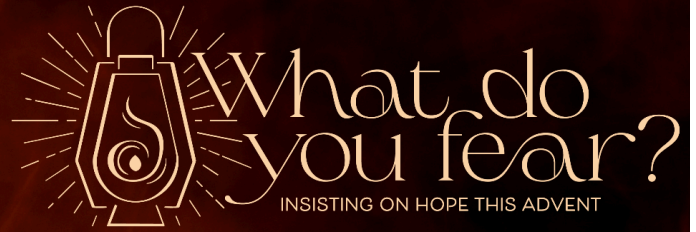


# 4th Sunday of Advent

December 21st, 2025 at 10:30am (Onsite & Online)

Umstead Park United Church of Christ



## GATHERING

Welcome and a Time of Greeting

Rev. Tyler Ung

Candle Lighting<sup>†</sup>

Nina Nalle Robinson, Kailina Grace

One: In a world full of fear, where do you see the presence of love?

Many: **We see love all around us. We see love when people hold open the door. We see love in a warm embrace, a homemade casserole, a phone call after a long day. We see love in random acts of kindness and intentional acts of empathy. We see love all around us.**

One: You are right. Even in a fearful world, love is all around us.

Today we light the candle of love as a reminder of this good news. May this flicker of light help us remember that even in a fearful world, love is here. Love is world-changing. Love is shining bright. We only have to look for it.

Many: **Thanks be to God! Amen.**



"In Too Deep"  
by Nicolette Faison

A Sanctified Art LLC  
sanctifiedart.org

Invocation<sup>†</sup>

Gwen Reagan

Meditation

Gwen Reagan

"When we choose to love we choose to love against fear—against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other."

- bell hooks

Prelude

David Wilson

\*Call to Worship (from the UPUCC Covenant)

Rev. Paula Womack

One: Beckoned to this place of belonging, we, of Umstead Park United Church of Christ, with body, mind, and spirit, gather to worship, serve, and proclaim God, unknowable mystery whose center is love, and Jesus the Christ, who makes this loving mystery known.

Many: **With inarticulate words and unfinished lives, we yearn to further embody this holy love, shaping the future as partners with God, who dances and weeps with us along the way.**

Choir Anthem

"Show Us How to Love" (see insert)

UPUCC Choir

Time with Children

Rev. Tyler Ung

Je - sus, our bro - ther, kind and good, was hum - bly born in a sta - ble rude,  
"I," said the don - key shag - gy and brown, "I car - ried your moth - er up - hill and down,  
And the friend - ly beasts a - round him stood, Je - sus our bro - ther, kind and good.  
I car - ried your mo - ther to Beth - le - hem town; "I," said the don - key shag - gy and brown.

## HEARING AND RESPONDING

**Reading of Scripture** Luke 1:18–23, from *The Inclusive Bible* Gwen Reagan  
(see insert)

**Sermon** Rev. Tyler Ung

**\*Responsive Hymn** "O Little Town of Bethlehem" Congregation

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie!  
Above your deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;  
Yet in your dark streets shines forth the everlasting light,  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars together proclaim the holy birth!  
And praises sing, and voices ring with peace to all on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts the glorious love of heaven.  
No one discerns God's coming, but when the light burns dim,  
Where yearning souls long to be whole, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, come near to us, we pray;  
Cast out our fear and enter here; be born in us today,  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

**Prayers of the People** Rev. Tyler Ung



*You are invited to share names or brief joys and concerns.  
To submit written prayer requests for the weekly email, visit  
[tinyurl.com/upuccprayers](https://tinyurl.com/upuccprayers), or scan the QR code to the left.*

**Celebration of Gifts (Offertory)** Rev. Tyler Ung

## SENDING INTO THE WORLD

**\*Sending Hymn** #124, "Away in a Manger" Congregation

## Announcements

**\*Affirmation of Community** Gwen Reagan

**One:** We believe that all people are God's people, that every child is holy, that every person is a part of the sacred family.

**Many:** **We believe that God's love embraces all, and that to exclude any person would be contrary to the message of Jesus.**

**One:** We proclaim that this community of faith, Umstead Park UCC, will strive to be as open as the radical realm of God, and as liberating as the love of Christ.

**Many:** **And so we journey into our hopeful future with joy, pledging to offer each other welcome, compassion and care. May God grant us wisdom, grace, and guidance in our life together.**

**\*Benediction** Rev. Tyler Ung

**Postlude** David Wilson

# Supplemental Texts and Hymns

## Choir Anthem

“Show Us How to Love”

Text by Lindy Thompson  
Music by Mark Miller

Hearts open, minds awake,  
change us now for heaven’s sake.  
Leave us not alone in hatred’s wake.  
Show us how to love.

Hearts open, souls awake,  
rules we made we now must break.  
With our very own lives at stake  
We must learn to love.

Eyes open, shocked awake,  
Much to learn from our mistakes.  
Draw us closer in our heartache.  
Show us how to love.

## Reading of Scripture

Luke 1:18–25, from *The Inclusive Bible*

Gwen Reagan

<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus came about.

When Jesus’ mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, her husband, an upright person unwilling to disgrace her, decided to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> This was Joseph’s intention when suddenly the angel of God appeared in a dream and said, “Joseph, heir to the House of David, don’t be afraid to wed Mary; it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. <sup>21</sup> She is to have a son, and you are to name him Jesus—‘Salvation’—because he will save the people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this happened to fulfill what God has said through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“The virgin will be with child  
and give birth,  
and the child will be named  
Immanuel”  
—a name that means “God is with us.”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of God had directed, and they went ahead with the marriage. <sup>25</sup> He did not have intercourse with her until she had given birth; she had a son, and they named him Jesus.

