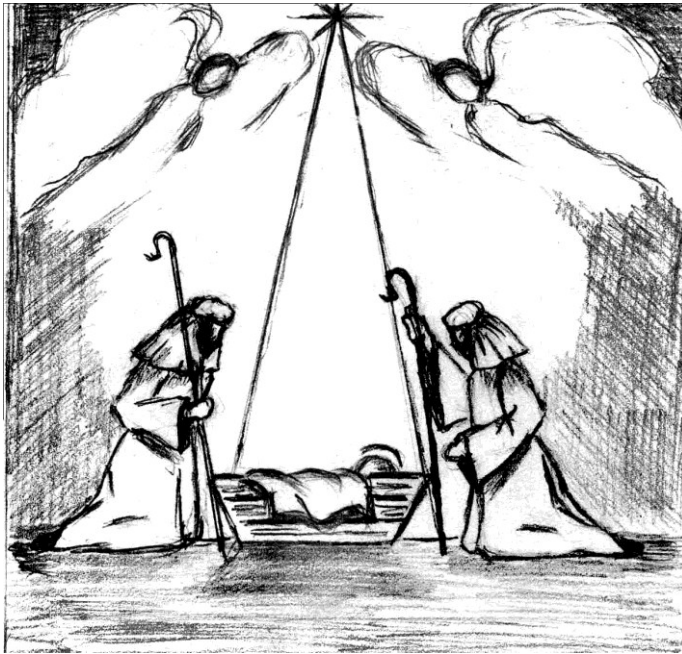


NIANTIC COMMUNITY CHURCH

An Open, Affirming, Reconciling congregation of
the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church

A Heritage of Faith since 1719 • Each Member a Minister



**“Whoever you are; wherever you are on life’s journey:
you are welcome here.”**

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF COMMUNION

December 24, 2011

11:00PM

PRELUDE

“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”

Linker

WELCOME and RITUAL OF FRIENDSHIP

Those in each pew closest to the center aisle will please begin passing the Friendship Pads so that everyone has an opportunity to indicate their presence here tonight and make a note of any messages. After the sharing of parish concerns, all will be invited to greet one another in Christian fellowship and love. Prayer requests will be collected during the second hymn.

INTROIT

“Joy!”
Agape Youth Ensemble

RECEIVING GOD’S WORD AND CHRIST’S LIGHT IN OUR WORSHIP

THE ADVENT WREATH

Leena Faulkner

Candle lighters: The long Advent journey to Bethlehem is ended.

Congregation: Jesus is born! The light of peace;

The light of hope;

The light of joy;

The light of love;

The light of Christ has come to shine for us and in us. Praise God, all earth and heaven!

[Light the Christ candle.]

All: O come, Desire of nations, bind

All peoples in one heart and mind;

Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,

And be Thyself our King of Peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

O Holy God, we hear the story of shepherds and magi, of Mary and Joseph, of prophets and angels, and we too come to Bethlehem for a blessing. You are born in our hearts because you have chosen the weakness of our bodies for your birth. We are filled with love because you have taken upon yourself our humanity; we are filled with hope because you have offered us your Spirit, your life and your light; we are filled with faith because all that is meek and lowly and humble in us and in creation becomes holy this night. Together we say, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill to all!”

✠ CAROL #224

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”
Prayer requests will be collected

IN DULCI JUBILO

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:1-20

REFLECTION

“Remembering Christmas”

John A. Nelson

✠ CAROL #246

“Joy to the World”

ANTIOCH

OFFERTORY

Leader: Tonight we remember that night when everything changed: light dispelled darkness; rejoicing replaced fear; and seemingly powerless love was born, to dispel loveless power. To this miracle and mystery we bow in wonder, and give our hearts.

Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

RECEIVING TITHES AND OFFERINGS

THE MUSICAL OFFERING

“Silent Night”

Linker

✠ CHORAL AFFIRMATION *unison*

CRANHAM

**What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him, give my heart.**

✠ UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION

God of mystery, of wonder and light and life, we pray that you will accept and bless these gifts. Let them be just a beginning of our response to the miraculous gift we remember tonight: the savior of the world, arriving as a baby whom we must adore and care for. May all that we give and all that we do make our world a place of joy for each of your children, and let our songs of wonder never cease. Amen.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Generous God, giver of every good gift,
you sent us the child Jesus as a light for our path.
Yet we confess that too often we shut ourselves to your light:
its brightness overwhelms our world-weary eyes.
Too often, we contented ourselves with the glitter of the world.
We have held back the gifts you placed within us;
we have tired of offering them to those in need.**

**God of wonder, let the birth that we celebrate tonight
be a rebirth of the Christ in each of us.
Lead us again to the humble place where our savior lies.
Renew in us the spirit of Christmas,
guiding us to share our vulnerability and your peace
with your children everywhere. We ask it in Jesus' name; Amen.**

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER *trespasses*

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE AND CONSECRATION

Leader: God of light, in whom there is no shadow, your gifts to us are from the very beginning of time.

People: They began with creation, when your Spirit gave form to the chaos of energy and matter, and when your word brought forth light on the face of the earth.

