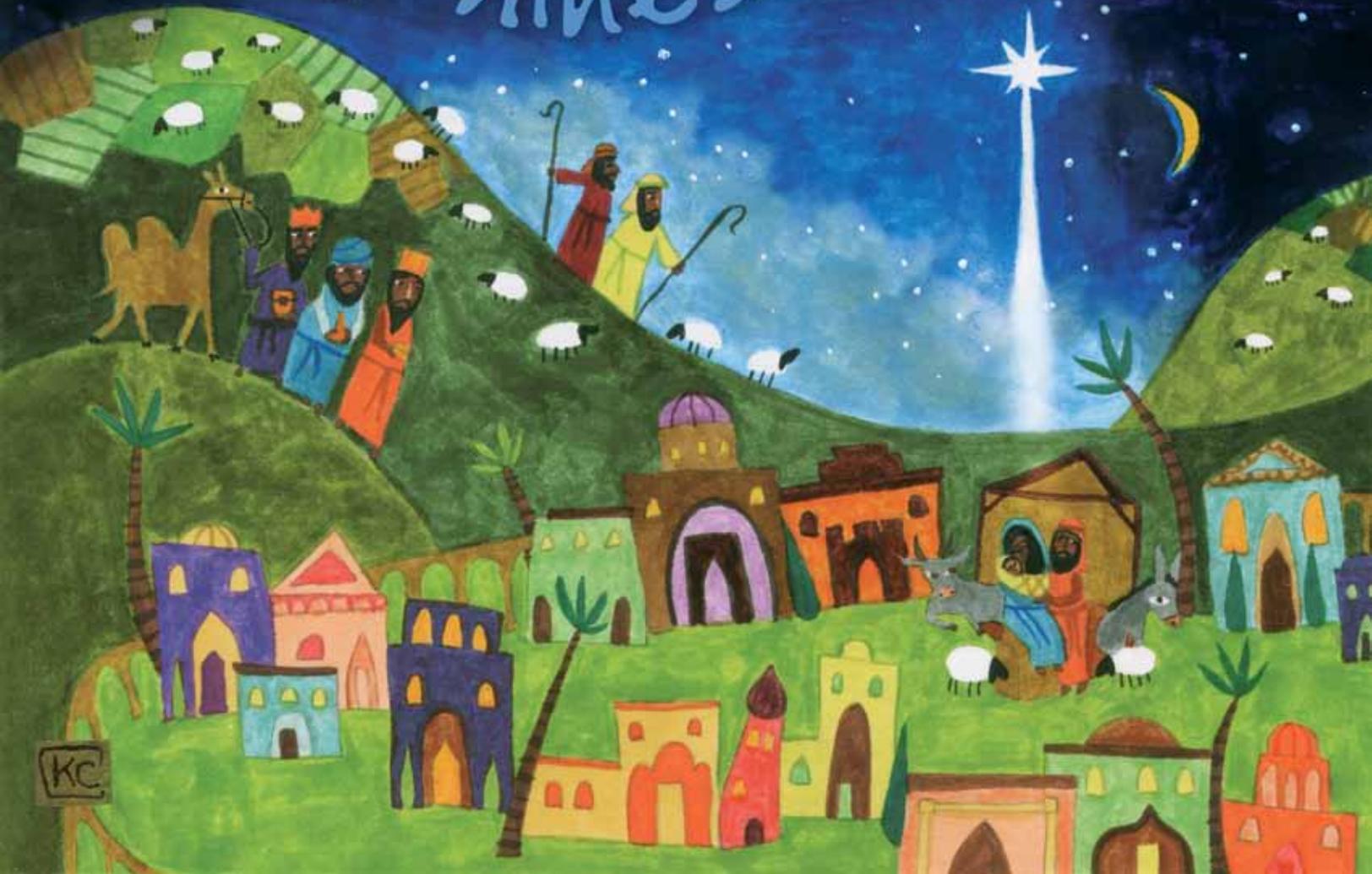


love shines through



“Mini Nativity” by Kate Cosgrove

2015  
★  
THE CHRISTMAS FUND  
for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

God is still speaking,  
**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



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# CHRISTMAS FUND 2015

## WORSHIP RESOURCES

The theme for the 2015 Christmas Fund Offering is **Love Shines Through**. These worship resources have been developed around that theme using the Revised Common Lectionary readings for this year's Advent/Christmas season. Ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations, bulletin inserts, information on how the funds are used, and an archive of previous years' worship resources are available at [www.christmasfund.org](http://www.christmasfund.org).

