



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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Ministers: All the Members of the Church

The Rev. Charles Ericson, Intentional Interim Minister

Erik Haeger, Organist

Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

Mandy Boukus, Office Assistant

December 28, 2025 ~ First Sunday After Christmas

Welcome to Our Guests!

*We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church...
if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!*

I. We Gather

Prelude

Medley of Selected Carols

Justin Chase

Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Chuck Ericson

Family of Faith, may the grace and peace of Jesus Christ be with us all!

Good morning and Merry Christmas! Whether this is your first time with us or your hundredth time, we are so glad you are here. And as we always say, "No matter who you are, or where you are in your life's journey, you are most warmly and enthusiastically welcome here!"

You may have noticed that our worship setup is a bit unique this morning. Instead of worshiping in pews, we are worshiping around tables. Instead of facing the front, we are facing one another. Instead of listening to one person do a lot of talking, we're going to listen to each other. And the reason we are doing all of this is because the last Sunday of the year deserves something special. So this morning we will break bread and sing. We will pray and listen. We will gather together, and God will meet us here, for surely God is in this space.

Call to Worship

Don Baxter

Leader: In worship, we hear God's story and we ask,

All: What did God do long ago?

In worship, we hear God's story, so we ask,

What is God doing, here and now?

In worship, we hear God's story, then we ask,

What can I do to respond to it all?

Listen, God is speaking. Listen, it may be time to act.

Let us worship our moving, inspiring, with-us God. Amen.

Call to Confession

Family of faith, the invitation of our faith is simple. We are invited to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. And yet, those acts have always been easier said than done. That is why, once in awhile, we need the Prayer of Confession. In confession, we speak honestly with God. We tell the truth of our lives, and in response, God offers us grace. God picks us up, shakes the dust off our weary bones, and shows us how to keep walking toward God. So let us go to God in prayer, not because we have to, but because God will always meet us there. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession

Emmanuel, God with us,

Scripture tells us that you were a refugee, but we often forget that information. We also forget about the acts of violence against your people. We forget how many people go hungry, or how many students do not have access to good education. We forget the injustices in our world that feel too big for us to face. But you are a God who refuses to forget. So today we pray: make it impossible for us to overlook the stories of those in need. Make it impossible for us to sweep injustice under the rug. Open our eyes along with our hearts, so that the anger we feel around injustice might fuel a fire for action. With hope for a better tomorrow we pray, Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Church family, even when we fail to do justice, even when we fail to love kindness, even when we allow fear to override action, freezing us in place, God still loves us. So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: On our best days and on our worst days, we belong to God. We are invited into community. We are held in God's grace. We are forgiven. And we are sent to serve. Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

Sung Response

Go Tell It On the Mountain (1 verse)

Refrain:

Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.

v1: While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold throughout the heavens,
there shone a holy light.

[Refrain]

II. The Word

Prayer for Illumination & Blessing for the Meal

In a few moments, we will break bread together. Once everyone has been served and we are all settled at our tables, we will hear scripture read and proclaimed and spend some time engaging in conversation together as we eat. So let us now pray a blessing for our food as we also invite God to speak to us through today's scripture and our conversations together.

There is a Latin American prayer that says:

Thank you God for the bread.

To those who have hunger, give bread.

To those who have bread, give a hunger for justice.

Thank you God for the bread.

This morning, we add a second verse to that prayer, saying together:

Thank you God for the Word.

To those who seek your truth, may they hear your Word clearly.

To those who hear your Word clearly, may they speak of love fervently.

Thank you God for the Word. Amen.

Sharing the Meal

Scripture Reading

Matthew 2:1-23

Scripture for Four Voices

Don Baxter is the voice of the narrator. Karen Christianson is the voice of (and narrator for) the magi. Deb Hubbell is the voice of (and narrator for) Herod. Jo-Ann Wunschel is the voice of the prophets and angels.

DON: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking,

KAREN: "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."

DON: 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,

JO-ANN: "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.'"

DON: 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,

DEB H: "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."

DON: 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.

KAREN: 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.

DON: Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,

JO-ANN: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

DON: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet,

JO-ANN: “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

DEB H: When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

JO-ANN: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

DON: When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

JO-ANN: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.”

DON: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,

JO-ANN: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Carol

What Child Is This?

Back of bulletin

Breakfast & Table Discussion

- When you hear the story of the Holy Family fleeing political persecution, how does it make you feel? Does it make you think of any current or historical events?
- We often skip the story of Herod’s persecution and the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt. Why do you think that is? What do we lose if we don’t read and know about this text?
- There is so much suffering in the world. What is one organization, non-profit, or grassroots movement that inspires you?
- Where and how do you see our congregation making a difference in the world? Where can we grow in this next year and the years to come?
- The scripture of the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt is a story that stirs up compassion for refugees. When it comes to the work of justice, compassion, and peace, what other causes or movements are you invested in?

