

# Central United Methodist Church

3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95204

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

### *First Sunday of Advent*

Sunday, December 3, 2023



## GATHERING

<b>PRELUDE</b>	<i>In the Bleak Midwinter</i> (arr. Mark Hayes)	Monica Adams
<b>GATHERING MOMENT</b>		Laura Dinges
<b>INTROIT</b>	<i>O Come, O Come, Emmanuel</i>	Chancel Choir
<b>*CALL TO WORSHIP</b>		Laura Dinges
	<b>Leader:</b> "Faith is believing things when common sense tells you not to." (Fred Gailey)	
	<b>All:</b> "I believe. I believe. It's silly, but I believe." (Susan Walker)	
	<b>Leader:</b> "There's no room for grown-ups in Santa's world." (Kris Kringle)	
	<b>All:</b> <b>Childlike wonder and innocence are essential to believing in God.</b>	
	<b>Leader:</b> "I don't have to prove that I'm Santa Claus. Santa Claus proves that he's Santa Claus." (Kris Kringle) Jesus did not prove that he was God. He just acted as God.	
	<b>All:</b> <b>We do not need external validation or proof. His actions and the impact he had on others are enough. We wait for the Lord! We wait for you!</b>	
<b>*OPENING HYMN</b>	<i>People, Look East</i>	UMH #202
<b>THE LIGHTING OF THE HOPE CANDLE</b>	<i>He Came Down</i> <b><i>He came down that we may have hope; he came down that we may have hope; he came down that we may have hope, Hallelujah forevermore.</i></b>	TFWS #2085
<b>CHILDREN'S MOMENT</b>		Mary Juarez Dalton
<b>MISSION &amp; MINISTRIES MOMENT</b>		Laura Dinges
<b>RITE OF FRIENDSHIP AND A SPECIAL WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS (11:00am)</b>		Laura Dinges
<b>*PASSING THE PEACE</b>		Laura Dinges
	(Stand, bow or wave, with the word "Peace be with You!")	
	<b>All Sing:</b> <b><i>Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His Name Is called Emmanuel. God with us, revealed in us, His Name Is called Emmanuel.</i></b>	

## PRAYER CARDS COLLECTED

ANTHEM *Advent Carol* Chancel Choir  
(by Dale Wood)

### PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 64:1-9 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 694) Laura Dinges  
Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God.  
All: **Thanks be to God.**

\*HYMN *Have Thine Own Way, Lord* UMH #382

SCRIPTURE Mark 13:24-37 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 50) Laura Dinges  
Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God.  
All: **Thanks be to God.**

SERMON The *Reel* Christmas Story: *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street\** Rev. Mark Wharff

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Laura Dinges

PASTOR'S PRAYER Rev. Sungho Lee

### THANKSGIVING

WORSHIP WITH OUR TITHES & OFFERINGS Laura Dinges

OFFERTORY *Lo! How a Rose* Monica Adams  
(arr. Lloyd Larson)

\* DOXOLOGY *Advent Doxology*  
(TUNE *Once in Royal David's City* MUSIC Henry J Gauntlett, R.G. Huff)  
***Praise to God, the One who made us. Praise to Christ, God's only Son.  
Praise the Spirit, ever with us. Praise the Godhead, Three in One.  
Clear a Path! Prepare the way! Advent leads to Christmas Day!***

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Laura Dinges

### COMMUNION

UMH #23-24 Laura Dinges

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them up to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Leader: It is right and a good and joyful thing...And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

***Sing: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.***

Leader: Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ...And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in

union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Sing: Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Leader: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here...Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and for ever.

**Sing: Amen, amen, amen.**

#### 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.**

#### COMMUNION HYMNS

*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus  
In the Bleak Midwinter*

UMH #196

UMH #221

#### SENDING FORTH

#### \*BENEDICTION

Rev. Sungho Lee

#### \*RESPONSE

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
O come, O King of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind.  
Bid all our sad divisions cease and be yourself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

#### \*POSTLUDE

*Now the Greenblade Rises  
(arr. Edwin Childs)*

Monica Adams

*Flowers on the altar this morning are given by Connie Edgecomb in celebration of the Advent Season!*

\*Indicates please stand as you are able.

**\*Excerpts from *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* (1947) 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox CVLI License No. 505457461**

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#### SERVING YOU TODAY

Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee

Rev. Mark Wharff

Laura Dinges, Worship Leader

Mary Juarez Dalton, Children's Moment

Ric Campero, Choir Director

Monica Adams, Organist/Pianist

David Campero, Livestream

Steven Adams, Media

Cherie Hudson, Facilities Coordinator

Rupert Cooper, Audio

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### **Miracle on 34th Street**

We're taking a light-hearted approach this season as we look for Advent themes in some of our favorite Christmas movies. Recently, The New York Times invited readers to share their favorite holiday movies.

