



Pastor: Rev. Dr. Jules Williams, Jr.

Telephone: 409.998.0339

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Love Came Down At Christmas

Christina G. Rossetti (1885)

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-11: John 13:15

Rossetti's poem, written in 1885, has continued to evoke the "feeling" of Christmas for over 130 years. Even though the language is a little archaic, the meaning is clear. Rossetti's love is not romantic love or even brotherly love. It is what Christ brought: an all-encompassing love for our "Creator" and for the universal mass of humanity that we are somehow responsible for as humans ourselves—Jesus would say, our "neighbors." That love came down at Christmas, sent to us all in a newborn child.

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus;
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

We Remember in Prayer

Prayer has the power to heal and change the lives of those who are hurting in body or mind or spirit. We ask that you would send up prayers for:

- **Gladys Barton**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Anthony Maldonado**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Antonia Rivera**, who has major medical issues.
- **Jean Brooks**, who has fallen twice and is restricted to a wheelchair.
- **Romie Hollins**, who welcomes prayers.
- **Rev. Juvenal Cervantes**, who is home and doing rehab.
- **Tammy Spangler**, who welcomes prayers.

Welcome Guests

We welcome our guests who joined us in worship this past month. Bibi Zurcher, Lisa Dove, Margaret “Magpie” Bennett.

FACEBOOK FUN

Did you know that Open Arms UCC has a Facebook Community Group page? If you are a member of the group, please follow us closely during Advent for announcements, events, games, etc. Right now, there are a growing number of responses to the question, *“What is your favorite Christmas Carol and why?”* If you are not a member of the group, please consider joining and ask your friends to join. It is a great way to connect with each other and include others both near and far who use social media and promote Open Arms UCC!



Where did the PURPLE go??

Entering worship, some folks might have been confused or puzzled on the first Sunday of Advent. Why? Candles, banners, and worship enhancements were blue, not the traditional purple. What happened to the purple?

Many Christian churches are shifting the emphasis of Advent from a penitential season, such as Lent, to a celebration of hope and anticipation. Purple is traditionally associated with solemnity and somberness, which is fitting to the repentant character of Lent. While purple (or violet) is the color of penance and sacrifice first used during Lent, that in no means takes away from the fact that Advent is also a time of preparation and introspection.

In an effort to distinguish between Advent and Lent, some churches have changed the color of Advent to various shades of blue. You might have guessed that there are many, many colors of blue.

But blue is by no means new to the church either. Before the 12th century, it was used in the Western Church. The original blue was called Sarum blue, but now many different shades are used and appropriate. Since organic, natural elements were used in early times to make dyes, availability and convenience may have influenced colors used.

Then there is that **pink** candle. It symbolizes JOY!! Throughout liturgical history, there are many stories, legends, and myths about the liturgical colors, especially the pink one. Bottom line: it is joyful!

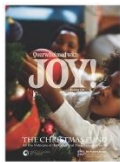
Does all that affect your attitude and appreciation of Advent? Probably not. Open Arms works at embracing change. Perhaps this change will increase our acceptance of newness, and look at traditional thinking with fresh eyes. And... just maybe you really like blue!

“Overwhelmed with joy!” Matthew 2:10

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

December Mission Projects....

In True Open Arms Fashion, More Than One!!



First, **The Christmas Fund** is a UCC offering as one of the designated 5 for 5 opportunities for giving. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need.

Secondly, **Free Wheelchair Mission** (formerly known as Wheelchair



Foundation) Free Wheelchair Mission believes in a world where everyone who needs a wheelchair has one. With an estimated 75 million people around the world today in need of a wheelchair, Free Wheelchair Mission continues their mission to provide mobility to people living with disabilities in developing countries. Free Wheelchair Mission continues its focus and commitment on becoming a leading provider of mobility in developing countries, but beyond placing recipients in a wheelchair, Free Wheelchair Mission is bringing transformation that opens doors to education, employment opportunities, and community that these individuals only dreamed of before receiving the gift of mobility. This mission is especially close to our hearts because of our dear Jean who is now confined to a wheelchair. We miss her so.



Finally, we were asked by the Tamina folks to help with **Christmas baskets for selected community seniors.** Thanks to Pam Mayo who accepted the assignment and has already completed baskets for our neighbors. Thanks Pam!

Express An Attitude of Gratitude to These Great People!