- The theme for this morning is, “Let fear fire a fuel for justice.” How can we move from fear to action? How do we not let fear stop us in our tracks?

A Reading

“Until We Reach the Sun”
by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Barbara Dobrocki

Buffaloes are the only animals that run into a storm.
They can smell the snow coming. They can feel the temperature change—
deep in their bones. So they gather together, a pack on the plains.
And with their large lumbering bodies, they run.
They run through snow and ice, wind and rain. They do not stop
until they reach the sun.
When you are afraid, because this world is cruel and harsh,
or because humans are deported and shot without reason,
or because we cannot remember how to talk to each other civilly,
I will be your pack. I will stay by your side. I will run with you
until we reach the sun.

III. Response | Acts of Justice

The story of Herod’s brutality is one we know all too well. Our world is full of vengeful leaders and violence. On this day, we not only want to acknowledge that truth, but respond in a tangible way.

Through *Church World Service (CWS)* our United Church of Christ works collaboratively with 36 other denominations to provide basic human needs, support and relief to people around the globe when violence has struck, natural disasters have occurred or poverty and hunger persist. The following videos give us a glimpse of the 75 years of this love-bearing and life-changing ministry of the Body of Christ, and also the CWS kits that this congregation has contributed to over the years.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLQKeewlbvQ>
and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IJtRBNU1Gs>

Call to Offering

First Church has a long-standing relationship with Church World Service through initiatives such as the CROP Walk, CWS Blankets, CWS Tools and CWS Kits. We hope these two videos provide you with a more complete understanding of the history and purpose of Church World Service as we participate in its programs in the coming months and years.

We also make a difference in the lives of our local communities through First Church’s Ministry of Caring. There are marked bowls at your table for a special Christmas offering that will help to carry out the outreach efforts of our Ministry of Caring in 2026.

Our regular collection plates are on the table by the kitchen door for you to leave your weekly offerings. It’s a good time to fulfill your annual pledge today or in the next few days.

Offertory Music

Justin Chase

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Holy and loving God,

You are the one who paints the sky with stars each night.

You are the one who stirs our souls awake and invites us to dream.

You are the one who was born in a manger, and you are the one who meets us now.

So with gratitude and humility, we bring you our prayers.

Loving God, we have so much to be grateful for in this season. As we move toward the end of the year, we look back on the last 12 months with gratitude for every joyful memory.

Thank you for the winter snows and the summer sun.

Thank you for the moments of laughter and the moments of growth.

Thank you for the magic of Christmas and the joys of life in community.

Holy God, thank you for every beautiful and lovely thing.

However, in addition to our gratitude, God, we also look back over these last 12 months with painful awareness that life on Earth is far from perfect. God, we worry for those who are hungry. We worry for those who have been told all their life that there is no room in the inn for them. We worry for those who feel alone, and for those trapped in layers of grief.

Emmanuel, when we look back over the last 12 months, it is clear that there has been abundant beauty and abundant suffering. Where there is injustice—where there is violence and suffering, bigotry and hatred—fuel a fire in us. Show us how to care for our immigrant neighbors, our hungry neighbors, our Republican and Democrat neighbors, our male, female, and nonbinary neighbors. Show us how to love as you loved. Show us how to make this next year a little more beautiful and a lot more loving than the last.

And as you do, we ask that you pour out your Spirit on our offerings that support the ongoing ministries of our church, the cooperative ecumenical missions of Church World Service, and the special Christmas offering toward caring ministries here in our local community.

May the individuals and families receiving these items feel your love through these small gifts. May this act of service bind us all more closely to our neighbors. May your protection safeguard everyone who is in harm's way. With hope for tomorrow and the determination to make this world a safer place for us all, let us now pray the words your son taught us to pray, saying. . .

**Our Father/Mother/Creator,
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/sins/trespasses,

as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

IV. Sending

Ritual of Release for our Intentional Interim Minister

Deb Richards: One thing ends, another begins. One door closes another opens. For everything and everyone there is a season, a few seasons, or many seasons. Today we celebrate our season together with Pastor Chuck, the lessons learned, and the tears and laughter shared. Our church family is constantly changing. People come and go through the seasons of our lives together.

All: Each has gifts to share. Each leaves part of themselves here with us and takes a part of us along with them. In every new beginning is an ending. In every ending, there is a new beginning.

