by shadows, but light took them away.
We were haunted by fears, but a child brought us hope.

And she laid him in a manger
When the time had fully come.
We were dismal and defeated, but faith set us on fire.
We were weary and complaining, but our hearts discovered
praise.
We were doubtful and confused, but a door to life was opened.
And the guiding star went before them
When the time had fully come.

Shared Silent Prayer

Assurance of God's Grace

One: Friends, the time has come. Emmanuel is now. Hear the glad tidings of great joy: God *is* with us. And in God's presence there is forgiveness, second-chances, and reconciliation. Therefore, let us celebrate together:

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

Kindling the Christmas Light

Carol Response:

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Readings from Scripture

Hebrew Bible Reading:

Psalm 98 (adapt. Nan C. Merrill)

O sing to the Beloved a new song, for Love has done marvelous things!

By the strength of your Indwelling Presence, we, too, are called to great things; we are set free through Love's forgiveness and truth.

Yes, your steadfast Love and faithfulness are ever-present gifts in our lives.

All the ends of the earth have seen the glory of Love's Eternal Flame.

Make a joyful noise to the Beloved, all the earth; break forth into grateful song and sing praises.

Yes, sing songs of praise extolling Love's way; lift up your hearts with gratitude and joy!

Let the voices of all people blend in harmony, in union let the people magnify the Beloved!

Let the sea laugh, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it.

Let the waters clap their hands; let the hills ring out with joy before the Beloved, who radiates Love to all the earth.

For Love reigns over the world with truth and justice bringing order and balance to all of Creation.

Carol Response:

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:1-20 (*The Message Translation*)

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to their own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah, Kyrie. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:
"Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

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

Carol Response:

Angels We Have Heard on High

Carol Response:

Away in a Manger

Call to Offering

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

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

Carol:

We Three Kings

Prayers

Celebration of the Holy Feast of the Nativity

Invitation to Communion

The Great Thanksgiving

One: May God be with you!

Many: And also with you.

A Feast of the Nativity Liturgy

(Tune: GREENSLEEVES, adapted from Beth Quick, 2013)

Lift up your hearts unto our God. Sing out to God with praises.

We gather on this holy day. We gather at this table.

Lift, lift your hearts up high! Sing praise to God, and glorify!

Praise, praise, the One of Peace, the Babe, the Child of Mary.

God breathed in us the breath of life. God gave the gift of Eden.

We turned away and sin was born; We sought for greener gardens.

Lift, lift your hearts up high! Sing praise to God, and glorify!

Praise, praise, the One of Peace, the Babe, the Child of Mary.

God called to us from age to age through messengers and prophets,

When we would not our hearts give way, the Word-made-flesh God sent us.

This, this is Christ we sing, whom shepherds guard and angels ring;

Haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Child of Mary.

O Holy One of wondrous works! **Hosanna in the highest!**

The one who comes is full of peace! **Hosanna in the highest!**

This, this is Christ we sing, whom shepherds guard and angels ring;

Haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Child of Mary.

The Prayer of Jesus

(text: Parker J. Palmer, in unison)

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother,

Holy and blessed is your true name.

We pray for your reign of peace to come,

We pray that your good will be done,

Let heaven and earth become one.

Give us this day the bread we need,

Give it to those who have none.

Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,

From each one to each one.
Lead us to holy innocence
Beyond the evil of our days —
Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.
For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy:
Forever your name is All in One.

Breaking of the Bread

Sharing the Bread and Cup

Post Communion Prayer (sung in unison, Tune: GREENSLEEVES)

Thanks be to God for feeding us; with bread, with cup, with mystery!
As we depart, let us take heart: God's light will lead us always!
Raise, raise the song on high! The Mother sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the Babe, the Child of Mary!

Charge and Benediction

Closing Carol:

Joy to the World

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

Minister of Music – Tom Handel

Liturgist – Rev. Rob Mark

Lector – Abhishek John

Cantors – Rev. Tom Reid, David McKinney, Tim & Betsy Groves

Covenant Choir – Barbara, Ted, Theodor, Rachel, Arnold, Mocky, Anita, Sarah, Nancy, Tom, David, Betsy, Tim

UPCOMING WORSHIP: Please join us each Sunday at 10:30am 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, January 1, 2023, Rev. Joshua preaching, Communion
- Sunday, January 8, 2023, Epiphany
- Sunday, January 15, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday

ANNUAL REPORT SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Our Annual Meeting will be Sunday, February 5, 2023 following worship, and the deadline for reports to be submitted to our Parish Administrator Kate is Thursday, January 5, 2023 – please email reports to kate.carlisle@cotcbos.org.