*We thank you for your willingness to use these worship resources and promote the important ministry that happens through the Christmas Fund!*

### ADVENT I – HOPE

**Isaiah 60: 2-3a; Luke 21: 25-26**

#### Prayer of Preparation

One: This is the day we begin our journey to the Child, His Mother and the manger.

**All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.**

One: It is a journey shrouded in a fading sun and a growing uncertainty as the world turns cold. And we journey anyway.

**All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.**

One: We journey because we are drawn to God's light at the end: it is God's promise, borne into our lives.

**All: May we kindle God's light together as we journey on.**

One: This is the day we begin our journey. May we kindle God's light within us, together, as we journey on.

**All: Amen.**

#### Lighting the Advent Candle

One: We light this candle in HOPE. [The candle is lit.] We bring this light of hope with us, together, on this journey. Hope comes from the Child and our hope is dedicated to the Child lying in a manger. Seeking goodness only, for our neighbors and for ourselves, may we kindle God's light of hope within us.

*The first verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" may be sung in response. Following the carol response, the leader may lead the congregation in this prayer.*

One: Let us pray together.

**All: Good and gracious God, God of darkness and light, God of hope and fear, help us take one step closer to you, toward the joy of unity with you. In this candle light, show us that the power of hope silences doubts and fears. Take this light, small but mighty, and magnify it within us until our hope chases away all shadows around our church, our**

**community, our nations and our world. Amen.**

**Call to Offering** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

What does it mean to hope? It means to put your whole trust in God, believing that God's promises of blessing will be fulfilled. For those who devote their talents, skills and time to our churches in the United Church of Christ, both authorized ministers and lay leaders, hope is a muscle. During this Advent season, we receive a Special Mission Offering for the UCC Christmas Fund, and we do this to show our gratitude for all our leaders. This offering will help both active and retired clergy meet basic financial needs like health care and retirement income. Moreover, the Christmas Fund Offering provides emergency assistance in times of financial strife. This offering is our chance to strengthen our own muscles of hope and to keep lit its beacon for those who serve the Church. Let us receive this morning's offering.

**Prayer of Dedication**

One: Please join me as we dedicate our gifts.

**All: Gracious God, bestow upon our gifts your great blessing. For those who need them most, may they be the symbol of hope we wish to bear into this world. In giving them, strengthen our hope as we anticipate the birth of all hope, grace, and glory. Amen.**

## **ADVENT II – PEACE**

**Luke 3:1-6**

**Lighting the Advent Candles**

One: We light this candle of peace,

**All: Reflecting on the proclamation of John the Baptist more than 2,000 years ago and working to spread the good news today.**

One: We light this candle of peace,

**All: Working toward and crying out for a world where everyone's basic needs are met.**

One: We light this candle of peace,

**All: Smoothing the rough ways and making paths in order to end discrimination and persecution.**

One: We light this candle of peace,

**All: Awaiting the arrival of Jesus Christ, light of the world. There is darkness everywhere. Be the light.**

*The two candles of Hope and Peace are lit.*

**Call to Offering** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

Presents and gifts are often on our minds during the Season of Advent. As we prepare to give our gifts this morning, let us take a moment to remember the many gifts that have been bestowed upon us. Gifts of love, time, education; gifts from our parents, our teachers, our pastors; gifts from God. During this season of Advent, our special offering will be used to support the Christmas Fund of

the United Church of Christ. Our special offering this morning will benefit active and retired pastors and lay employees with health care, retirement income, and relief from financial emergency. Let us give graciously, in celebration of the many gifts we receive and in anticipation of the gift of God's Son.

**Prayer of Dedication** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

One: Will you please join me in prayer:

**All: Gracious Giver, bless these gifts that are present before you. May they be used to provide for those who have given to us. Use them, we pray, that they may help your light continue to shine in a world that can often seem dark. We ask you this, in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.**

**ADVENT III – JOY**

**Luke 3:7-18**

**Lighting the Advent Candles**

One: This morning, hear anew the Baptizer's prophetic announcement of the coming of the Messiah and interpret it wisely.

**All: We need not shrink from the challenge of repentance because when we've been truly rearranged on the inside, we will bear good fruit on the outside.**

One: During these troubling times in our nation and around the world, the question from the crowds still persists, "What then should we do?"