We begin today with a 1947 film that won 3 Academy Awards and is listed among the most inspirational motion pictures of all time by the American Film Institute; a movie to help rekindle the hope of Christmas: *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Our story begins at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. A Macy's executive, Doris Walker (played by Maureen O'Hara), oversees the parade. She finds that the Santa Claus she hired is intoxicated, so she needs to find a replacement Santa immediately. There's a man nearby named Kris Kringle, and she enlists him to be Santa on the float in the Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Doris has struggled a bit with Santa. Though managing the jolly old elf is her job, not only does she not believe in him, but she also doesn't care for the idea of Santa Claus one bit. She teaches her daughter, Susan (adorably played by 8-year-old Natalie Wood) there is no Santa Claus.

Doris becomes acquainted with Fred Gailey (played by John Payne, who said *Miracle on 34th Street* was his favorite movie of all time because it reflected his own spiritual beliefs). Fred is an attorney who lives in the same building. He and Susan have been watching the Macy's parade. Fred is perplexed by Doris' attitude, depriving her daughter of the normal childhood imaginative flights of fancy.

Doris and Fred remind me of the left brain/right brain dichotomy. Science tells us that the left-brain hemisphere specializes in logical thinking, while the right brain is focused more on the intuitive, feeling side. (Optional) How many of you function mostly out of your left brain, tend to think first? How many of you are in your right mind and tend to feel your way through life?

When it comes to the Christmas Story, someone who operates from a strictly rationalistic perspective is going to think the whole thing is absurd. A virgin conceiving under miraculous circumstances? Impossible! God coming in human form as a baby born in Bethlehem? Seriously? A rationalist is going to say, if there even is a God, how could that God come into the world as a baby?

The only way to approach the Christmas Story is with the heart. If even the most rational thinker is able to suspend disbelief for a moment, to recognize that there is more than you can see and feel and touch in this world around us, that there really is a God who has come to us in Jesus, who has shown us by his life, death, and resurrection there is always hope, and that we are loved by the same force that created the universe, we can begin to appreciate how Christmas makes all the difference in the world.

Now – where were we? Right. Doris hired Kris Kringle on the spur of the moment to take over as Santa Claus in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. And he is a sensation! So she extends his contract to be Santa for the season at Macy's flagship 34th Street store, the largest retail store in the world.

As he is preparing for his first day on the job, the head of the toy department, Mr. Shellhammer, comes to Kris with some tips on how to be a good Santa Claus. It involves steering children toward asking for toys with which Macy's is overstocked.

Kris Kringle is upset by the commercialization of Christmas – in 1947. He's determined to be a different kind of Santa. His motto is, "The only important thing is to make the children happy." When the toy manager hears him sending parents to other stores to buy the toys their children want for Christmas, he goes through the roof. But Macy's discovers that when you put the needs of the customer first, even before the profits of your own business, the customer appreciates it.

Putting the needs of others before your own. That's a theme in the Gospel – though I don't suppose Macy's or the screen writers would give credit. Jesus teaches us if you want to be great, you've got to be a servant. The apostle Paul says that we are to consider the needs of others before our own. And that is what Kris Kringle models when he's trying to emphasize the real meaning of Christmas.

But you know that when you start behaving like that, some people are going to think you're crazy. Especially if you say you, really are Santa Claus. Doris worries that Kris is mentally unstable. So she sends him to Mr. Sawyer, the Macy's psychologist, to have his head examined.

But Kris turns the tables in the interview, much to the dismay of his examiner. The psychologist recommends that Kris be institutionalized, and he winds up in a psychiatric ward. Who will represent him as his attorney? Fred Gailey. Of course, that leads to conflict between Fred the romantic and Doris, the rationalist. She says, "But you've got to be realistic and face facts. You can't just throw your career away because of a sentimental whim." And Fred has just the right response: "Look, Doris, someday you're going to find out that your way of facing this realistic world just doesn't work. And when you do, don't overlook those lovely intangibles. You'll discover they're the only things that are worthwhile."

Ultimately, the intangibles Fred is talking about are things like hope, peace, joy, and love. And they are rooted in a deeper truth: the truth about a God who created the cosmos and calls us by name, who came to walk among us in the form of a baby born in the midst of poverty; who shows us the way, the truth, and the life by his life, his teachings, his death and resurrection; who heals us, redeems us, and offers us hope. And all of that is wrapped up in the big intangible of Christmas.