They continued with our ancient ancestors, like Noah, whom you blessed with the colorful promise of the rainbow,

And like Sarah and Abraham, whom you blessed with a child whose descendants, as many as the stars of the sky, were to be a light to the nations.

In the desert, you gave the gifts of manna and of living water to the weary pilgrims, whom you led with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

At last, you sent your love into the world in the form of a child, tiny and fragile and vulnerable, who from that moment was the very Light of Light, full of grace and truth, revealing your glory on earth.

As we receive this bread and cup, may we open our hearts to receive the love and grace of Jesus Christ, by which we may love one another. Be born among us! In Christ's name we pray; Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

SHARING THE BREAD AND CUP

We celebrate an open communion, and welcome every person to the table. We understand the sharing of the bread and the cup in Jesus' name to be a reenactment of an ancient vision of God's feast for all people. We don't require you to be a member of our church, or any church, to participate with us in this feast of grace: all that is needed is that you desire God's nurture.

Tonight communion will be offered by intinction. The deacons will invite you to walk forward; the pastor and deacons will serve you the bread, which you may dip it into the cup. (We use unfermented grape juice.) If you wish to have communion brought to you in the pew, please indicate so to one of the deacons.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING *unison*

**We give you thanks, O God, that you come to us
in the wonder and mystery of Jesus—**

both in one, long-ago night in the town of Bethlehem,
and in the timeless presence of Christ,
who pours himself into us through bread and cup.
Let there be no darkness here, for in the birth of the holy child,
you give us a flickering light that will shine
in us and everywhere the story is told.
With you, light and life have conquered death!
Send us out into the world rejoicing,
ready to share your love with the people we meet,
through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SENDING THE LIGHT INTO THE WORLD

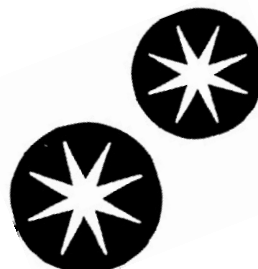
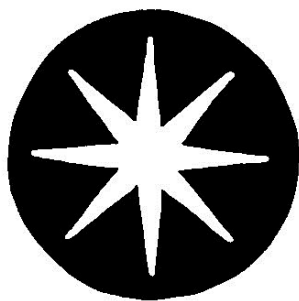
The Light of the Advent Candles has illumined our worship with its glow and its promise of hope, peace, love, and joy. Now as we prepare to carry light into the creation beyond these doors, we gather the light of the Advent promise. As we sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem," please form a circle around the sanctuary. As we sing "Silent Night," we will share the light of our candles with one another.

✘ CAROL "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

✘ CAROL "Silent Night, Holy Night"

✘ BENEDICTION

*Go with our prayers
for a wondrous,
blessed,
Merry Christmas!*



“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

- 1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.**
- 2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth!**
- 3. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!**



“Silent Night, Holy Night”

1. Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
2. Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
3. Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.



S i l e n t N i g h t , H o l y N i g h t

WELCOME TO NIAN TIC COMMUNITY CHURCH!

A Heritage of Faith since 1719, and an Open, Affirming, Reconciling congregation, Niantic Community Church is affiliated with the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ. It is also a welcoming home to people from many church backgrounds and life experiences. Your presence here today is a gift to us! We hope you will find the mystery and wonder of God's Spirit through our Christmas worship.

Please set cell phones and pagers to silent mode.

Assistive Listening Devices, Large Print Bulletins, and Hymnals are available. Please ask an usher for assistance!

Tonight's Worship Leaders:

Ushers: Sue Smith, Susan Brown, Jennifer Munzner, Mary Childs

Lay Reader: John Whritner

with special thanks to Sue Basham and friends, for decorating our sanctuary

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Ministers: All Participants in the Life of the Congregation

Worship & Music

Organist & Music Director: Dr. Paul Althouse

Director of Handbell Choirs: Lynne Floyd

Directors of Children's and Gospel Choirs:

Lee Wilkerson & Nikki Rollins

Sound Engineers: Dick Robinson & Ron Deziel

Education & Youth

Christian Education & Youth Minister:

Russell Kirby

Children's Center Director: Kathy Tiller

Caring & Community

Community Minister: Patty Chaffee

Parish Nurse: Marie LaTourette

Holding the Parts Together!

Church Secretary: Judy Snitkin

Church Officers: John Whritner, *president*;

Cindy King, *vice-president*; Avery Morgan,

clerk; Linda Leavens, *treasurer*, Liz Kuchta,

historian

Financial Secretary: Judy Layden

Bookkeeper: Sandra Kuchta

Librarian, Newsletter Editor: Jennifer Datum

Pastor and Teacher: The Rev. Dr. John A. Nelson

Niantic Community Church

170 Pennsylvania Avenue, Niantic, CT 06357 • Phone: 860-739-6208

Fax: 860-739-8308 • E-mail: NianticCommChurch@sbcglobal.net

NianticCommunityChurch.org

Church Office Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:30-5:00 p.m.; Friday 8:30-Noon