

THE JOYOUS SUNDAY OF ADVENT
A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS
December 14, 2025

The United Church of Santa Fe
A United Church of Christ



A Desert Christmas

Christmas begins in the desert. It ends there, too.

From the cry of the prophet Isaiah in his people's exile to the birth of Mary and Joseph's child in Bethlehem's barn, the Christmas story is a desert story.

It's not even the high desert of northern New Mexico. Nazareth is only 1,200 feet in elevation, lower than Phoenix, Arizona (where I grew up). Bethlehem soars to 2,500, not exactly alpine. Like other desert places, winters in Palestine/Israel are bitterly cold and summers hot and dry. In late spring, sand-filled *Khamaseen* winds from the Arabian Desert blow through the region.

Jesus was born in a desert place. He was born into a desert time, too, under Roman domination. That's why he was born in Bethlehem and not his parents' hometown of Nazareth. Flexing his imperial muscle, Caesar Augustus demanded a head count of all his subjects. What Caesar wanted, Caesar got—even if a pregnant woman and her carpenter husband had to load up the donkey with diapers and head for a strange town.

A desert time, a desert place. That's where Christmas begins. It stays there for a long time. After the child is born, the parents can't go back home to Nazareth. King Herod doesn't want any new king around, so they must flee to Egypt, another strange desert place where no one knows their name.

So perhaps instead of "snow on snow" at Christmas, we should sing of "rock on rock" and decorate cholla and saguaro cactus rather than pine and fir trees. Moreover, the fact that Christmas begins in the desert, and stays there, may be the best part of the Christmas story. If God could be born in the desert, God can be born in the harsh landscapes and fearsome times of our lives and our world.

WELCOME TO THE UNITED CHURCH OF SANTA FE!

We're glad you have joined us for "Lessons and Carols" on the Joyous Sunday of Advent's journey to Christmas. Children through 5th grade share in the service through the Lighting of the Advent Candle and then go to Kids United to prepare for next Sunday. Youth are invited to join in the full worship service.

We hope this time will deepen your faith and bring you closer to God's light. Invite a friend to join you next Sunday and also on Christmas Eve (5:00 and 7:00 services). Sharing what you have found at the United Church is one of the best Christmas gifts you can offer. Again, thank you and blessings for the journey.

WE GATHER

(As you enter the Sanctuary, please enter into a time of prayer. Also, please turn off your cell phone. Thank you.)

Prelude

*Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

Bach/Busoni
Rowland Hugh Prichard

*Introit

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
**Please rise in body or spirit.*

Plainsong

***O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here;
Love stir within the womb of night, and death's own shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel will come to thee, O Israel.***

***O come, O Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh:
To us the path of knowledge show, and help us in that way to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel will come to thee, O Israel.***

Welcome and Breathing in God's Gifts

Sharing God's Gifts and Regathering

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (vs. 1)

Plainsong

Breathing in God's Gifts Again

A Call to Advent from the Letter of James (from *The First Nations Version of the New Testament*)

James 5:7-8

So be patient, my sacred family members, until our Honored Chief appears. Look at the worker in the field who patiently waits for the seasonal rains to fall so the land can bring forth its fruits. In the same way, you must also be patient and stand firm, for the appearance of our Honored Chief is close at hand.

Musical Call to Worship

People, Look East

Eleanor Farjeon/French Carol

The Call to Worship from the Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah 35

Hear the promise of Isaiah: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing."

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

"The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God."

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

"For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness.
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

People of God, come. Come with singing for the everlasting joy God gives you.

*Hymn

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Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Es Ist Ein' Ros

WE PREPARE

The Lighting of the Advent Candle of Joy

Why is today different from all other days?

Today is the Joyous Sunday of Advent, and the day we light the third candle on the Advent Wreath.

Why is this candle different from the other three candles?

The third candle is the Candle of Joy. Its color reminds us of the Rose that blooms in the midst of winter. When the people of Israel were in exile, Isaiah promised that the desert would rejoice and blossom. Even in the most barren of times, God still brings joy and new life.