Fred has another great line in that scene: "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to." Doesn't that sound familiar? It echoes Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." [New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition]

The climactic scene takes place in the New York State Supreme Court where the judge must decide if Kris Kringle is mentally incompetent or if he is who he claims to be: Santa Claus. Acting as Kris's attorney, Fred calls two witnesses. The first is R.H. Macy, the owner of the store that employs Kris as Santa. The second witness is the prosecuting attorney's son, who testifies that his daddy told him there really is a Santa Claus – and his daddy wouldn't tell him a lie.

But the testimony of those two witnesses is not enough for the court. The judge demands authoritative proof... and Fred introduces into evidence bag after bag of letters, delivered to Mr. Kringle by the faithful couriers of the United States Post Office, addressed to Santa Claus.

Let's think about this question: who really is Kris Kringle?

Is he Santa Claus? We think that Santa Claus is derived from Saint Nicholas, who was the Bishop of Myra, in Turkey, in the 4th century.

The tradition is that Nicholas was raised in an affluent home. His parents died when he was young, and he inherited their wealth. As a young man, God called him into the priesthood, and he used his inheritance to help people in need.

One of my favorite St. Nicholas stories concerns a poor man with three daughters. Back then, a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands a dowry – and the larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were unlikely to marry.

Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home, providing the needed dowry funding. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left in

front of the fire to dry. That led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting Christmas gifts from St. Nicholas.

Nicholas' devotion to helping those in need resonates with Jesus' teaching his first disciples that, in the final analysis, that is the measuring stick of righteousness.

As we heard in our Gospel Scripture Reading last Sunday: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." [Matthew 25:35-36, NRSVUE] Whenever you help one of the least of these, my sisters and brothers, you are helping me.

Nicholas became a great Saint of the Church. But by the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther recognized people had begun to shift the focus. Whereas Bishop Nicholas was trying to point people to the birth of Jesus as the true meaning of Christmas, people had begun to focus on St. Nicholas as the giver of Christmas gifts. Luther tried to turn the attention back to Jesus by talking about the source of Christmas giving as Christkindl — German for the Christ child.

The Americanized spelling and pronunciation is... Kris Kringle. Who is Kris Kringle today? I think the answer is you and me. We are representatives of the Christ Child. And as we approach Christmas, the celebration of his birth, we look for ways we can represent Jesus for other people, where we can demonstrate the hope he brings — especially for those who need it most: "the least of these," in the words of Matthew's gospel. To put it another way, we follow in the footsteps of Saint Nicholas.

What are some concrete ways we can do that?

Many of you got off to an early start by providing 1,276 food items for Thanksgiving in a Box.

This week Central has hosted Family Promise of San Joaquin County. And of course, the invitation to a variety of volunteer roles and the need for donations to support Family Promise is always before us.

Through Angel Tree, we can help make a child's Christmas a little brighter. Dianne England welcomes your assistance in calling caregivers and delivering gifts.

We can reach out to family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, inviting them to join us for the many special services Central offers during this most wonderful time of the year:

A Charlie Brown Christmas presented in Worship next Sunday...

The Christmas Cantata presented by the Chancel Choir and Orchestra on Sunday, December 17...

Christmas Eve Services on Sunday morning, December 24, and our Candlelight Services that evening at 7:00 and 9:00.

And we can share hope this season by attending the Blue Christmas Service on the Winter Solstice. With holy space and time to prepare, opportunity to remember and give thanks for those we have lost, commit ourselves as those who take the side of peace as we were challenged last week, and lending a shoulder to someone for whom the holiday season may not be the most wonderful time of this year. Extending an invitation and accompanying someone for this service could be the most important Christmas present you give this year.

Of course, Saint Nicholas practiced extravagant generosity toward those in need, and the Advent and Christmas Season affords those opportunities as well. Central's Christmas Offering this year will also benefit the Showered with Love Mobile Showers ministry, as well as our very own Lunch on Us Senior meal program headed up by our Isaiah Partnership Team, with additional support from Princeton Theological Seminary.

My hope for this Advent Season is to look beyond all that my rational, thinking self is trying to make sense of and focus on the intangibles like faith – “the conviction of things not seen...” and the Christmas gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. I want to follow the example of St. Nicholas, expressing thanksgiving for the ways God has blessed me by being generous toward those Matthew described as “the least of these,” and doing my utmost to represent the one whose birth we celebrate at the center of it all: Christkind!... the Christ child.

And I hope you do too.