**All: Once again we humbly dedicate ourselves to kindness, to justice, and to fairness.**

One: On this third Sunday of Advent, we light a candle of joy, as a visible symbol of these "fruits worthy of repentance."

**All: Come let us be baptized with winds of the Spirit and refined by the fire of God's word.**

*Three candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy are lit.*

One: Let us, though many, pray in one voice.

**All: Gracious and loving God, as we await the coming of the One whom you sent, grant that our waiting might be the active kind. Give us the courage to meet the challenge of altering our thoughts and feelings about the world around us so that our actions might also be changed. Help us to keep our priorities straight, our passions properly pointed, and our eyes fixed upon the prize of joy. Remind us that you lovingly require evidence of our repentance – kindness, justice and fairness. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Call to Offering** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

Giving can be seen as a privilege rather than a problem, especially when we do so under the influence of joy. Mother Teresa described joy as a net of love by which souls may be caught.

During the Advent season, in addition to our regular offering, we embrace a unique giving opportunity – a Special Mission Offering of the United Church of Christ called the Christmas Fund. This offering celebrates clergy and lay leaders who have shared their gifts and cast their nets on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. This Offering benefits active and retired pastors and lay employees with health care, retirement income, and relief from financial emergency. The Christmas Fund Offering represents a moment when we return a portion of the love we have received to those who have first loved and served us. Let us pour out our joy even as we are filled with expectation for the coming Messiah.

**Prayer of Dedication** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund Offering today)*

One: Please join me in prayer.

**All: God of justice and joy, we make this special offering knowing that it is acceptable not only because there are those who need our gifts, but also because You have called us to be givers. Bless these donations and multiply them by your Holy Spirit so that they may bring assurance of your provision and grace to those who have faithfully served the United Church of Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

## ADVENT IV – LOVE

### Luke 2:1-14

#### Lighting the Advent Candles

One: Elizabeth was barren with no hope for a child, but then a baby filled her womb. The presence of new life filled her with hope.

**All: May the light of Christ fill us with hope.**

*(Liturgist lights the Hope candle)*

One: Elizabeth did not know why Mary came rushing through her doors, but the leap of her unborn child filled her with the knowledge of the Lord. The knowledge of the Lord filled her with peace.

**All: May the light of Christ fill us with peace.**

*(Liturgist lights the Peace candle)*

One: John the Baptist, while in the womb of his mother, expressed the joy of generations to come. The faith of Mary filled the unborn babe with joy.

**All: May the light of Christ fill us with joy.**

*(Liturgist lights the Joy candle)*

One: In a moment filled with hope, in a moment filled with peace, in a moment filled with joy, Mary opens her mouth to sing, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." Mary rejoices in the God who loves the oppressed; Mary rejoices in the God who loves hungry. Mary a maiden, Mary unseen by the powerful of the world, is

filled with the light and made powerful by a God bent on overturning the world with a teenage girl and newborn babe.

**All: Like the first disciple Mary, let the light of Christ fill us with love.**

*(Liturgist lights the Love candle)*

### **Prayer**

One: Please join me in prayer.

**All: God of Love, we thank you for bringing the light of Christ into the world. May the love shared by Elizabeth and Mary serve as a beacon for our own affections. May we, like Mary, create love that exalts the lowly and makes low the proud. May we all bear the light that changes the world. Amen.**

### **Call to Offering**

One: Filled with the love and light of Christ, we now take a moment to recognize those ministers and lay employees of the United Church of Christ who work to maintain the love and light we feel. We have all experienced moments in which love and light feel far from our reality. In these moments, we are blessed with ministers and lay employees who take us aside to listen and offer support. The light of their presence helps us to rekindle our own light. Today's special offering will support the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund provides us with an opportunity to assist ministers and lay employees with support during retirement or in the midst of a crisis. When their wick burns low, we can serve them as they have served us. Please extend your generosity not only to the regular offering, but also to the Christmas Fund. In doing so, we show our love by supporting the current and future Veterans of the Cross.

**Prayer of Dedication** *(for churches receiving the Christmas Fund offering today)*

One: Please join me in prayer.

**All: God of Love, we are grateful for these gifts of the congregation. Bless the lives of those who will be served by these gifts, for they have chosen a life of service in your church. May we be blessed by the giving of these gifts, knowing they will help support our Veterans of the Cross as they seek rest in retirement or solace in the midst of a crisis. In the name of the One who died so we may live, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

**Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20**

### **Lighting the Advent Candles**

*As the liturgist approaches, the hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" plays softly.*

One: As night falls, and the shadows grow long, we wait in hopeful expectation for the coming light.