Thank you to those who helped make October 29, 2022, scheduled meeting of the Houston Association of the UCC, a successful experience. The food mavens are truly to be complimented: Breakfast, Sue Krueger, Kate Flagge, Dr. Caroline Moore; Lunch, Kenneth Reaves, Brenda Mayfield, David Durham, Kim Williams; Desserts, Elise Daulley, Carol Foss, Sue Krueger. Kudos to hosts Pam Mayo, Gail and Rev. Bill Royster, Rev. Ron Krueger, Rev. Dr. Jules Williams, Dr. Kendall Moore. Thanks to all others who may not have been mentioned here.

Thank you to those “behind the scenes” people who prepare for Open Arms’ worship each Sunday. Typical Sunday: At 9:00 a.m., Mustapha and Jules III, having driven in from Huntsville to Tamina, are set up, ready to play. Nia has her keyboard in place and is practicing. Rev. Dr. Jules enters, and with Chris, moves tables and places chair for worship. Vicky and Peter adjust their equipment that Dr. Kendall has put in place. At 9:30, Bill and Gail bring in the enhancements and decorate the altar. If the choir is to sing, Barry enters and cues up their accompanying music for a warm up. Around 9:45, Kim arranges her reception table and displays programs for the worship service. All of these happen early so we can enter and worship unencumbered. **Thanks to those “behind the scenes.”**

Lit Wits Prepares for a New Year

Our last book of 2022: *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb* by Melanie Benjamin, reviewed by Kate Flagge.

On November 15, Lit Wits met at Wunsche Bros., the book club’s usual evening dining spot, to discuss the story of a “remarkable small woman who refused to live a small life.” At two feet, eight inches tall, Mercy Lavinia Bump reached out to the famous entertainer P. T. Barnum, married the diminutive super star Tom Thumb, and transformed into a celebrity of the 19th century. Kate led the discussion of this true-life story of Mrs. Tom Thumb. Thanks, Kate.

On December 13, Lit Wit members will meet for a Christmas celebration at the home of Sue Krueger and plan the schedule for 2023. Participants are asked to bring

book suggestions for the new year. Sue's address is 27815 Geneva Hills, Spring, 77386.

Facts about Lit Wits: *The club has been meeting regularly since 2015. *The first book for group read was *The Glass Castle*, reviewed by June Laaser. *At present, Lit Wits is composed of ten active members, a membership which has remained fairly steady. Members are from various settings, including at least three different churches. *As a group over the years, Lit Wits has read a total of seventy-six novels, biographies, and non-fiction selections.

Sound like a vital, active group? Join us and find out!

Bible Study: A December Lesson—And A Look Toward January

Holiday season, travel, family gatherings—all have taken their toll on a time for Bible Study. Open Arms Bible scholars are on hiatus for the month as they take deep breaths and try to keep up the pace of contemporary life.

But a break in formal study does not mean we need to leave all Bible reading and then try to jump back on the bus later. If we look around, we learn much. Advent has us to return to those times leading up to Christ's birth. It's in the BOOK—in *Matthew* and *Luke*. Mary's conception, Joseph's dream, the visit to Elizabeth, that arduous trip to Bethlehem. Then "pressed between the pages" you find the beautiful account of those varied figures that gathered at the manger and worshipped the Christ Child. Shepherds and angels and Magi from the East who followed a star to find the "king of the Jews" share the scene. Let's make all of those holy events and their meanings our Bible study for the month of December.

At Open Arms in January, our Bible Study class will look at the Epiphany—with Wise Men, the Star, and Light.

Following this, our new unit will focus on the Apostles, each of them, who showed forth Christ's Word to the world. Hence, back to our regular Bible Study.

Christmas Caroling at Open Arms

December 17 at 1:30 p.m.: the date and time for an Open Arms' caroling event to serenade citizens of Tamina. It all sounds wonderful and exciting. James Lemm has located a flatbed trailer for OA folks to ride on, and some of our best singers are planning to lead the group. Our neighbors in Tamina are also invited to join with us. This is a great opportunity for children and youth to get involved, almost like an old-fashioned hayride. It's a time to share the Christmas spirit and wish everyone a "Happy Holiday." We will gather in early afternoon, ride and sing, and return to the Tamina Community Center for delicious snacks and games. Let's get the children and grandchildren in on this "memory-making experience."

Consider Joining the Open Arms Church Council

The Open Arms annual meeting is scheduled for January of 2023. At that time, we will survey 2022—more information about required reports on the past year's activities will be provided later—and appoint new members to the Council. Needed now are volunteers for the Church Council to be affirmed at the meeting. There are three vacancies for a two-year term that must be filled to make the Council complete. What do you think? Can you answer the call and help this wonderful church remain viable? Call Kenneth Reaves, 832-326-3058, for information about serving on the Council. He can tell you what the work entails.