As we light the third Advent Candle, let us remember this promise of our faith:

"Sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and we shall have everlasting joy and gladness."
(The lighting of the third candle.)

Stir up your power and come, O Lord.

Come into the wild and dry place of our lives.

Come into our deserts and wildernesses.

Come with your joy and possibility.

Stir up your power and come, O Lord.

Come like rain in a thirsty land.

Come like waters in the wilderness.

Come like streams in the desert.

Stir up your power and come, O Lord.

Come that we might blossom abundantly.


Come that we might rejoice and sing.

Come to us so that with joy and rejoicing we might finally come home. Amen.

*A Carol for Advent

Light Dawns on a Weary World

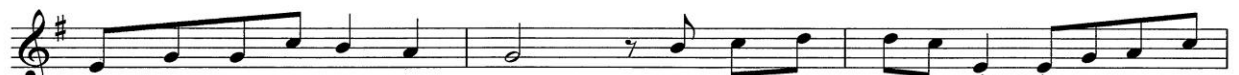
Mary Louise Bringle/William Rowan



1. Light dawns on a wea - ry world when eyes be - gin to see all
2. Love grows in a wea - ry world when hun - gry hearts find bread and
3. Hope blooms in a wea - ry world when crea - tures, once for - lorn, find



peo - ple's dig - ni - ty. Light dawns on a wea - ry world: the
chil - dren's dreams are fed. Love grows in a wea - ry world: the
wil - der - ness re - born. Hope blooms in a wea - ry world: the




prom-ised day of jus - tice comes.
prom-ised feast of plen - ty comes. The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands
prom-ised green of E - den comes.



gush with springs; the hills and moun - tains shall break forth with



sing - ing! We shall go out in joy, and be led



forth in peace, as all the world in won - der ech - oes sha - lom.

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(After the carol, children through 5th grade are invited to Kids United to prepare for next Sunday and Christmas Eve.)

THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE DESERT

A Word of Introduction

108 *Isaiah the Prophet* (1-2)

Joy Patterson/Sydney Carter

Isaiah's Promise in the Desert

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Far waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water;

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and celebration
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35

Silence

Hope begins when we make room for the Spirit in our lives. Only a small space will do. With just a tiny foothold the sacred can put down deep roots and begin to grow into every aspect of our lives. Where there was fear, confidence begins to bloom. Where there was anger, harmony weaves a vine of love through reality. Where there was confusion, clarity emerges like wildflowers. Hope becomes an organic part of our existence because it embodies irrepressible life: an urge to become that will not be denied.

Episcopal Bishop and Choctaw Elder Steven Charleston

109 ***With Joy Draw Water*** (1-3)
Anne McKinstry/St. Columba (Irish melody)

Silenced in the Desert

In the time of the bad-hearted *Chief Looks Brave* (King Herod), who ruled the territory of the *Land of Promise* (Judea), the Creator chose to send a powerful spirit-messenger to *Sacred Village of Peace* (Jerusalem), to a holy man whose name was *Creator Will Remember* (Zechariah). He and his wife, *Creator Is My Promise* (Elizabeth), were in good standing in the eyes of the Great Spirit, and with good and pure hearts they walked a straight path.

But *Creator Is My Promise* was unable to have children, and both were growing old. One day, when *Creator Will Remember* was leading prayers in the Lodge, suddenly a spirit-messenger appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of sweet-smelling smoke. *Creator Will Remember* was troubled when he saw the spirit-messenger. He trembled with fear that covered him like a blanket.

"Do not fear!" the messenger said to him. "Your prayers have been heard. *The Maker of Life* will give you and your wife a son. You will give him the name *Gift of Goodwill* (John). He will bring great joy to you, and many people will be glad that he has been born. Because of him many will find the good road and return to the Great Spirit and the holy ways."

Still trembling, *Creator Will Remember* finally found his voice. He asked, "We are too old to have children. How can I believe you?"

The spirit-messenger answered, "My name is *Creator's Mighty One* (Gabriel), his chief messenger. These good words I have spoken to you will come to pass, but since you did not believe my words, you will not be able to speak until they are fulfilled."

