

Central United Methodist Church

3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95204

ORDER OF WORSHIP

SUNDAY, December, 24, 2022

9:00pm Worship Service



GATHERING

PRELUDE	<i>O Little Town of Bethlehem</i> (arr. Pepper Choplin) <i>He Is Born the Divine Christ Child</i> (arr. Lloyd Larson)	Monica Adams
INTROIT	<i>Sussex Carol</i> [arr. By Sir David Wilcocks]	Chancel Choir
GATHERING MOMENT		Alan England
SPECIAL MUSIC	<i>Silent Night</i>	Cambodian Choir Chancel Choir
*CALL TO WORSHIP		Rev. Viseth Hou
Leader:	In that region, there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.	
All:	An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.	
Leader:	But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.	
All:	Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.	
Leader:	Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,	
All:	"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Amen!	
*OPENING HYMN	<i>O Come, All Ye Faithful</i> (vv. 1-4)	UMH #234

ANTHEM *On Christmas Day, All Christians Sing* Chancel Choir
[English Carol, arr. Patti Drennan] Jessie Hernandez, Flute

THE LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE *He Came Down* TFWS #2085
*He came down that we may have life; he came down that we may have life;
he came down that we may have life, Hallelujah forevermore.*

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 9:2-7 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 638) Alan England
Leader: This is the word of God for the People of God.
All: Thanks be to God.

***HYMN** *Hark! The Herald Angles Sing* UMH #240

SCRIPTURE Luke 2:1-20 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 58) Alan England
Leader: This is the word of God for the People of God.
All: Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC *Sweet Little Jesus Boy* Rachelle Mimms, Soprano
[Robert MacGimsey]

CHRISTMAS EVE REFLECTION The Reel Christmas Story Rev. Sungho Lee
A Christmas Carol – From Scrooge to Ebenezer
(Written by the Rev. Mark Wharff and rearranged by the Rev. Sungho Lee)

SPECIAL MUSIC *Joy to the World* អំណរដល់លោក Cambodian Choir

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER Rev. Sungho Lee
Our Father, 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 trespasses as we forgive those who 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.

HYMN *The First Noel* (vv. 1-4) UMH #245

THANKSGIVING

CHRISTMAS OFFERING Alan England

OFFERTORY *Go Tell it on the Mountain* Ric Campero, Tenor
[arr. Mark Hayes] Monica Adams

***RESPONSE** *Joy to the World* (vs 1) UMH #246
*Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.*

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Alan England

SPECIAL MUSIC *O Holy Night* Dianne England, Soprano
[by Adolphe Adam] Monica Adams

SENDING FORTH

***BENEDICTION**

Rev. Sungho Lee

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

Silent Night

UMH #239

*Indicates please stand as you are able.

SERVING YOU TODAY

Rev. Sungho Lee
Rev. Viseth Hou
Alan England, Worship Leader
Ric Campero, Choir Director
Monica Adams, Organist/Pianist
David Campero, Livestream
Mark Wharff & Steven Adams, Media
Cherie Hudson, Facilities Coordinator
Rupert Cooper, Audio

OFFICE HOLIDAY SCHEDULE:

Dec. 25—26	Office Closed
Dec. 27—28	9:00am—12:00pm
Dec. 29 Jan 2	Office Closed

THE REEL CHRISTMAS STORY • December 24, 2023 — 9:00 P.M.
A Christmas Carol – From Scrooge to Ebenezer
(Written by the Rev. Mark Wharff and rearranged by the Rev. Sungho Lee)

A Christmas Carol

This Advent Season, we've prepared to celebrate the birth of Jesus by exploring the meaning of Christmas as depicted in some familiar Christmas Movies. Tonight, we'll look for the real meaning of Christmas through the lens of a familiar story that has been adapted for the screen 21 times, starting in 1901 with a 6-minute silent film. Tonight, we'll see some clips from one of the most recent versions: starring Jim Carrey, the 2009 Disney production of A Christmas Carol.

Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol in December of 1843.

It was released December 19, and the first printing sold out in 4 days.

Dickens' Response to his society.