**All: (sing)**

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,**

**that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the child of God appear.**

*(Liturgist lights the Hope candle while congregation sings)*

One: As war and violence swirl around us, we watch for the coming Prince of Peace.

**All: (sing)**

**O come, desire of Nations, bind  
all people in one heart and mind.  
Bid all our sad divisions cease,  
and fill the world with Heaven's peace.**

*(Liturgist lights Peace candle while congregation sings)*

One: As our we struggle amid the shadows and gloom, we drink deeply from the font of all joy.

**All: (sing)**

**O come, Key of David come,  
and open wide your heavenly home;  
make safe the path to endless day,  
to death's destruction close the way.**

*(Liturgist lights Joy candle while congregation sings)*

One: As love seems a rare commodity in our world, we cling to the love that will not let us go.

**All: (sing)**

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirits by thine advent here;  
Love stir within the womb of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.**

*(Liturgist lights the Love candle while congregation sings)*

One: People of God, rejoice, for a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Mother, Prince of Peace.

**All: (Singing)**

**Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel. (2x)**

*(Liturgist lights the Christ candle)*

### **Call to Offering**

When the shepherds met the newborn Christ, they immediately turned into preachers, choir members, and ministers. The text in Luke says, "The shepherds then returned to their fields glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard." When we encounter Jesus it is natural to want to sing, to dance, to laugh, to gasp, to give. True generosity flows not from duty, but from awe.

Tonight's offering will be given in whole to the Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ. The Christmas Fund provides support for those who serve the church and are experiencing financial distress. Your gracious giving can be a light for those walking in shadows, it can be a hope for those in trying times, it can be love for those who feel forgotten. In the spirit of Christmas joy, please give as you are able.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

One: Please join me in prayer.

**All: Gracious God, we pray that you would richly bless and multiply these gifts. May all who receive these gracious offerings know that you are with them. And in our giving may we know that you are with us. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ, our Emmanuel, God with us, in our giving and our receiving. Amen.**

### **WORSHIP IDEA FOR CHILDREN AT ADVENT/CHRISTMAS**

Depending on the time, this idea can be done during Sunday School or during the Children's Message portion of the service.

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes, before the service

**Tools:** "The Other Wise Man" (Van Dyke, Henry (story); Pamela Kennedy (author); Robert Barrett (illustrator). The Other Wise Man. Hambleton-Hill Publishing: Nashville, 1989), envelopes for each child, and 2-3 strips of seasonal colored paper to fit into the envelopes.

**Preparation:** Cut the strips of paper and write one of the following phrases on each of the strips: "You are special!", "Thank you for all you do!", "Rock on!", "You are a blessing!"

**Activity:**

### **RESOURCES FOR ANY TIME OF YEAR**

#### **Call to Worship 1**

One: One: Lift your hearts. Lift your eyes. Lift your voices.

**All: The living God, the moving Spirit of God has called us together – in witness, celebration, and struggle.**

One: Reach out toward each other!

**All: Our God reaches out toward us! Come, let us worship God!**

#### **Call to Worship 2**

One: Though the way is long and the road is tough,

**All: We do not travel alone.**

One: Though the shadows loom and the wind will rise,

**All: We find strength together.**

One: Though our feet ache and our muscles strain,

**All: We can make it home only with the help of each other.**

One: We are a pilgrim people.

**All: No one gets left behind.**

One: And as we travel, may we remember the God who has promised to travel with us.

**All: Come let us sing praises to this God, our companion on the road.**

### **Call to Offering 1**

A Veteran of the Cross is a term historically used by the United Church of Christ Christmas Fund to describe clergy and lay employees who have served and are serving the church. Although we may experience our ministers and lay employees as tireless, the truth of the matter is they need rest. Although we may be unaware of the hardships and trials of our ministers and lay employees, unexpected deaths, illness, and disasters regularly occur in their lives.

The Christmas Fund provides emergency grants for clergy and lay employees during the unexpected times of financial need. Further, the Fund provides monthly pension supplements to more than 400 lower-income retired UCC clergy.

Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks are also issued to over 500 retirees. We may not be in the Christmas season, but we can participate in the spirit of the season by giving to the Christmas Fund. Today, we have an opportunity to show our gratitude by providing financial support for those who have ministered to us week in and week out.