Luke 1:5-20

Silence

I am praying for silence. I am praying for a great silence to descend on every city that is in conflict, on every community that is suffering, on every street still littered with broken glass. Like snow falling from heaven, I pray for a silence to still the voices of those who would incite violence, to muffle their messages of manipulation, to turn their shouts to whispers, until the only thing left is no sound at all other than the sound of our heart beating: the common sound we call life. I am praying that in this holy silence, free from the voice of hate, we might finally see one another clearly, see who we are, see what we have done and are still doing, see into the eyes of those we have been told are different. No more speeches today. No more fear or anger. Only silence. The silence of any human spirit when it first sees the truth.

Bishop and Elder Steven Charleston

Gifts in the Desert

When six moons had passed from the visitation in the Lodge, the Great Spirit sent the same spirit-messenger, *Creator's Mighty One*, to another small, out-of-the-way place called *Seed Planter Village* (Nazareth). There he appeared to a young virgin woman named *Bitter Tears* (Mary), who was promised in marriage to a man named *He Gives Sons* (Joseph).

Creator's Mighty One said to her, "Greetings, highly favored one! You are close to the Great Spirit and greatly honored among women." *Bitter Tears* was deeply troubled by this greeting and wondered what the spirit-messenger would say. "Do not fear," he comforted her, "for you have found goodwill in the eyes of the *Great Mystery*. You will be with child and give birth to a son. You will name him *Creator Sets Free* (Jesus)."

Luke 1:26-31

Silence

Put down that bag of potato chips, that white bread, that bottle of pop.

Turn off that cellphone, computer, and remote control.

Open the door, then close it behind you.

Take a breath offered by friendly winds. They travel the earth gathering essences of plants to clean.

Give it back with gratitude.

If you sing, it will give your spirit lift to fly to the stars' ears and back.

Acknowledge this earth who has cared for you since you were a dream

planting itself precisely within your parents' desire. . . .

Let the earth stabilize your postcolonial insecure jitters.

Be respectful of the small insects, birds and animal people who accompany you.

Ask their forgiveness for the harm we humans have brought down upon them.

Don't worry.

The heart knows the way though there may be high-rises, interstates, checkpoints, armed soldiers, massacres, wars, and those who will despise you because they despise themselves.

The journey might take you a few hours, a day, a year, a few years, a hundred, a thousand or even more.

Joy Harjo, "For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet"
from *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*

Silence

114 *Return My People* (1-2)

James Martin/Repton (Charles Hubert Parry)

Song from the Desert

Bitter Tears quickly put together a traveling bundle and went to visit her cousin *Creator Is My Promise*. When *Creator Is My Promise* heard *Bitter Tears'* greeting, she felt her child, *Gift of Goodwill*, jump inside her, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Bitter Tears, too, was filled with gladness, and her words flowed out like a song.

"From deep in my heart," she sang, "I dance with joy to honor the Great Spirit. Even though I am small and weak, Great Spirit noticed me. The Mighty One has lifted me up!

"The Great and Holy One shows kindness and pity to both children and elders who respect holiness. The strong arm of the Great Spirit has brought low the ones who think they are better than others.

"The Holy One prepares a great feast for the ones who are hungry, but sends the fat ones home with empty bellies. The Great Mystery has remembered the ancient promises made to our ancestors—to the Forebearers of Many Nations (Abraham and Sarah) and their descendants."

For three moons *Bitter Tears* stayed in the home of her cousin and then returned home to her own village.

Luke 1:41-55

Silence

*When you find your way to the circle of the elders, to the fire kept burning by the keepers of your soul,
you will be welcomed.
You must clean yourself with cedar, sage, or other healing plant.
Cut the ties you have to failure and shame.
Let go the pain you are holding in your mind, your shoulders, your heart, all the way to your feet.
Let go the pain of your ancestors to make way for those who are heading in our direction.
Ask for forgiveness.
Call upon the help of those who love you.
These helpers take many forms: animal, element, bird, angel, saint, stone, or ancestor.
Call your spirit back. It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse.
You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return.
Speak to it as you would to a beloved child.
Welcome your spirit back from its wandering. It may return in pieces, in tatters.
Gather them together. They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long. . . .
Make a giveaway, and remember, keep the speeches short.
Then, you must do this: help the next person find their way through the dark.*