December is Human
Rights Month

Happy Birthday Wishes

Sue Kreuger – December 4

Mustapha Williams – December 4

Margaret Smith – December 8

Liz Lemm – December 8

Sandy Royster – December 15

Greg Mayo – December 15

Chris Teese – December 18

Liz Herrick – December 21

Ian Says – December 24

Carol Foss – December 27

Open Arms Financial Information

October, 2022

Offerings - \$6,367.80

Missions - \$780.00

Forever Home Fund - \$432.80

Tamina Food Pantry - \$120.00

November, 2022

Offerings - \$3,622.80

Mission - \$370.00

Tamina Food Pantry - \$20.00

Forever Home Fund - \$167.78

Christmas BLESSINGS

For some time now, Open Arms has had a “Blessing Board.” It invited us to be aware of blessings we have received, and an opportunity to share our endless blessings.

Here are some of those words of blessing:

- ~ Thank God for my health and family
- ~ I’m grateful for my New, New!
- ~ Thankful for another day and a loving community
- ~ I’m thankful I woke up this morning
- ~ I’ve been to church today!!! What a blessing it is to be part of this faith community!
- ~ Grateful I found a new pen, because the other one does not work. God will provide!
- ~ Grateful for my family’s health & the opportunity to celebrate Passover Seder with my Jewish friends
- ~What a wonderful community
- ~ Blessed that my brother, Trey, had three stints put in and is back home!
- ~ Thank God for a church community that wants to do the work!!
- ~ Thankful for another day
- ~ A beautiful extravaganza; Blessing to all food, fellowship, fun, all in name of God!!
- ~ A heart to serve, health, strength, family, a steady mind. Blessed!!
- ~ A community to build and serve with
- ~ Thank God for the return of KW. Healthy and ready to go!!! Praise God
- ~ Thank God for another year to serve, love being with family
- ~ A new level of seeing self and surroundings. Thank God for more clarity.
- ~ LIFE!
- ~ Thankful for my friends and for eternal life after death, I love you, Mama.



**Thanksgiving Day is over:
our blessings and gratitude are not.**

Joy Like Water by Sara Are

(One classic Advent story is in Luke 1:39-56 where a pregnant Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, also expecting a child. Sara Are wrote this lovely poem in response to that moment when the two women meet.)

Mary went to Elizabeth's house
Because that's what we do when the world falls apart
When the rug is pulled,
When it rains inside.
We go home.
We find friends.
We find love.

Mary went to Elizabeth's house,
Harboring good news that must have felt like water—
Something capable of helping her float or pulling her under.
And only then,
Only there,
In the presence of a face that looked like love,
Does the word "joy" appear.

Mary said, "How can this be?"
The angel said, "Do not be afraid."
Mary said, "May it be so."
But when Mary went to Elizabeth's house
And Elizabeth opened the door,
Joy—like a tipped cup of water—
Spilled out everywhere.

I imagine that Elizabeth laughed.
I imagine that Mary framed her growing belly.
I imagine that both women pressed palm to stomach
When that baby began to kick,
A holy ritual as old as time.
I imagine that God smiled.
And I imagine, that for the first time,
Mary could float.

(Continued on the following page.)

*Isn't it always that way?
I could harbor joy to myself.
I could tuck joyful moments deep into pockets,
Saving memories of better days for long nights.
But when I share my joy with you,
When you open the door,
Joy spills out everywhere.
And it is love that helps me float.*

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

(German “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht”)

In 1818 the popular Christmas carol “Silent Night, Holy Night” was composed by Franz Xaver Gruber to lyrics by Joseph Mohr in the small town in Oberndorf near Salzburg, Austria. It made its world premiere on Christmas Eve of 1818 in the St. Nicholas church of Oberndorf near Salzburg. Because mice had eaten holes in the bellows of the church’s organ, the Christmas song was performed for the first time on the guitar.

Unfortunately, the original church no longer stands because in September of 1899 the Salzach River flooded, shaking the church from its foundations. The church sadly was demolished shortly afterwards.

On the site of the original church the Silent Night Chapel has been built. Every Christmas Eve, a solemn mass is held at the church and the famous carol is sung in many languages.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Years!!

Open Arms Photo Gallery



Christmas baskets for selected community seniors put together by Pam Mayo.



Manger made by Norman Swaney for our Advent Decorations and Advent Candles display by Gail Royster.