Dickens authored A Christmas Carol as a way of trying to inspire and challenge people in Great Britain to understand that there really is a connection between the birth of Christ and kindness and compassion and care for those who are on the margins of society. In Dickens' Day children as young as 5 were working in the coal mines and factories. He saw people who were sent to debtors' prisons as his father had been or working under terrible conditions. And yet other people were completely oblivious to this. His hope was that this short novel

would touch the hearts of people, showing the link between Christmas, human compassion, kindness, and mercy.

A man before his transformation.

The main character in the story is Ebenezer Scrooge. The word scrooge is found in several English Dictionaries, defined as a mean or miserly person. Scrooge's perspective on Christmas before his transformation is expressed through a variety of quotes throughout the story. Here are a few examples:

Scrooge to the carolers: "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" This quote shows Scrooge's view of Christmas as a pointless holiday, one that only burdens the poor and does not benefit them. He believes that giving to charity is unnecessary and that the poor should be left to fend for themselves.

Scrooge to his nephew: "Bah! Humbug!" This iconic phrase is perhaps the most famous representation of Scrooge's hatred for Christmas. It encapsulates his general negativity and bitterness towards the holiday and all its traditions.

The process of his transformation.

The story chronicles Scrooge's personal transformation – his salvation. On that fateful Christmas Eve, he is visited by three spirits representing Christmases past, present, and future.

The first visitor shows Scrooge scenes from his childhood – and he was a joyful child. Then, year by year, he relives painful experiences from his youth. In another scene as a young adult, he's dancing with a young woman with whom he's falling in love. You think there's hope for young Scrooge as he and his beloved are engaged to be married. However, their relationship faces challenges due to Scrooge's growing obsession with wealth and his changing priorities.

Initially, Scrooge seems genuinely in love with Belle. He is attentive, caring, and expresses his desire to build a future with her. He even promises to change his ways and become more generous and compassionate. However, as Scrooge becomes increasingly focused on accumulating wealth, his love for Belle gradually fades. He prioritizes his business and financial gain over spending time with her or fulfilling her emotional needs. Belle recognizes this shift and eventually breaks off the engagement.

Scrooge's struggle lies in choosing between his love for Belle and his ambition for wealth. He faces a critical decision: to continue his pursuit of money, sacrificing his relationship with Belle, or to re-prioritize and focus on building a life with her.

When Belle confronts him about his neglect and changing priorities, Scrooge is unwilling to compromise. He prioritizes his financial ambitions over their relationship, leading to Belle's painful decision to leave him. In his later years, Scrooge deeply regrets losing Belle. He recognizes that his obsession with money cost him true love and happiness. This regret becomes a key driving force for his eventual transformation in the story.

Rearrange priorities in life: A Process of Sanctification.

We all change over time, don't we? All living things change. Healthy living things grow and mature – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

As children of God and followers of Jesus, we are transformed into the person God created us to be. The Wesleyan theological term for that process is Sanctification: growth in love, kindness, and compassion.

Part of what I love about this story is that Scrooge, though he is now an old man whose life has been going in the wrong direction for years, is still not beyond redemption. That is certainly a message from the very heart of the Gospel. We read in Luke chapter 19, verse 10:

"The Son of Man (that is, Jesus) came to seek and to save the lost."

No one is outside the range of God's forgiving grace.

No one is beyond the reach of God's redemptive love.

No one – not even Scrooge.

That brings us to Scrooge's second visitor that Christmas Eve: the ghost of Christmas present. Together, they fly over the rooftops of London to one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. There, they look in on a Christmas dinner table around which the family of Scrooge's lone employee, Bob Cratchit, is gathered. Now, for the first time, Scrooge is seeing the Cratchit family in their own home – and he learns something he had not known before.

Scrooge saw firsthand the Cratchits' meager living conditions. Their home was small and poorly furnished, their food was scarce, and their clothing was worn and patched. This realization challenged Scrooge's perception of the poor as lazy and undeserving, forcing him to confront the harsh realities of poverty.

Despite their poverty, however, the Cratchits were filled with love and joy. They celebrated Christmas with enthusiasm and gratitude, even though their feast was small. Scrooge was particularly struck by Tiny Tim's optimism and belief in the goodness of the world, despite his own illness and hardships. This showed Scrooge that true happiness does not depend on material possessions, but rather on the love and support of family.