Joy Harjo, "For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet"

106 ***My Heart Sings Out with Joyful Praise*** (1 & 3)
Ruth Duck/Marias Lovsang (Swedish)

New Life in a Desert Time

When the time drew close for *Bitter Tears* to have her child, the government of the *People of Iron* (Romans) ordered that the people be numbered and put on government rolls. All the Tribal Members were required to travel to their own ancestral village to register. *He Gives Sons* and *Bitter Tears* set out on a long journey from *Seed Planter Village* to *House of Bread* (Bethlehem) in the *Land of Promise* (Judea).

While they were there, the time for *Bitter Tears* to have her child was upon her. But no place could be found in the lodging house, so *He Gives Sons* found a sheep cave where it was warm and dry. There *Bitter Tears* gave birth to her son. They wrapped him in a soft, warm blanket and laid him on a baby board. Then they placed him on a bed of straw in a feeding trough.

Luke 2:1-7

Silence

Love will find you. Love will find us. Keep that thought close to your heart. No matter where you are, no matter what is happening: always remember that love will find you. Do not be afraid or in despair. Do not feel alone or forgotten. But wait with the deep assurance that one day soon love will walk through that door to find you. Love is patient, love is persistent: it is out seeking you in every season of your life. And it will not stop searching until it finds you. Look up with hope. Rise up in healing. There is no place you can go where love will not find you. Keep that promise close to your heart.

Bishop and Elder Steven Charleston

128 ***In the Bleak Midwinter*** (1-2, 4)
Christina Rossetti/Cranham

WE RESPOND

Offering Ourselves in Prayer and the Prayer of our Savior (please pray any version)

Sharing Our Gifts

Huron Carol

Fr. Jean de Brebeuf/arr. Neil Harmon

Prayer of Dedication

WE GO IN PEACE

Closing Hymn

People, Look East

Eleanor Farjeon/French Carol

*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.*

*Birds, though ye 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.*

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

*Benediction

*Musical Benediction

People Look East

Farjeon/French Carol

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

Sola Deo Gloria!

WELCOME TO THE UNITED CHURCH OF SANTA FE!

Thank you for joining in this Joyous Sunday of Advent. Your presence enriches the experience of us all. As you enter the Sanctuary, please enter into the spirit of worship through quiet reflection. Again, welcome!

Sharing leadership are Rev. Talitha Arnold, Senior Minister; Dana Bender, Family Minister; Michelle Schumann, Pianist/Director of Music; Sanctuary Choir directed by André García-Nuthmann; Kevin Darrow, oboist; Jack Smucker, Sasha Smucker, Rev. Ben Larzelere, and Dawn Williams, Readers and Liturgists; and Elijah Marquez, Media Coordinator, assisted by Frank Wilbanks. The Advent Candlelighters are the Lindsey-Grafe family (Fallon, David, Ophelia, Rosalind). The Sanctuary was prepared for the Joyous Sunday of Advent by the Sacred Space Team (Dana Cagle, Donna Clark, Dana Hollifield, Christy Jones). You were greeted by Rosemary Thompson, Dana Hollifield, Louise Cavatta, Pam Hyde, Karen Wilbanks, and Sunday Aide Irene Guilbeault.

TODAY AT UNITED

Kids United Get Ready for Next Sunday and Christmas Eve

During the 10:00 service today, we'll practice "Lo How a Rose/The Rose," that we'll sing with the Sanctuary Choir next Sunday. We will also begin prepping for the Readers Theater of "A Francis and Clare Christmas" for next week. All kids welcome! (Dana Bender, Family Minister; Maria Navarett and Destiny Muñoz, Children's Ministry Aides)

Advent All-Church Family Workshop – 11:15 (Learning Center)

We'll decorate and fill Christmas Bags for the guests of St. Elizabeth Shelter. Many hands make light work! Children, youth, adults are all invited to join in and enjoy some snacks and make an angel ornament to take home. This is a nice way to connect with one another during this busy season and give back to the community.