### **Prayer of Dedication 1**

One: Let us pray together.

**All: Creator God, we are gathered in this space of worship, which was built with earthly materials and through the spiritual gifts of our Veterans of the Cross. Bless these gifts and be with those who will receive these funds in retirement and in emergency situations. We are thankful for the opportunity to give back to our church leaders, from whom we have received so much. In the name of the Son of God, who modeled a life of service, so that we could follow his example, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

### **Call to Offering 2**

We all have our strengths to donate to our community. The authorized ministers and lay employees in the United Church of Christ have donated their time and energy to guide us to spiritual heights and have served us when we were spiritually empty. We receive a Special Mission Offering during this time of year to show our gratitude for all our leaders. This Offering helps both active and retired clergy meet basic financial needs like health care and retirement

income, and in times of financial strife, the Offering provides emergency assistance. This is our chance to strengthen our community's commitment to those who serve. Let us receive this morning's Offering.

### **Prayer of Dedication 2**

**One:** Please join me in prayer as we dedicate our gifts.

**All:** **Gracious God, bestow upon our gifts your great blessing. For those who need them most, may they be the gratitude we wish to show, and may they be the symbols of grace we wish to bear into this world. In giving them, strengthen us through the power of their leadership and work in the Spirit. Amen.**

### **Call to Offering 3**

Answering God's call is rewarding and challenging. Those called to ministry give their time, talents and love continuously, often without anything in return. Today's Special Mission Offering will support those who have faithfully served the United Church of Christ and its mission. Today's Offering will assist authorized ministers and lay employees with support during retirement, during times of crisis, and in subsidizing health care costs. Let us give as they have given, freely and generously, without expectations of what can be gained.

### **Prayer of Dedication 3**

**All:** **Generous God, we ask that you use these gifts to support those who have so generously supported us. May they be a token of our appreciation for their countless hours of service and dedication to you and your work. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, whose path we long to follow. Amen.**

## **AUTHORS OF WORSHIP RESOURCES**

Our special thanks to the following students and professor at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts for creating the 2015 liturgical resources. Andover Newton, one of the seminaries of the United Church of Christ, was founded in 1807 and is "deeply rooted in the Christian faith and radically open to what God is doing now." To learn more, visit [www.ants.edu](http://www.ants.edu).

**Jack Farrell** (Advent I) is a recent graduate of Andover Newton Theological School. He is focusing on a ministry of chaplaincy work, and he is invested in working within an educational ministry environment for all ages. Jack currently lives in rural New York and has been dividing his time between pulpit supply preaching and working on any of his many creative writing projects – another lifelong pursuit and joy. Jack hopes to complete his ordination requirements in the coming year, as he continues to discern his call by God.

**Casey Guet** (Advent IV) is a third year Master of Divinity candidate at Andover Newton Theological School. She served as Student Association President during the 2014-2015 academic year. Casey is serving as the Student Minister at First Church Somerville, UCC in Massachusetts for the 2015-2016 academic year.

**Sarah Krhla** (Advent II) serves as Director of Faith Formation at the Church of Christ, Congregational UCC in Goshen, Connecticut while she pursues her Master of Divinity at Andover Newton Theological School. The married mother of three children, ages 10, 8, and 6, Sarah received her undergraduate degree in early childhood education at Stonehill College in Massachusetts.

**Fredd Ward** (Advent III) serves as Associate Pastor at the Congregational Church of Naugatuck, Connecticut with licensed standing in the Naugatuck Valley Association of the United Church of Christ. He has served in the national setting of the UCC as a member of the Justice and Witness Ministries Board of Directors and the Executive Council. He lives in Hartford with his wife, Sandy, and is the father of two children, Nathaniel and Cassidy — ages 16 and 10. He expects to graduate from Andover Newton Theological School in December 2015.

**Adam Hearlson** (project editor and Christmas Eve) is the Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship, and Director of Wilson Chapel at Andover Newton Theological School. Originally from California, Adam received his B.A. from Vanguard University and his Master of Divinity and Ph.D from Princeton Theological Seminary. He has also served congregations in Costa Mesa, California; at the Princeton University Chapel; and in Warren, New Jersey. Adam is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

Currently, Adam's research interests include the role of worship in social resistance, how the visual images are being incorporated into the preaching moment, and the role of food in Christian ritual. Adam is fascinated by the myriad ways in which people live out their faith. When he is not leading worship or teaching, he enjoys NBA basketball games or cooking for his family.



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