Scrooge saw how Bob Cratchit, despite being underpaid and overworked, remained loyal and dedicated to his job. This surprised Scrooge, who had always viewed his employees with suspicion and resentment. Bob's unwavering commitment made Scrooge realize the value of his employees and the importance of treating them with respect and fairness.

Through the Ghost of Christmas Present, Scrooge saw a vision of Tiny Tim's potential death. This realization horrified Scrooge and made him understand the devastating consequences of his neglect and indifference towards others. He realized that his actions, or lack thereof, could have a significant impact on the lives of others.

What's happening to Scrooge? His heart is beginning to beat like a human heart again. For the first time in maybe half a century, he cares for someone other than himself. His indifference is wearing off, and suddenly he begins to feel compassion and concern for Tiny Tim.

Transformation happens when we notice God's broken heart.

One of the things Dickens wanted readers to understand was God's compassion and concern for the people on the margins of society. We see this throughout the Scriptures. And we see this particularly in the Christmas story. Matthew tells us about the Wise Men who come from the East with their expensive gifts – but Luke's gospel gives a very different portrayal of the Christmas story. We read in Luke that Jesus is born in a stable because there is no room in the inn – born in a first century parking garage where the donkeys and other animals ate and slept. His first bed was a feeding trough for the livestock.

I think Luke emphasized the humble circumstances of the birth of the Son of God because we are meant to understand he is at home among the marginalized in this world. Jesus spent so much time during his ministry among the nobodies and the outcasts. One of the ways we can determine if we are becoming more like Christlike; if our journey of Sanctification is progressing in the right direction is to ask ourselves if our hearts are broken by the things that break God's heart. In Dickens' story, Scrooge's heart was broken; opened up by caring and concern for Tiny Tim. And once his heart was broken, it could be transformed.

Scrooge has one last messenger, the most frightening of them all: the ghost of Christmas yet to come. He shows Scrooge scenes of a future if things remain unchanged. He sees unhappy endings for Tiny Tim and himself. Those

ominous portents are enough to shake Scrooge to his very foundation. He promises to turn his life around, to honor Christmas in his heart and to keep it all the year. Scrooge woke up on Christmas morning a changed man. For the first time in decades, he could laugh. His heart felt generous, and he wanted to give and help other people. He could dance, and he could even sing.

A new life in God is possible for Scrooge and for you!

What a change! To see Scrooge dancing and singing... and giving – those are marks of a life transformed. And it's interesting to think about the name Charles Dickens chose for the central character in this story: Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge just sounds nasty. But why did he choose as the Christian name for his protagonist, Ebenezer? If you've spent much time in church, you might recall a line from the 2nd verse of the hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" in which we sing:

"Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come..." What is an Ebenezer, anyway? Ebenezer is a combination of two Hebrew words: eben, which is a stone, and ezer, one who comes alongside to help someone who is weak. An Ebenezer is a stone of help.

In 1 Samuel 7:12, we read how, after the Israelites had been delivered from the Philistines by God's power and grace, Samuel the prophet set up a stone monument to mark the site where God helped the people. He named it Ebenezer...

I like to think that Dickens chose the name Ebenezer to suggest that his character had been helped by God... redeemed by God's grace... in the hope that his story, A Christmas Carol, might help point others in the right direction, toward becoming caring, compassionate, even Christlike people. The central figure in Dickens' story had been a Scrooge – but he became an Ebenezer – a reminder of God's help, God's compassion, God's love – an instrument God had used to bring hope and help and healing to other people.

Would you like to see how the story ends? After witnessing the future and potential consequences of his actions, Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning with a renewed perspective. He is filled with remorse for his past behavior and determined to change his ways.

Scrooge immediately sets out to make amends and spread Christmas cheer. He gives a generous donation to a charity fund, anonymously sends a large turkey to the Cratchit family, and accepts his nephew's invitation to Christmas dinner. The ending of A Christmas Carol offers a hopeful message about the power of redemption and the transformative potential of Christmas. It demonstrates that even the most hardened and miserly individuals can change their ways and experience true happiness through compassion and generosity. Forgiveness and redemption. A kind and generous heart. These are gifts that God offers us in Christmas.

