



# Church of the Isles United Church of Christ

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

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## First Sunday of Advent

9:00 AM, November 29, 2020

### Gathering Music

**Shirley Hand**

- **Deck the Hall**
- **Hark, the Herald Angels Sing**

### Welcome/Announcements

**Shelly Wilson**

### Lighting the First Candle of Advent

**Nancy & Skip Ertz**

Advent wreathes are a tradition used to mark the passage of the four weeks of Advent. Starting during the first week of Advent, we light each of the four candles and remember the words of the prophets who awaited the Christ's coming. A central, white, Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve. Advent wreathes are often used in family services, and here at church. The circular wreath originally symbolized God's eternity as it has no beginning or end. The evergreens are also a symbol of everlasting life. On traditional Advent wreathes, three of the candles are violet-colored, and one is rose-colored. The violet candles symbolize faithful expectation, and the rose candle, the traditional candle of Mary, symbolizes joy and hope. Violet, a color which symbolizes the royalty of Christ, is mirrored in the colors of the pastor's stole and the sanctuary's paraments used during the Sundays of Advent. Today, the first Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of Hope. The prophets foretold the coming of the One we hope for, who brings healing, nurture, equity, peace, and safety for all God's children. We hear anew the prophets' words, "Listen! A voice is crying in the wilderness, make a plain way! Open the highway for our



God!" May we honor the Christ child as we hope for light and love for all children everywhere. (**lighting the candle of Hope**)

Music "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"  
**Shirley Hand**

Litany of Welcome  
**Linda Smith & all**

One: The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light!

**ALL: The people who have dwelled in the deepest night, on them has light shined.**

One: The light comes as the warmth of a friend's hand tucked in yours, the hope of a cheery fire on a bleak winter's night. God's light is unpredictable, found in the most unexpected places: in the likes of us, and in a humble stable long ago.

**ALL: O God, oil the hinges of our hearts' doors that they may swing gently and easily to welcome your coming!**

One: With what shall we decorate God's house this holy season of night and Light?

**ALL: We have placed signs of our welcome, branches of pine and holly. We have placed evergreens and a fir tree. We have hung wreathes and garlands. We will make the church fragrant with the scents of our holy celebration!**

Special Music "The Holly and the Ivy"  
**Shirley Hand**

The Wreathes & the Light  
**Alicia Isaac**

In the act of hanging greens this different Advent, let us make our hearts and this space a place of inward & outward welcome for all who wish to come in and for those who are necessarily faraway. In ancient times, evergreen garlands, wreathes, and candles were placed around doors and windows to prepare the house for a special visitation. To welcome and honor royal guests, garlands of cypress, pine, and cedar were draped around entrances. Evergreens such as holly & ivy, rich with both pre-Christian and Christian symbolism, were placed in homes and churches to remind one and all of the important characters and events in the stories of the birth and death of Jesus. Candles were placed in windows then, as they are today, as a cheery welcome to all who journey, a welcome filled with warmth and light and love.



## The Legend of the Poinsettia

**Hazel Merihew**

In the past two hundred years, a symbol of Christmas journeyed from Mexico and now is woven into our traditions. In the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an American named Poinsett was the ambassador to Mexico and admired the beauty of the bright red “Flores de la Noche Buena” that grew there. He learned a legend which says that when the Bethlehem star shone over the manger where Jesus was born, its light was so bright that the earth responded, reflecting that star light with a beautiful radiant, star-shaped flower with pure white petals and golden star centers. Legend adds that when Jesus was crucified, the petals turned to red, but still glowed with a hopeful star-shape, remembering both the journey to birth and the journey to death, as well as life eternal. Poinsett brought both the flower and the legend back to North America where the flower was renamed in his honor. Today in churches & in our homes, the poinsettia reminds us of the star of Bethlehem and the possibilities for the rebirth of hope in our hearts.

