

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH
A UNITED METHODIST/PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) COMMUNITY
WILDE LAKE INTERFAITH CENTER ● COLUMBIA, MARYLAND
UNITED IN LOVE – UNITED FOR SERVICE

December 21, 2025

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT // IN-PERSON & LIVESTREAM SERVICE

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Liturgist: Nancy Gabie

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* **Congregation Standing**

WE GATHER IN GOD’S NAME

PRELUDE

Patricia Hammer

WELCOME

CENTERING HYMN

“Surely the Presence of the Lord”

UM #328

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can hear the brush of angel's wings;
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLE 4

"Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah"
(verse 4)

GTG #85

Light four candles to watch for Messiah:
let the light banish darkness.
He is coming; tell the glad tidings.
Let your lights be shining.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*CALL TO WORSHIP

In a world longing for assurance,
God sends a word of hope: *Do not be afraid.*
In a time searching for meaning,
God draws near and becomes Emmanuel - *God with us.*
In the quiet faithfulness of Joseph,
We witness obedience shaped by trust.
Come, let us worship the God who enters our lives with grace,
For the Holy One is with us, now and always.

***PRAYER OF APPROACH**

**Gracious God,
You come to us in unexpected ways—through whispered dreams,
quiet acts of courage, and the faithful “yes” of those who trust Your
promises. As we gather before You, make our hearts attentive to Your
presence and open our spirits to Your guidance. Draw near to us just
as You drew near to Joseph, and let Your Word become flesh in our
lives. In the name of Emmanuel, Amen.**

***OPENING SONG**

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

GTG #121

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee 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 to God the king, and peace to all on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in; 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!

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Holy and Merciful God,
We confess that we often greet Your presence with hesitation rather
than trust. You call us to courage, but we cling to fear.
You ask us to welcome Christ into our lives, but we make little room.
You invite us to follow You in faith, but we resist the paths that
challenge our comfort.**

**Forgive us, O God. Like Joseph, help us to listen for Your voice,
to trust Your promises, and to follow where You lead –
that Christ may be born again in us. Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!**

*THE RESPONSE

“There Is a Longing in Our Hearts”

GTG #470

Verse 4

Refrain:

***There is a longing in our hearts, O Lord,
for you to reveal yourself to us.***

***There is a longing in our hearts for love
we only find in you, our God.***

Lord save us, take pity, Light in our darkness.
We call you; we wait: be near; hear our prayer, O God.

Refrain

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Having received Christ’s peace, let us share it generously.
The angel said, “Do not be afraid,” and in that assurance we greet one another.

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of dreams and promises, by Your Spirit, open our hearts to
Your Word. Speak to us as You spoke to Joseph - with clarity, courage,
and compassion - that we may hear, believe, and follow. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

ANTHEM

”Long Time Ago”

Choir

Joseph M. Martin

To a tiny stable lowly, long time ago,
came the Son of God most holy, long time ago.
Angels filled the night with singing, stars all aglow;
songs of joy through heaven ringing, long time ago.

Little Baby in a manger, prophets foretold;
God’s own Son and yet a stranger, long time ago.
To a tiny stable lowly, God’s love to show,
came the Son of God most holy, long time ago.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Matthew 1: 18-25

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

“Those We Don’t See”

Pastor Hyiwot Teshome

MESSAGE

“The Invisible Around Us”

Pastor Hyiwot Teshome

Through it all, through it all,
I’ve learned to trust in Jesus,
I’ve learned to trust in God;
Through it all, through it all,
I’ve learned to depend upon God’s word.

CALL TO OFFERING

In Joseph’s trust and obedience, we see what it means to
dedicate ourselves to God. Let us now bring our gifts - signs of
our gratitude, symbols of our faith, and offerings for God’s work in the world.

OFFERTORY

“The Boy-Child of Mary”

GTG #139

Refrain

*That boy-child of Mary was born in a stable,
a manger his cradle in Bethlehem.*

What shall we call him, child of the manger?
What name is given in Bethlehem?
His name is Jesus, God ever with us,
God given for us in Bethlehem.
How can he save us; how can he help us,
born here among us in Bethlehem?

Refrain

Gift of the Father, to human mother,
makes him our brother of Bethlehem.
One with the Father, he is our Savior,
heaven-sent helper of Bethlehem.
Gladly we praise him, love and adore him,
give ourselves to him of Bethlehem.

Refrain

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Faithful God, accept these gifts and our lives along with them.
Use what we give to bring hope, healing, and justice to Your world.
Shape us into people who say “yes” to Your call—just as Joseph
did—so that Christ may be known through us. Amen**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us; and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“Go Tell It On The Mountain”

GTG #136

Refrain

***Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!***

While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.

Refrain

The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! Above the earth
rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.

Refrain

Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

Refrain

*CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Pastor Hyiwot Teshome

*POSTLUDE

“Prepare the Way, O Zion”

GTG#106

Prepare the way, O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!
Let every hill and valley a level way appear.
Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.

Refrain:

O blest is Christ who came in God's most holy name.

He brings God's rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven above.
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.
Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.

Refrain

Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior's rule embrace,
and tidings of salvation proclaim in every place.
All lands will bow rejoicing, their adoration voicing.

Refrain

Readings are NRSV unless otherwise noted. CEB=Common English Bible; CEV=Contemporary English Version; KJV=King James Version; MSG=The Message; NIV=New International Version; NLT=New Living Translation; TIB=The Inclusive Bible

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.

Matthew 1: 18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

CALENDAR: SCHEDULED FOR WEEK OF DECEMBER 21 – DECEMBER 28

All meetings are via Zoom (unless otherwise noted).

All meetings are open to the members and affiliates of SJU unless otherwise noted. Members are encouraged to connect to, engage, and invest in the life and leadership of this Body of Christ, the church! Contact SJUColumbia@gmail.com if you wish to receive meeting and contact information on anything below:

Sun, 12/21	8:30 am 10:30 am 11:30 am 6:00 pm	CHRISTIAN APPLICATION WORSHIP SERVICE (<i>in-person and livestream</i>) (Scheduled liturgist: Nancy Gabie) FELLOWSHIP (<i>Room 10</i>) BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE (<i>in-person and livestream</i>)
Wed, 12/24	7:00 pm all day	CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE SJU Offices Closed
Thurs, 12/25	all day	Christmas Day (Offices closed)
Fri, 12/26	all day	SJU Offices Closed
Sun, 12/28	8:30 am 10:30 am 11:30 am	CHRISTIAN APPLICATION WORSHIP SERVICE (<i>in-person and livestream</i>) (Scheduled liturgist: TBD) FELLOWSHIP (<i>Room 10</i>)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Special Christmas Offering

This year's special Christmas Offering will go to Columbia Community Cares.

To make a special Christmas Offering:

- Use the "Christmas Eve Offering" envelope in Givelify
OR
- Write "Christmas Offering" on your check or envelope
OR
- Use a blue envelope available from the ushers to submit cash or check along with your name and gift amount on the enclosed red Christmas Offering slip.

2025 Donations

All donations for 2025 need to be in the church office by noon, Tuesday, December 30, 2025 to be credited to your 2025 giving.