Would you join me in a prayer of thanks...I invite you to repeat this prayer silently after me:

Thank you, God, for Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus into our world. Thank you for forgiving me (Pause) and transforming my life. Thank you for taking away the fear of death and replacing it with the hope of everlasting life. Help me to become more kind, generous, and loving. Thank you, God, for Christmas. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CONNECTIONS



NEW YEAR'S EVE DAY

Sunday, December 31 there will be only two services. The Khmer service will be at 10.15am in the Fireside Room and our 11:00am in the Sanctuary. **THERE WILL NOT BE AN 8:30PM SERVICE.**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

The congregation is being invited to move closer to the front of the Sanctuary during the season of Advent. The back five rows on either side of the sanctuary have been roped off. We hope you will get accustomed to this and move closer to the front after the first of the year.

OFFERING ENVELOPES

If you turned in a pledge card, you can pick up your offering envelopes in the Fellowship Hall on Sundays.

SANCTUARY FLOWERS

Sponsoring the Sanctuary floral arrangement for a Sunday worship service is a beautiful way to celebrate an occasion or honor your loved ones. Your personal dedication will be published in the worship bulletin on the Sunday of your sponsorship. There is a \$35 donation to the Flower Fund to sponsor an arrangement.

Sign up for a 2024 Sunday in the Fellowship Hall. You will be contacted the week prior to your Sunday to arrange wording for the bulletin. Your check must be received in the church office the week prior to your Sunday.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Many thanks to all who made pledges as part of this year's stewardship campaign. So far, we have 91 pledges of time, talent and funds for 2024. We still have not reached our goal of 10% more pledges than last year so **REMEMBER IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO PLEDGE.** We hope that some of you who have forgotten or were waiting to make your pledge will still show your commitment to Central by submitting a pledge soon. 91 pledges sounds like a good number, but we have at least twice as many active members. There is still time, and it is never too late. If you want a pledge card, they are available in the pews at church, in the narthex when you enter the church building, at the church office or from Dick Edelstein (209 351-5857). Again, **MANY THANKS** to all who have pledged. "You Rock."

END OF THE YEAR GIVING - If you are in a position to make an additional 2023 gift, we invite you to do so by December 31. In order to claim a charitable contribution deduction for 2023 pledge/donation checks must be delivered by or be postmarked by December 31, 2023.

BOOK GROUP

The Book group met Dec. 10th for another informative discussion. The current read is *River Sing Me Home* by Eleanor Shearer - a mother's gripping journey to find her stolen children in the aftermath of slavery. Next discussion date is Jan. 7, 2024.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The Chili Cook off featuring Snap Jackson and the Knock on Wood Players returns to the Fellowship Hall Sunday, January 28 at noon. Tickets go on sale soon. Watch for more information in the coming days.

SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 29TH 2024!

Rotary Read-In, 10:00 am - Cleveland and Team Charter Schools - Sign-ups will start in January.

FOOD PANTRY

The food pantry shelves are getting bare. We are serving 10-12 homeless people per week, and I expect that to go up as the weather gets colder and wetter. Here are some guidelines to help you pick items for the closet. ***Everything needs to be no cook items!*** The people we serve do not have access to cooking facilities or can openers or refrigerator space. ***Please do not empty your cupboards or fridge or give us anything that is expired, legally we can't use it. We rarely serve families and we direct them to the Emergency Food Bank. Sometimes the cheapest and easiest way to get these items is to go through Amazon!***

Here are our immediate needs:

Tuna (with a pull tab to open or packets of tuna that can be easily opened.)

Water bottles 16 oz. size

juice (apple, orange) small sizes

canned soups (with pull tabs that can be opened and eaten without water or heat.)

Vienna Sausage with pull tabs

Raisins, small boxes

milk (shelf stable, small sizes)

Cereal individual servings

Pudding cups in any flavor

Cup O' Noodles or something similar

If you have any packets of utensils with napkins that they hand out in some fast-food places, we can use those too!

Thank you so much! This congregation is so compassionate.
Dianne England, food closet organizer