

10:30am
December 29, 2024

Sunday After Christmas
Persia: A Place of Return

GUESTS, Welcome to our faith community. To learn more about us please visit our website at www.unionucc.org or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/unionneffs. Let us know you're here by completing the Welcome Card in the racks in front of you and hand it to a pastor or drop it in the offering plate.

Vision Statement

UNION UCC: RELEVANT, ENGAGED, and GROWING

Mission Statement

Our church is a diverse family of believers, spiritually united in Christ, rooted in a rich heritage and growing with vitality into the future. We proclaim God's word, nurturing and inspiring dedicated Christian discipleship through worship, education, pastoral care, fellowship, and outreach within our community and the world.

***No matter who you are or where you on life's journey,
you are welcome here.***

Union UCC is an Open and Affirming (ONA) Community.

Lay Reader: Donna Christman
Greeters: Carol Pope, Ron Pope
Sound: Dawn Dengler

Prelude Music

O Little Town of Bethlehem
(Lewis H. Redner; Arr. Melody Bober)
Good Christian Men, Rejoice
(Traditional German Carol; Arr. Melody Bober)

Doug Brace

Welcome to Union UCC and Worship Today!

Welcome & Announcements

Light for the Journey

Guide: Our journey to Bethlehem was all about the places “on the way.” In this week after Christmas, we may feel like “whew... we did it, we’ve arrived.” But we have one more stop to consider—Persia. Why Persia? Because the “wise ones from the East” go back to their homeland... likely Persia. After we come to pay homage to the Christ Child, our life journey continues in our own home lands!

Leader/Pastor: As we approach the beginning of a new year, we often take stock of our lives and spend time in contemplation and discernment. This continuing story of the birth of Christ also involves inquiry. Three wise “seekers” came to visit the newborn Christ, guided by a new star they had noticed. On this last day of our series, we ask ourselves, what are we seeking? Where is our attention focused? What new stars may be calling to us? Will we just go back into routines of life or will we take this moment to understand more deeply how we can “return anew?”

**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.**

**We're on our way
We're on our way
Dream of the day
When hope holds sway
With all the earth
In all our hearts
We're on our way
This is the day.**

The journey continues, and this candle will help light our way.

We are on our way to more love.

Life is full of expectations and waiting for the right time, the right answer, the right opportunity.

We are a people who wait for Good News.

It is hard to wait, but there are milestone moments when we get a glimpse of what true peace feels like.

God's light goes before us, we are not alone.

**We're on our way
We're on our way
Dream of the day
When hopeholds sway
With all the earth
In all our hearts
We're on our way
This is the day.**

Opening Prayer and Words of Assurance

Holy and Living God, we pray for all who seek.

Too often, we are seeking things that do not satisfy.
Give us wisdom to pursue what really matters as this new
year approaches.

Call us to a “turning”—following your Star of Wonder.

Call us to “re-turn” toward your purposes for us.

Remind us that our longing and our waiting are wrapped in
your care.

Draw us to a more simple and humble existence in which
our treasures are defined by the hope, peace, joy, and love
we feel and also give away.

We pray this in the name of your Son,
Jesus, the Christ, the Savior of Our Lives. **Amen.**

Let this be a marker of assurance that we are moving in a
faithful direction:

God is with us every step of our way toward your Kin-dom.

Jesus has been born into our lives.

The Spirit is transforming us in this place.

Peace be with you!

And also with you.

As people forgiven and freed,

I invite you to pass the Peace of Christ among you

[and those worshiping remotely, we are glad you are on the
journey with us!].

The Peace

***Please rise in body or spirit to greet each other and for the
first song.**

***Opening Hymn** #193 O Come, All Ye Faithful
Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God

ALL: O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

**O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!
Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
All glory in the highest
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!**

**Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing!**

**O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!**

Please be seated.

10:30 Worship Children's Time

Children's Church – during 10:30am Worship for ages 3-grade 5. Kids start in worship with their family and are invited forward for a children's time, They then leave with Ms. Tiffany and return before worship is over. They will return to worship before it's over and if not, please pick up your children in Room 100. If you want your child

to stay in worship with you, please let them know.

**Little donkey, little donkey
On the dusty road
Got to keep on plodding onwards
With your precious load.
Been a long time, little donkey
Through the winter's night
Don't give up now, little donkey
Bethlehem's in sight.**

**Kids are invited to the Education Hour and Faith Formation
for All Ages – 9:15-10:15am on Sundays, ages 3 to grade 7.**

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them,

went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Sermon

Persia: A Place of Return

Rev. Kayli Freeman

Guided by Prayer

Guide: We begin our prayer time today remembering that when we need guidance the most, we can turn to God in prayer. Today we are guided by the sense that Christ is our Home.

Lead Me, Guide Me

Lead me, guide me, a - long the way, for if you
lead me, I can - not stray. Lord, let me walk each
day with thee. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Leader: Let us pray:

God of Hope, we come to you today longing for your presence in our lives and with all those who suffer—in body, mind, or spirit. We pray this day for...