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# CONNECTIONS

## **A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS PROPS NEEDS**

### **Join Our Team and Bring the Magic of "A Charlie Brown Christmas" to Life!**

Are you a creative genius with a passion for crafting and building? Do you love the holiday spirit and want to be a part of something truly special? The 3700Youth group is seeking enthusiastic individuals to help us create props for our upcoming production of "A Charlie Brown Christmas"!

We are in need of Schroeder's Piano:



Join us in making this holiday season unforgettable for our audience! To get involved or inquire about these exciting opportunities, please contact Elaine Hanley (Youth Director) at [elaine@cumcstockton.org](mailto:elaine@cumcstockton.org) or call (209) 466-5046 Ext: 5. Let's create magic together!

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## **GF COMMUNION?**

You bet! Starting this Sunday, December 3, we will be providing gluten free rice crackers at the self-serve Communion stations. These will replace the cubed bread. Those of you who eat a gluten free diet, you are now welcome at the table! (I'm sorry that it took so long for the invitation!) Those who routinely ate the cubed bread at the self-serve stations, these crackers are for you, too!

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## **BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

Central's Blue Christmas Service will be held on the longest night of the year; Thursday, December 21, at 6.30pm in the Fireside Room. Here are several reasons to attend this service.

### **1. It's too easy to rush this season away.**

By the time December 21 comes around, we are already 21 days into Advent. During these past 21 days have you taken the time to pause, to pray? We spend a lot of time preparing decorations, preparing packages, enjoying family time, and preparing food. Advent only asks that we prepare ourselves. The Blue Christmas service offers time, and a holy space, to do that.

### **2. Not everyone is "merry and bright."**

The holidays can be a sad, lonesome time for anyone suffering from depression or grief. The Blue Christmas service will offer hope and light to those who need it most. Even if you are not feeling blue, come lend a shoulder to someone who is on December 21 at 6.30pm.

**3. There are people you need to remember.**

We've all lost someone-people we loved who have died, moved away, or become estranged from us. Our losses may be new, or decades old. The Blue Christmas service will bring those people to mind, love them, forgive them, forgive ourselves and find comfort.

**4. You will leave with a renewed sense of peace in your heart.**

That's Alan Cook's promise to you.

**LUNCH ON US, AGAIN! CENTRAL INVITES OUR SENIORS TO A FREE LUNCH EVENT**

After a great turnout at our first Lunch on Us event last month, we're hosting another one, and this time, we'd like to encourage you to bring a friend!

Are you a senior and interested in:

1. A grab-and-go meal?
2. A sit-down meal with other seniors?
3. Singing Christmas carols led by Pastor Lee and his wife, Pastor Lee?

Come to Central on Wednesday, December 6, from noon-1:00 for a meal that you can either eat with others in the Fireside Room or take with you.

While you don't have to sign up in advance, doing so will help us plan, and a limited amount of food will be available at the event.

Sign-up sheets will be available outside worship services this Sunday, December 3, or you can contact Alan Cook to let him know you're planning on attending.

Questions? Contact Alan Cook at (209) 610-7893 or [alancook4138@gmail.com](mailto:alancook4138@gmail.com)

This project is a pilot project for Central to try out new programming that will help us put into action our goal of sharing God's love. Funding is provided by the Isaiah Partnership/Princeton Theological Seminary.

**BOOK GROUP**

December is always a busy time. The next book group discussion date is still pending. Watch for a separate email. Continue to read *The Keeper of Hidden Books* by Madeline Martin and *River Sing Me Home* by Eleanor Shearer.

**GIVE A GIFT THIS ADVENT SEASON**

It is a Central tradition to decorate our Sanctuary with poinsettias. If you would like to give a gift of \$15 to the Poinsettia Fund in memory or in honor of a special someone, please do so today. Fill out the form and mark your contribution "Poinsettia" on the memo line. All donors will be recognized in our bulletin on December 17 and 24. Donors may take a poinsettia home after **Christmas Eve** services.

**Deadline: December 12.**

**YOUR NAME** (who the poinsettia is from) \_\_\_\_\_

**IN MEMORY OF** \_\_\_\_\_

or

**IN HONOR OF** \_\_\_\_\_

or

**OTHER MESSAGE** \_\_\_\_\_



### **ADVENT BIBLE STUDY**

Advent Bible Study will continue the Leadership Bible Study (Samuel, Saul, and David) that we had during the summer. We did not finish the book and we will finish the book this time. Jesus is a "descendent of David" and what qualities of King David made him an ancestor of Jesus would be the key point of the Bible Study. Please email pastor Lee ( [slee@cumcstockton.org](mailto:slee@cumcstockton.org) ) or sign up or come to the fellowship hall to be in the Advent Bible Study.

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**SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 29<sup>TH</sup> 2024!**

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

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