Deb Richards: Today, we bid farewell to Pastor Chuck, who has faithfully served this church and this congregation during this interim time between settlers ministers. Pastor Chuck, we are grateful for the gifts and spiritual leadership you have shared with our community of faith, and we thank you for your service.

Chuck: I am very grateful for the time I have journeyed here and the season we have shared. I thank all of you for the kindness, support, and care that I have found in this church. I am grateful for the ways my leadership and creativity has been accepted and encouraged. I ask forgiveness for mistakes I've made, thoughtless words I've said, and things I am leaving left undone. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

All: We appreciate your time with us and all your efforts on our behalf. We offer you our forgiveness. We, in turn, ask your forgiveness for any mistakes we made, thoughtless words we said, and things we've left undone.

Chuck: I offer you my forgiveness.

Donna Clauson: Do you, friends and members of the First Church of Christ in Mansfield, release Pastor Chuck from the duties of Pastor of this church, and offer your encouragement and support best wishes in the days and years to come?

All: We do, with the help of God.

Donna Clauson: Chuck, do you release this church from turning to you and depending on you, and offer your encouragement and support for the continued ministry here and for the person who is coming to serve after you?

Chuck: I do, with the help of God.

Deb Hubbell: As the Registrar of the Windham Association of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, I have witnessed the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness and release. The member churches of our Association and Conference hold each of you in prayer. The Association Council pledges its support in the transitions signified in this service.

All: Thanks be to God.

Deb Hubbell: Governing Board and Ministry Team leaders, I invite you to come up for our laying on of hands. Will everyone please rise as you are able, and all who wish may come forward for the laying on of hands. Or you may reach out your hand in blessing from where you are or put your hand on the shoulder of your nearest neighbor as we send Pastor Chuck out into the world with our blessings.

Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded of you. And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Pastor Chuck, we offer our blessing as you conclude your ministry among us. We will hold you in our prayers as we know you will be praying for us. Pastor Chuck, go now in peace.

Demonstration of Gratitude

Closing Hymn

Go, My Children, With My Blessing

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Benediction

In a fearful world, may you look for God's spirit.
May you reach for each other's hands.
May you choose courage whenever you can.
And in all things, may you remember that good news is louder than fear.
In the name of the one who calls,
the one who sends,
and the one who journeys with—
go in peace and
be not afraid.
Amen.

Passing of the Peace

Friends, the peace of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem and forever alive in our hearts, is with you now and in all the days to come.

And also with you.

Let us share with one another a sign of that peace.

Postlude

Liturgy by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org; also adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

This Advent and Christmastide we have been using the creative ministry resources from A Sanctified Art LLC. The 2025 Advent theme is "What Do You Fear?: Insisting on Hope this Advent."

Luke's Gospel begins the story of Jesus with this opening line: "In the time of Herod..." The story reveals layers of information about the fearful world Jesus entered, one filled with rampant oppression, economic

disparity, uncertainty, and instability. A world not so unlike our own. And yet, throughout the stories of Christ's birth, we hear the whispers of angels delivering a surprising message: "Do not fear."

Theme and Image for the First Sunday After Christmas:



The Holy Family fears for their safety and for their child's life, like so many refugees around the world. Their valid fears motivate them to move—and so they seek refuge in Egypt until it is safe for them to return home. Instead of trying to push fear away, what if we used it as fuel? What if we harnessed that incredible source of energy for good, fighting for a world where no one fears for their safety? Utilizing our fear wisely not only helps others; taking concrete action also interrupts the fear that so easily paralyzes us. The work helps others, but the act of putting our fear to work changes us, too.

Next Sunday, January 4th (Epiphany Sunday)

10:15 a.m. Worship & Worship Circle; Communion Sunday; Rev. Don Erickson's first Sunday

Four Marks of Our Thriving Church:

In his inaugural sermon series, Rev. Don will point to four wonderful characteristics that define First Church and discuss ways to reinforce these characteristics as we together build the Kin-dom of Christ in our beautiful college community.