## umstead park UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

### Church Staff

**Lindsay Cooper, she/her**  
Nursery Director

**Rev. Tyler Ung, they/them**  
Senior Pastor

**Gwen Vass, she/her**  
Financial Administrator

**Cody Walter Welch, he/him/they/them**  
Teaching Intern

**David Wilson, he/him**  
Director of Music

**Rev. Paula Womack, she/her**  
Associate Pastor

### A special “Thank You” to this week’s volunteers!

Don Altman, AV Team  
Peter van Dorsten (he/him), AV Team  
Lee Harrison (he/him), Assistant Treasurer  
Mike Boston (he/him), Usher/Auditor  
Gwen Reagan (she/her), Lay Leader  
Kathy Austin (she/her), Usher  
Nina Nalle Robinson (she/her), Lay Leader  
Kailina Grace (she/her), Lay Leader

### Giving

Scan the QR code to make a one-time or recurring donation!

### Visiting?

You are invited to fill out the online visitor form so that we can get to know you!

### Realm

Access your Realm account



We at  
Umstead Park  
United Church of Christ  
welcome and affirm all  
as we journey to seek  
the divine, to embody loving  
community, and to strive for  
justice as a progressive  
community of  
faith.

My inaugural contribution to A Sanctified Art in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. After having a challenging pregnancy of my own, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies and how that special type of relationship benefits the community. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and time again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change with his new wife. Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think more often of what it would feel like for someone else to come in and try to fit into my established family system.



This made me think of a Joseph who can't sleep well at night, as his mind is uneasy with the words of Gabriel in his ear. I wanted Joseph to have an uncomfortable sleep form with a clenched fist that shows us he is tense even while he dreams. His foot is raised up in a way that looks almost as if he could pop up at any moment. Funny enough, this is how I slept throughout my own pregnancies. His hair, while luxurious, has flowy movement to it, leaning into the uneasiness. The soft spiral pattern in the background also implies movement. We don't see Joseph often in holy art. We receive the occasional holy family portrait, which is often not detailed, but Joseph does not really get his own place in the story. He is almost like the forgotten father after Jesus comes of age, so his time is really now. I don't think his position needs to be a cornerstone for the birth story; however, as my own life changes, I can appreciate the importance of his devotion and obedience to God.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness*. This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise. Why wouldn't an angel both resemble God and the people they are called to speak to?

The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is styled in an outfit that is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought." At that time Beyonce was pregnant with her twins, Sir and Rumi, and gave one of the most outstanding performances someone so far along could provide. Her full costume also included a golden headpiece that resembled that of an icon, a goddess even. How appropriate for a woman of faith carrying twins—performing a song from an album where she experienced betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation—to perform at this last supper-like table in such an outfit, knowing her marriage and pregnancy could have killed her. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated.

# UPUCC Updates

## **Longest Night Service | Tonight at 5:30pm**

When the holidays feel heavy, join us for our Longest Night service—a gentle space for the grieving, the lonely, and the blue—Sunday, December 21 at 5:30pm.

## **Christmas Eve Service | December 24 at 6:00pm**

We will hold our Christmas Eve service on Wednesday, December 24th at 6:00pm. We hope to see you Onsite or Online!

## **Christmas Breakfast and Worship | December 28**

A gentle service for sharing breakfast and singing hymns, pajamas are warmly welcome. You can join us in making breakfast at 10:00am! A sign-up to bring breakfast items was included in today's Sunday email, and may be found on the "News" page of the website.

## **Staff Love Offering**

Our dedicated UPUCC staff enrich our community through meaningful worship, beautiful music, and loving care. A simple way to say thank you is by contributing to the Staff Love Offering. Visit [upucc.org/giving](http://upucc.org/giving), or drop a check in the offering basket to help us show our heartfelt appreciation!

## **JTP Clean-Up Volunteers Requested | Saturday, January 24th at 9:30am**

Justice Theater Project is planning to do a clean up of the area behind the worship space that serves as storage for JTP's props, tools, costumes, etc.. The clean-up starts at 9:30AM. They would appreciate having some hands on deck while they get the back organized before their next play. For more information, email Brooklyn Miller at [brooklyn@thejusticetheaterproject.org](mailto:brooklyn@thejusticetheaterproject.org).

## **Square Dancing | January 31st at 2-4pm**

Fellowship is happy to announce that Square Dancing is coming again—save the date! More details to come including a sign-up sheet so we know how many are coming. It will be lots of fun. The event is free but donations will be accepted to help offset the cost of the Caller.

## **Mardi Gras Pancake Supper | February 17th**

Save the date for a Mardi Gras Pancake supper! Fellowship will host and more details to come later. If you are interested in volunteering to organize a talent show to accompany the supper (separate from Fellowship Lead Team) please contact Carole Holt at [cholt@triad.rr.com](mailto:cholt@triad.rr.com).

## **We're Hiring!**

Explore two part-time opportunities—Youth Director and Teaching Intern—in our vibrant, progressive faith community. We are thrilled to have Cody Walter Welch on staff as one teaching intern, and are looking to add to our team!

## **Ongoing Needs - Food Donations**

Food donations are needed—and so are volunteers to deliver them! Bring meal-focused items on Sundays and let Jane Weidig know at [womweid@gmail.com](mailto:womweid@gmail.com) if you can help.

## **Advent Resources | Season of Advent**

On Dec. 1st we sent out a number of resources for you to use this Advent. Among them are Advent Devotionals that follow our series, "What Do You Fear?" We are also including the pertinent devotional in each week's email.

Learn more at [upucc.org/news](http://upucc.org/news)!