

Mary, a teen engaged to Joseph, received the startling news that God had chosen her to birth hope into a bleak world. Quite an honor of the divine kind, yet quite a dishonor of the humankind. This pregnancy would ignite gossipy whispers and many a raised eyebrows among the villagers. Still, Mary said “yes,” relaying the brave and life-changing words to her angelic messenger: *Let it be according to God’s will.*

While young and innocent, Mary knew what even the most learned and worldly person failed to grasp: The Mighty One can and will do great things for all who have been told that they are not good enough to garner any worthy attention.

The holy mother-to-be also knew there was something greater in the works than her own blissful domesticity with Joseph. Her “yes” would bless generations to come. How often do we realize that our “yes” to God creates a ripple of blessings? When will we ever truly allow God’s plan to override our best laid plans for tomorrow? Can we give up our dreams so easily and so eagerly for that of God’s vision for us?

So in awe to be cast in the salvation story, Mary begins singing of God’s power that sends the rich away empty. While the scholarly name of Mary’s song is “The Magnificat” it could easily be called “The Heartbeat of Justice,” for each word hits the right note of how God will dismantle the systems of oppression.

Mary had her season of saying “yes” to God. Now it is our turn, for we are being invited to play a pivotal role in the unfolding saga of salvation. It is our time to sing “The Heartbeat of Justice,” making clear every note of God’s care for all who have been forgotten.

But what exactly would our “yes” to God require? According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, every “yes” to God is accompanied with a “no.” As the German pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident during World War II once reflected, “Our ‘yes’ to God requires our ‘no’ to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor.”

“The Heartbeat of Justice” is playing. Who will sing it out loud?

Mighty and loving God, as Christmas songs fill the air with promises of jingling bells and flying reindeer, may our ears be attuned to the true song of Christmas. May we hear the lyrics of a justice seeking Love that sets prisoners free and lifts those kicked to the gutter. May we hear, may we sing, and may we find ourselves whispering our “yes” to You. May Your will be done in our lives. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

(Rev. Donna Frischknecht Jackson is a communications specialist for the United Church of Christ and author of today’s *Sunday Bulletin*.)



St. John's United Church of Christ

P.O. Box 794, 401 N Main Street, Belvidere, IL
61008stjohns401.org stjohnsucc401@gmail.com

Pastor: Rev. Muriel Morley Jahn 815-544-2977
murielmorley@gmail.com
Pastoral Associate: Beth Carson 815-979-0473
Minister of Music: Mary Albrecht 815-547-7503
Choir Director: Jeanne Anderson 815-985-2652

WELCOME VISITORS! Thank you for coming! Please sign a pew card to place in the offering plate.

WORSHIP: When reading this bulletin Leader Speaks Plain Font, Everyone Speak Bold Font

Announcements

Nursery: Children are welcome in all aspects of worship. The nursery provides an alternative space so kids and parents can both get what they need from worship. Children are encouraged to check in with their adult before going downstairs with the nursery attendant.

The Belvidere Group (AA) meets at everyday at 7pm.



Delicious Fundraiser



Amazon List



T-Shirts

Announcements

- † Welcome and thank you to Soloist Nicolai Janitsky of the Chicago Lyric Opera for blessing our worship today with his beautiful voice.
- † Fellowship Meal today! Join us for a meal downstairs after worship.
- † Chair and Mat Yoga with Katherine Ray is going weekly! Chair yoga at 10 AM and mat yoga at 11:30 AM. No RSVP required and classes are \$5.
- † Sunday school is on break until Sunday, January 11th, 2026.
- † Community Meal December 17th from 5 pm to 6 pm. The menu is chicken and noodles, green beans, fruit, dessert, milk, coffee. The WIC Mobile Unit from the Health Department will be parked in the parking lot from 4 pm to 7 pm.
- † Christmas Eve Service begins at 4 pm and is candle-light.

SPONSOR A POINSETTIA

Deadline: December 15th

Cost: \$13.00 each

Given by _____

In Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

As a Thank Offering _____

Payment must accompany order. Make checks payable to St. John's UCC. Leave in Pastor Muriel's mail slot or contact her before December 15th. THANKS!