## Music “What Child is This?”

**Shirley Hand**

## The Chrismon Tree

**Alex Fuller**

Through many of the Scripture stories the Holy One is portrayed as a God of comfort and compassion. With the Christmas tree we remember God’s promises to the poor and needy. The prophet Isaiah spoke of God’s making of the wilderness a place of blessing where water and plants and animals and humans all together would manifest God’s loving action to save and to provide. Pre-Christian peoples believed that trees themselves were signs of the presence of divinity. Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer was one of the first to have a Christmas tree in his home, placing lighted candles on its branches and a star on the top. Gifts given for those in need and to beloved family and friends recall the rich gifts offered by the Magi to welcome the poor Christ child, and recall the tradition of 13<sup>th</sup> century St. Nicholas. Chrismons were first created by Frances Kipps Spencer at Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia. Chrismons are traditionally colored white and gold and are formed from a variety of materials. The symbols include a great variety of Christian symbols, including stars, doves, Greek monograms for Christ, butterflies, and crosses from many nations and traditions.



Music: "O Christmas Tree"

**Shirley Hand**

The Tradition of the Manger Scene

**Mindy Picardo**

The placing of a manger scene is an ancient Christian tradition, dating at least from the 1200's when St. Francis of Assisi was said to have had the first one made of wood. Manger scenes began as live Nativity plays in which the human and animal characters journeyed from house to house, seeking shelter and welcome in remembrance of the journey of the homeless Holy Family. Today Nativity plays often are produced in churches, using children, adults, and animals to re-create the story of the first Christmas. Today in homes and in churches, small replicas of the manger scene have been created, made from every conceivable material. Their popularity has grown with the passing of time. Nearly every culture has particular local versions of the tableau with traditional-appearing characters and settings. The manger scene is a reminder that finding a welcome and a safe sanctuary is as difficult for many persons today as it was for the Holy Family. We remember that like many families in our own time, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus were denied hospitality and medical care, and were refugees in continual danger from oppressors.

Music "Away in a Manger"

**Shirley Hand**

As we make ready our church building and our homes, may we also prepare our hearts in the coming days, honoring and welcoming the One who brings to **all the people** good tidings of great joy! We begin the Advent adventure anew today! God continually is being incarnated in this world, living among, in, and through, us! We welcome the birth! We celebrate the good news! Emmanuel! God-with-us! May we share our offerings and gifts.

Meditation & Benediction

**Shelly Wilson**

Postlude

**Shirley Hand**

Following worship, please join us outside for socially distanced coffee & conversation.



## Prayer Concerns

- ❖ Charlotte Hanna, hospitalized Largo Medical Center
- ❖ Jay Gallagher, respiratory concerns
- ❖ All who are traveling, those suffering from the pandemic and injustice.

## Outreach and Missions

Thanks to everyone for your amazing support of all our many missions that are ongoing and so especially important in these hard, hard times! You can still help in these ways:

- ❖ Bake cookies for those on the front lines of COVID: Boxes available in Narthex; hopefully, bakers are taking them to fill up (instructions in boxes and all boxes have been sanitized)
- ❖ Bring school supplies (books for preschoolers, crayons, play doh) and snack items for students: Collection bins in narthex
- ❖ Christmas gifts for families of Healthy Start Pinellas. All the families in need have been chosen by our members! Thanks! Gifts due back 12/6.
- ❖ Miracles Girls: possible projects: journaling kits and fleece wraps for the girls! More details to follow! Watch emails and the bulletins for more info!
- ❖ Pinellas Hope: We are scheduled for dinner (and hopefully, gift distribution) on Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup>. Stay tuned for more info!

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*THANKS FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!*

*THANKS FOR BEING THE CHURCH!*

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**Church of the Isles-United Church of Christ** 200 24<sup>th</sup> Ave., Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785  
727-595-1038 [www.churchoftheisles.org](http://www.churchoftheisles.org)  
Rev. Dr. Shelly Wilson, Pastor (352) 359-1869  
Rev. Bill Main, Associate for Visitation (727) 291-3663  
Jan Kreuger, Moderator (314) 562-4585  
Beach Community Thrift Store (727) 444-0339