Making a difference: tax smart philanthropy while you are working or in retirement

Today's Forum in Education Wing – Don Duncan, CFA, MBA

Our focus is helping you manage your philanthropy, especially to the church, in the most tax efficient manner possible. Don covers different gifting strategies and gifting vehicles that help the church and help you reduce your taxes. All welcome!

Compassionate Christmas Gift Market – Today and next Sunday

In the true spirit of Christmas, we invite you to give United's *Compassionate Christmas Gifts* that give hope, care, and joy to people and places in need. Gifts support New Mexico Immigrant Law Center, Church World Service, Solace Crisis Center, Changing Lenses, Changing Lives, United's Youth Ministry, Santa Fe Shelters, Communities in Schools, Santa Fe Watershed Association. You can also go to unitedchurchofsantafe.org to "shop." Thank you!



And at 12:30 today . . .

Kids United rehearse next Sunday's Readers Theater and also special music offerings for Christmas Eve. All kids welcome!



Memorial Gifts for Christmas Wreaths, Poinsettias, and Flowers for Congregational Care

Today is the last day to submit names of loved ones to honor or remember in the Christmas Flower List. After the Christmas Sunday service, flowers will go to United members and friends for whom the holidays are difficult. (suggested donation: \$20/name). Forms and envelope for donation in Community Room. Thanks!



BE THE ENERGY!

87% to the 2026 Stewardship Goal of \$625,000

To date, we've received 139 pledges, totaling over \$544,000. Only \$80,400 to reach the Victory Goal! With your help, we can make it –and maybe the \$635,000 Challenge Goal, too! Your pledge counts. Pledge cards and envelopes in Community Room. Thank you

COMING UP IN THE COMING WEEKS!

“A Frances and Clare Christmas” – Readers Theater for 10:00 Worship Service

Next Sunday, Dec. 21 – 10:00 Worship

Next Sunday, an intergenerational troupe of adults, youth, and kids, offers “A Frances and Clare Christmas,” the story of the first Nativity scene. The children will also join with the Sanctuary Choir in “Lo, How a Rose/The Rose” arranged by Craig Hella Johnson. A great Sunday to bring friends!

Hanukkah: Its History and Meaning – This Monday (Dec. 15) at 6:00 pm– KSFR 101.1

Talitha Arnold, co-host of KSFR's “Forum,” interviews Rabbi Martin Levy of Temple Beit Tikva.

Christmas Piano Recital

with United Pianist/Music Director Michelle Schumann

Monday, Dec. 22 – 7:00 pm -United Church

You're invited! United's Music Director Michelle Schumann performs a Christmas Piano Recital on Monday, Dec. 22 at 7:00 pm in our Sanctuary. She will offer pianistic arrangements of favorite Christmas carols alongside works by Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninov, and more! Tickets at door or online (\$30 general/\$10 student). Proceeds benefit the *Hearts in Harmony* program of the Santa Fe Desert Chorale.

Las Posadas at United – Tuesday, Dec. 23 at 6:00 pm

We welcome the community of Santa Maria de la Paz for wonderful New Mexico tradition: an early evening of song, prayer, and a visit from a couple of newlyweds. For the night, United becomes the stable of Bethlehem to welcome them (and provide hospitality and refreshments). Sign up to let us know you can help. And plan to come—all ages welcome!

And on Christmas Eve...

Farolito Set-up (3:00 pm)

Join us Christmas Eve at 3:00 pm to help place the farolitos all around (and on top of) the church for the evening services. Many hands make light work! Please bring long grill lighters.

Christmas Eve Services:

A Song in the Night

Candles & Carols – 5:00 pm

Designed for families with children, but all welcome! Carols, a special story, a gift for every child, and youth, and the Candle-lighting Service. (Infant and toddler childcare)

Candlelight Service – 7:00 pm

Carols, candle lighting, the Christmas Choir, and a message of hope. (Childcare offered.)

First Sunday of Christmas – Dec. 28

(one service only at 10:00 am)

In the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, a time to pray “For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be “YES!” We'll also share Communion as we prepare for the New Year.