God of Joy, we come to you today so deeply grateful for celebrations, triumphs, and even small steps toward the lives we seek and the world we desire. We pray this day for...

Holy God of Peace and Love, we know you are near. We know that every step along the way to Bethlehem in this Advent season was a step closer to renewed life in Jesus, the Christ. We know that your Spirit resides within us, growing day by day into the fullness of the Kin-dom. In this moment, we pause in silence, marking your presence with awe and asking you to fill us and guide us along our journey into the new year.

Moments of Silence

May we live by the prayer you taught us...

Lord's Prayer

**ALL: 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

**NEWS ABOUT THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH
AT UNION**

OFFERING



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Neffs, Pennsylvania

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• **Venmo @unionuccneffs** Make a donation or pay for a fundraiser or event. Complete "What's this for?" See QR code.

• **Cash or checks (to "Union UCC")** Place in the offering plate with a member offering envelope or guest envelope (in the seat racks) or drop in the mail if you're not in person.



Venmo

Contact John Harting (610-799-2508) or Don Penrod (610-972-8719) or Pastor Kris if you have questions or if you'd like to learn more about other giving options or legacy gifts to Union.

Christmas Mission Offering – Sharing God's Love with the World

The Christmas Mission Offerings will go to Phoebe Home and Phoebe Ministries in Allentown and Disaster Relief through the Penn Northeast Conference (and Penn Southeast Conference). Please share your financial support by using the Christmas Mission Offering envelope in your envelope packet, or blank envelope marked - Christmas Mission, or donate online at <https://www.unionucc.org/>

resources/giving-and-sponsorship/ OR <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-Z51X/campaign/C-12DNK>

Phoebe Home & Phoebe Ministries

Phoebe Ministries provides faith-based communities and services for senior living, including independent apartments, personal care, skilled nursing, memory support services, short-term rehab, and geriatric care management. Union UCC has a long history of supporting Phoebe Home in Allentown and the overall mission of Phoebe Ministries.

Disaster Relief through Penn Northeast Conference (PNEC)

Hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, flooding, blizzards, and explosions are some examples of disasters, some minor, some major. Union UCC also regularly provides financial support to the Disaster Relief program through the Penn Northeast Conference. These donations are provided to communities and families in need after a disaster strikes.

Music Offering The Holly and the Ivy-trad.; arr. Alex DeGrassi
Mike Baer

***Please stand in body or spirit.**

Offering Response

(Sung to the tune of *Away In a Manger*)

**Praise God for these gifts that we offer today
and bless them for good in the world, this we pray.
Praise Jesus, the Christ-Child, our Hope and our Stay,
the Spirit, our Keeper, our Guide on the Way.**

We Set Off: A Proclamation for the Continued Journey

Guide: We checked the signs and markers all along the way to make sure we were moving in a faithful direction. And now, with faith, we move on into a new year with perseverance for the continued journey ahead. Having been

to Bethlehem, we know that the Light of Christ shines through any night we may encounter. We are never alone. And so we sing with confidence, that Jesus Christ is born and goes before us!

Benediction

And now as you go forth from this place,
know that all the places you encounter in the world
will contain signs and markers of God's work among us.

So keep your senses alert,
your perception wide,
and your heart open
to new discoveries along the way.

**O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray,
cast out our fear, and draw us near; 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.**

**We're on our way
We're on our way
Dream of the day
When joy holds sway
With all the earth
In all our hearts
We're on our way
This is the day.**

***Closing Hymn Joy to the World
Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.**

**And heaven and nature sing.
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the world! The Savior reigns:
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.**

Postlude Music

Gesù Bambino Pieteo A. Yon
Payge Haydt, viola

Worship Theme: c. Worship Design Studio
Worship Design Team: Kathy Bonsell, Claire Kern,
Deb Topp, Pastor Kris, Tiffany Lakatosh, Kathy Milander,
Maryann Puia

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)		Attendance Last Week	
Last Week		8 AM	
Calendar Year 2024 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$320,290.00	10:30 AM	
Calendar Year 2023 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 308,275.00	Online Views	
Change from Last Year	3.9%	Sunday School	
Budget FY 2024-25 (July-Oct.)	\$115,200.00	God First	25
Actual Fiscal Year-to-Date (July-Oct.)	\$114,112.00	Faith on Tap	30
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-0.9%	Breathe	15
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>		2024 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
		Last Week:	\$, lbs
		Total YTD:	\$1300, 7,090lbs

Christmas Mission YTD:	\$2,785.00
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Presentations to the Glory of God

In memory of Walt Disney

Good News Sponsor— for \$20 help us cover the costs of advertising on social media, mailings, and local papers.

Children’s Bulletin Sponsor— for \$8 cover the cost of bulletins for children.

Send to Union UCC through your offering envelope or online marked Spread the Good News or Children’s Bulletin. Contact Marissa to sign up for a certain date or to sponsor in honor or memory of someone.

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