

God With Us

Matthew 1:18-25

It was Christmas Eve, and I was joining my father at a church he had been attending. I settled into the pew, letting the medley of hymns soothe my still frazzled soul from the push to meet holiday deadlines at my Manhattan magazine job. Soon, though, I heard more than the music. I heard a silent prayer fill my heart.

God, thank You for being in my life. May I never forget to thank You even when dark times come. May I always know You are with me.

Why was I thinking about dark times descending upon my seemingly perfect life? I was young. My career was taking off. I had a wonderful apartment. I even had a special someone in my life.

Thankfully, the church school procession of angels with lopsided cardboard wings had begun, giving me something else to focus on. But throughout the service, every now and then, I kept thinking about, "May I never forget to thank You even when dark times come."

Two months later, "the one" I envisioned building a future with was killed in a jeep accident while traveling in Africa. The proverbial rug was ripped out from underneath me. Yet through my tears, I remembered my Christmas prayer. And so, I prayed in my sorrow a prayer of thanks for God being with me here in my dark time.

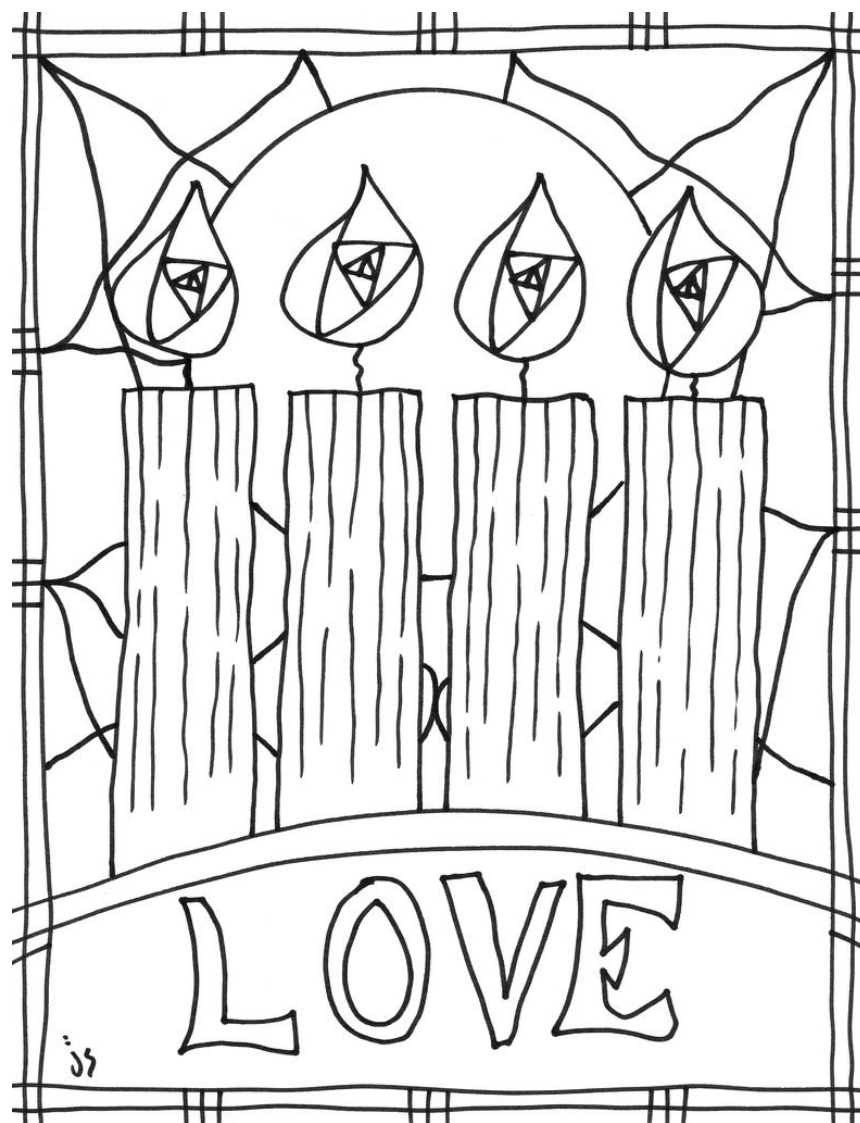
The year of unwanted change flew by and once again it was Christmas Eve. This time, though, I wasn't sitting in the pew of the church my father was attending. I was standing with a heavenly host of angels with lopsided cardboard wings. I had left my magazine job and was now serving the church as Christian ed director as I prepared to enter seminary. Little did I know then that down this unexpected path was a rural congregation waiting for me where I would find not only my call, but someone to share my life with.