Invitation to Generosity

Offertory Music “**God Rest You Merry Gentlemen**”
J. Cox

Doxology

Praise God, through whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below,
Praise God, above ye heavenly host. General Giving
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

**Prayer of Dedication**

Precious God, take these gifts in the spirit they were given, with joy and love for our siblings around the world. Let us remember that we all have times of trouble. We will each stand before you, hands clasped in prayer, begging for relief. Use what we have here to bring that relief where it is needed most. Amen

Benediction “**O Rest in the Lord**” F. Mendelssohn

Called the Holy Way: Service Prayers for the Third Sunday of Advent Year A
was written by Maria Mankin.

Prelude “**“Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn”**
M Haugen

Announcements**Responsive Welcome Statement**

At St. John's United Church of Christ, we are Living Outwardly & Valuing Everyone!

We live and work amid God's love!

In that spirit, we extend love to all who come into our midst, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, nationality, skin color, culture, differing abilities, age or political affiliations, to participate fully in all aspects of church.

Our ministry is to bring the Good News of Christ's love to all.

We work in God's name to tear down walls and build community,

to walk with each other through all of life's circumstances,

to provide for those in need,

to offer comfort to the hurting and the sick,

and to uplift the brokenhearted.

Where we fail, we ask for God's forgiveness.

May the Holy Spirit and our siblings continue to challenge us to do better.

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

Call to Worship

Joy is the gift God gives us upon waking in the morning to see beams of sun dance in dusty corners or hear much needed rain, even on a leaky roof.

Joy is in the delight of tiny precious things.

Joy is the magnificence of the Redeemer when the tests come back clear, or when a school test is finally passed, or when the spirit is tested and chooses faith over fear.

Joy is in the hands that hold our own while we sit silently and wait.

Joy is the patience of Emmanuel when petty disagreement turns into great injustice and change is slow to bend towards what is right and good.

Joy is in the small actions we take each day to help righteousness and peace abound.

Invocation

Beloved, we come now seeking to recognize moments of delight when we feel connected to you. We bring our fragmented hearts filled with good cheer, gentle reverence, and utter amazement; we share our secret hopes, dependable comforts, and cozy moments of advent peace. Rise up within us as we cherish the divinity of all that is good.

Hymn #102 “O How Shall I Receive You” (Verse 1,3)

Lighting the Candle of Joy

Today we light the Candle of Joy.
 Joy is often considered the easiest
 of these four weeks before Christ's holy birth.
 We may cling to hope,
 and pray for peace,
 but in joy, we delight.
 In joy, our struggles are released.
 In joy, we find relief and comfort,
 a connection to friends and family and God.
 In joy, we find innocence within
 that has not been ground out.
 The lighting of this candle is joy.
 and it reminds us of candles lit in our lives.
 No matter the size or color of the wax,
 no matter what room it is lit in,
 the act itself is exquisite.
 While the flame dances, we are one
 in the miracle and beauty of its light.

Children's Time Blessing our Families

Hanging of the Greens Decorating the Tree

Solo “O Little Town of Bethlehem” W. Davies

Prayer for Transformation and New Life

Great Redeemer, too often we allow the idea of absolute happiness to block the existence of joy from our daily lives. Our hopes are crushed under the weight of the world's sorrows, and our peace is disturbed by the agonies of an interconnected existence. We race toward solutions without pausing to meditate on the greater good. We lay bare the sorrows we carry without acknowledging the small delights that make the fight against injustice worthwhile. Relieve us of the pain we wear as a badge of honor, ignoring your love, even as it surrounds us.

Words of Grace

Our loving God does not spare us from pain, as empathy is born from suffering; but neither does God remove joy from our lives as a punishment for our indiscretions. We are bound together with a sacred braid of hope, peace, and joy designed to hold fast against the greatest adversities. In faith, no anguish can take hold completely; no sorrow completely outweigh the possibility of joy. Praise be to God!

Gloria Patri

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son
 and to the Holy Ghost,
 as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall
 be, world without end. Amen.**

Scripture Luke 1:46-55

Sermon “Song of the Blessed ”

Moment for Mission~ Christmas Fund