- January 4 Clarity
- January 11 Compassion
- January 18 Creativity
- January 25 Contemplation

Joy to the World

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1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re -
 2. Joy to the world, the Sav - ior reigns! Let all their
 3. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the

ceive her King; let ev - ery heart pre - pare him room,
 songs em - ploy; while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 na - tions prove the glo - ries of his right - eous - ness,

and heaven and na - ture sing, and heaven and na - ture
 re - peat the sound - ing joy, re - peat the sound - ing
 and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his

And heaven and na - ture sing, and
 Re - peat the sound - ing joy, re -
 And won - ders of his love, and

sing, and heaven, and heaven and na - ture sing.
 joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.

heaven and na - ture sing,
 peat the sound - ing joy,
 won - ders of his love,



1. What Child is this who, laid to rest, on Ma-ry's lap is sleep-ing?
2. Why lies he in such mean es-tate where ox and ass are feed-ing?
3. So bring him in-cense, gold, and myrrh, come, rich and poor, to own him,



Whom an-gels greet with an-thems sweet, while shep-herds watch are keep-ing?
 Good Christ-ian, fear: for sin-ners here the si-lent Word is plead-ing.
 the King of kings sal-va-tion brings, let lov-ing hearts en-throne him.



Refrain



This, this is Christ the King, whom shep-herds guard and an-gels sing:



haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Son of Ma-ry.



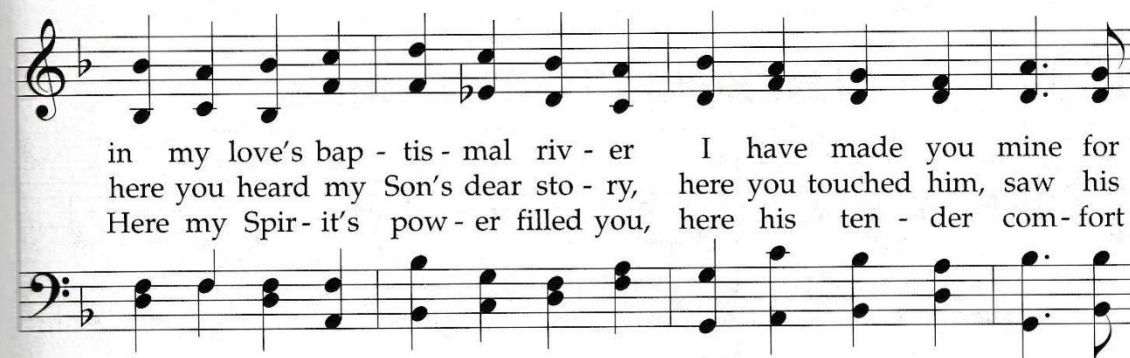
Go, My Children, with My Blessing 431



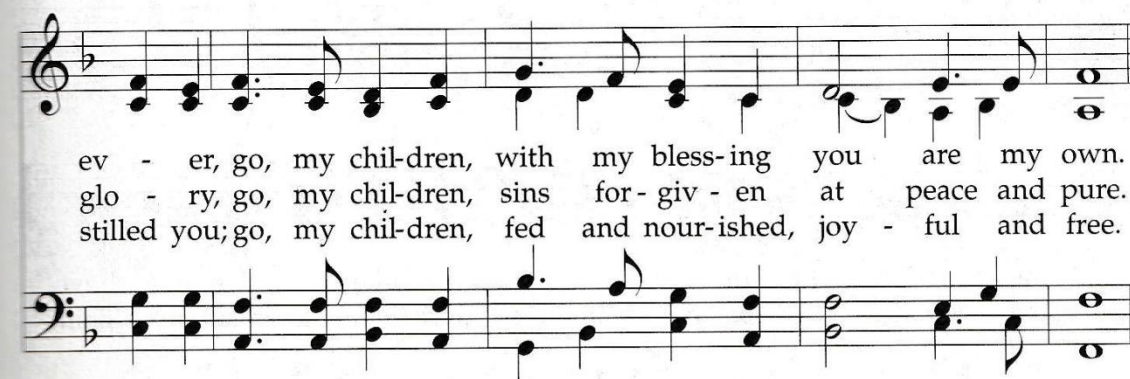
1. Go, my chil-dren, with my bless-ing, nev - er a - lone;
2. Go, my chil-dren, sins for - giv - en, at peace and pure,
3. Go, my chil-dren, fed and nour-ished, clos - er to me;



wak - ing, sleep - ing, I am with you, you are my own;
here you learned how much I love you, what I can cure;
grow in love and love by serv-ing, joy - ful and free.



in my love's bap - tis - mal riv - er I have made you mine for
here you heard my Son's dear sto - ry, here you touched him, saw his
Here my Spir - it's pow - er filled you, here his ten - der com - fort



ev - er, go, my chil-dren, with my bless-ing you are my own.
glo - ry, go, my chil-dren, sins for - giv - en at peace and pure.
stilled you; go, my chil-dren, fed and nour-ished, joy - ful and free.

WORDS: Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1983

MUSIC: Traditional Welsh melody; harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams

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