As I waited with the overly excited angels, I thought about how drastically my life had changed. It was then the realization of where God had led me fully hit. I was standing in church named "Emmanuel," which was located on a street called "Hope."

The angels began fluttering as the organ bellowed with the first notes of the processional hymn. But I didn't hear any of it. All I could hear was a familiar prayer, in which I invite you to say along with me:

God, thank You for being in my life. May I never forget to thank You even when dark times come. May I always know You are with me. In the name of Emmanuel, God with us always, 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

to remember, as we await Christ's birth, to give more generously than we receive, knowing we will always be rich in your abundant love.
Amen

Scripture Matthew 1:18-25

Hanging of the Greens Changing of the Altar Clothes

Hymn #131 "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" (Verse 1, 3)

Benediction

"A Savior is Born" Tune: Traditional melody ("Though I May Speak") ([MIDI](#)) Text: Copyright © 2016 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Let It Be Deep: Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A was written by Maria Mankin.

Announcements

✠ **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 for Adults and Kids** is on break until Sunday, January 11th, 2026.

✠ **Christmas Eve Service** begins at 4 pm and is candle-light.

shepherds in their fields, sometimes as cowardly and cruel as Herod. You have given us the most sacred gift, yet we often lack the faith to accept it. Amen.



[General Giving](#)

Words of Grace

God's love for us encompasses every doubt and disaster we will imagine. God did not turn from our ancestors when they fell short, and God will not turn from us. Our humanity is not a flaw. It is the gift of the divine, sealed in Emmanuel's humanity. 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 Isaiah 7:10-16

Sermon *"When is the Season?"*

Moment for Mission~ The Christmas Fund

Invitation to Generosity

Doxology

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

Prayer of Dedication

Love and Light of the world, we give you thanks for these gifts. We give you thanks for the privilege of generosity. We give you thanks for the ability to share your divine love in a tangible form with our siblings around the world. Help us

Prelude

Announcements

Choral Introit #116 "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (Verse 6)

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

To love is the greatest gift bestowed upon us. It is a surrender to God's holy power.

God loves us, despite all our mistakes, so we pray for the patience of hope!

To be loved by God is the right of every living thing. This love is the sun and the rain, it is the beginning and end of all.

God loves us even when we neglect our neighbors, so we pray for the strength to bring peace.

God's love is always a promise and a responsibility, and we are given this love freely. God demands nothing from us, yet knows we are capable of greatness.

God loves us in the midst of destruction and despair, so we pray to share a vision of joy.

Love is a sacred vow God has made to us, a rainbow in the sky, a baby in the manger.

God loves us just as we are, and we give thanks and whisper amen.

Invocation

Emmanuel, we come today with arms wide open, ready to meet your precious son. Your love for us is so full that you sent a fragile babe to share your holy word, knowing that he would face human pain. Open us, God! Prepare us for his coming, that we may be messengers of your abundant love, and act to ease the suffering of all.

Hymn #117 "Lift up your Heads"

Lighting the Candle of Love

Today we light the Candle of Love.

Over the past few weeks, we have sparked the light of hope, peace, and joy. Now, we come to love, which binds all of these together.

Each strand is braided gently into an image of God who protects, encourages, and endures.

We cannot look upon the face of God, but we can experience this love every time we experience hope, peace, and joy.

We are not above suffering, but God promises, even in the midst of despair, love will pour down upon us.

Just as we await the birth of our savior in the man-

ger, God waits on us, watches over us, and sends us out into the world to do as Jesus did – to care for our neighbors, to give freely to those in need, to call out tyranny, to face down injustice – knowing that God is with us.

We are loved.

We are love.

Children's Time "Give and Get"

Pastoral Prayer~ The Lord's Prayer

Hymn "A Savior is Born"

(Tune: Gift of Love, Carolyn Hymn)

**A Savior born — a gift of joy!
A manger bed, a star of light,
A mother's laugh, a tiny boy,
A father's prayer — such gifts that night!**

**A life for all — our hope restored!
God's Word of love, a healing touch,
A cross and grave, the Risen Lord —
God's endless joy, now shared with us.**

**O God of love, your joy uplifts —.
The poor now laugh and know their worth.
May we your church give Christmas gifts that
bring your joy to all the earth.**

Prayer for Transformation and New Life

Majestic Redeemer, in these last days before the birth of your son, we admit that we ask often for a sign. We put you to the test, beg for miracles, for mercy, for proof of your holy word. We doubt, even as we retell the old stories. We are like Joseph — shamed, questioning, fearful of the truth of Mary's dream — not wanting to be taken as fools for believing in something that seems too precious to be true. We are as afraid as the