UPCOMING STAFF VACATION SCHEDULES: Sunday Dec. 25, Joshua & Kate will be off. All staff will take the week of Dec. 26-Dec.31 off, with Rob and Kate taking Jan. 1 off. Kate is off through January 7. If there are pastoral emergencies during that week, please be in touch with our Deacons, or Rob if needed, and building emergencies please be in touch with Bill.

NO PLACE AT THE INN? A CHALLENGING WINTER: For many reasons, this will be a challenging winter. One way we can help those experiencing homelessness in downtown Boston is to support our partners Women's Lunch Place, who have an ongoing wish list for items, found here:
<https://womenslunchplace.org/in-kind-donations>.

LOOKING AHEAD: CLIMATE JUBILEE ALL CHURCH BOOK

DISCUSSION: Join us on Sunday February 19, 12pm following worship for a hybrid (in-person and online) book discussion on Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781571313560>). This could make a great CHRISTMAS GIFT to someone you'd like to invite into this discussion, or for yourself! Please though, we ask you to avoid buying from Amazon.com and instead [use this link](#) to find a local bookstore if you feel safe going to in person, or a less eco-impactful company than Amazon to purchase from.

IMAGINE WHAT'S NEXT. Save the date: Sunday, January 29, 2023, newcomers to Life Alive are invited to a pizza with the pastors session immediately following service. This will be an opportunity to discuss who we are as a church and for young adults to imagine what's next in their lives.

LIFE ALIVE MINISTRY. Our young adults (aka "Life Alive") enjoy a robust fellowship and community that gathers monthly for brunches and weekly for prayers. Want to join us or have questions? Email Rev. Joshua at joshua.lazard@cotcbos.org.

BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS. Our weekly morning Bible Study is each Wednesday morning on Zoom at 9:15am. We are studying the Gospel of Matthew. If you'd like more information or want to be on the list to get regular reminders & Zoom info, contact Jan Gough at revjangough@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY EVENING PRAYERS 6-6:30pm: Please note we will not have evening prayers next week, but regather again near Epiphany, Weds. January 4, 2023, [on Zoom](#).

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COVER ART. *How God Shows up* by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Inspired by Luke 2:1-20 | Silk painting with digital drawing and collage
This year, I come to this story with deep reverence for the complexity and beauty of childbirth. At the time of creating this art, I am about 6 weeks away from giving birth to my first child—who will be born in the same hospital where my mom died from cancer 20 years ago. My daughter will take her first breath in the same place where I heard my mother's last exhale. Much of my pregnancy has been a journey of healing—of inviting joy into the house where my grief lives, of preparing to become a mother as a motherless child. The more I learn of others' experiences around birth, I realize how closely joy and grief can coexist in each of our stories. And so, as I return to Jesus' birth story, my imagination leads me to wonder about how Mary experienced both grief and joy. Apart from Elizabeth, did she have support throughout her pregnancy? Was her own mother involved? Did she have generational trauma she needed to grieve? Did the stress of their travels to Bethlehem cause her labor to happen sooner than expected? As she labored, did a midwife come? Was she afraid? In this image, as if looking past a curtain, we peer into this threshold moment when excruciating pain gives way to

ecstatic joy as Mary draws her baby to her chest and he takes his first breath. As Mary holds her baby, additional hands reach in to support them both. Maybe these are the hands of strangers, of Joseph, or of a midwife who was summoned. Perhaps they are simply the hands of angels. Each year, we tell this story because it is raw with joy, pain, and the complexities of being human. No matter how your story is unfolding, may you find that this sacred story holds space for you. For this is how God shows up—in a child who cries, in hands that hold, in human flesh, in life and in death.

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



Church of the Covenant
Boston Massachusetts

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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 and inquirers 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 Lazard, *Associate Pastor*
Thomas Handel, *Minister of Music*
Bill Brown, *Building Manager*
Rev. Kate Carlisle, *CYCE Coordinator / Parish Administrator*
Nancy Stockford, *Financial Secretary*
Fred Lopes & Jesús Vargas, *Sunday Sextons*
Alan Lane, *Food Cupboard Coordinator*
Kelsie Lawhorn, *Childcare Provider*

CHURCH OFFICERS

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