

# COVENANT CHURCH

## HOUSTON

### A Service of Worship for Christmastide 28 December 2025

little tree  
little silent Christmas tree  
you are so little  
you are more like a flower

who found you in the green forest  
and were you very sorry to come away?  
see      i will comfort you  
because you smell so sweetly

i will kiss your cool bark  
and hug you safe and tight  
just as your mother would,  
only don't be afraid

look      the spangles  
that sleep all the year in a dark box  
dreaming of being taken out and allowed to shine,  
the balls the chains red and gold the fluffy threads,

put up your little arms  
and i'll give them all to you to hold  
every finger shall have its ring  
and there won't be a single place dark or unhappy

then when you're quite dressed  
you'll stand in the window for everyone to see  
and how they'll stare!  
oh but you'll be very proud

and my little sister and i will take hands  
and looking up at our beautiful tree  
we'll dance and sing  
"Noel Noel"

—e. e. cummings



Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!  
**And also with you!**

Ringing in the hour

Silence is kept

\*Prelude

“Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light (Hymn 26)”

*Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light,  
And usher in the morning.  
You shepherds, shudder not with fright,  
But bear the angel's warning.  
This Child, now weak in infancy,  
Our confidence and joy shall be;  
The power of Satan breaking,  
Our peace eternal making.*

Call to Worship

<sup>+</sup>Opening Hymn #39

Kurisumasu

“Joyful Christmas Day Is Here”

**Joyful, joyful, joyful, joyful, Christmas day is here;  
Ding, ding, dong, dong, hear the church bells ring.  
Chime throughout the land, He was born in Bethlehem;  
Baby Jesus came into this world on Christmas day.  
Happy, happy, happy, happy, Christmas day is here;  
Ding, ding, dong, dong, hear the church bells ring.**

**Joyful, happy, joyful, happy, Christmas day is here;  
Ding, ding, dong, dong, Christmas day is here.  
Chime throughout the land, He was born in Bethlehem;  
Baby Jesus came into this world on Christmas day.  
Sing together, celebrate; Christ is born today.  
Ding, ding, dong, dong, Christmas day is here.**

*\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

<sup>+</sup>Opening Sentences

**To claim to believe in the incarnation is to commit ourselves to a radical meaning of God not in verbal propositions, but in human lives, their joys and sorrows.**

Invitation

Scripture Lesson

Matthew 1:18-25

These are our sacred stories.

**Thanks be to God.**

Time for Children

<sup>+</sup> Response (Hymn 30, verses 1 and 2):

Mary's Child

**Born in the night, Mary's Child,  
A long way from Your home;  
Coming in need, Mary's Child,  
born in a borrowed room.**

**Clear shining light, Mary's Child,  
Your face lights up our way;  
Light of the world, Mary's Child,  
Dawn on our darkened day.**

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**Jesus was born into a world that loves to turn people away—  
a world with shut doors and closed hearts.**

**A world that readily said: "There's no room for you."**

**Today we will not be turned away,  
because Jesus spent the rest of his life making room.  
He made room for tax collectors and children.  
He made room for the five thousand.  
He made room for Samaritan women, Jews and Gentiles.  
He made room for the sick, for the outcast, for the unclean.**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**Jesus was always pulling up a seat, saving space, making room for people, and he has made room for you.**

Words of Assurance

<sup>+</sup>Hymn #21

Warum Sollt' Ich

"All My Heart Today Rejoices"

**All my heart today rejoices,  
As I hear, far and near,  
Sweetest angel voices:  
"Christ is born," their choirs are singing,  
Till the air, everywhere,  
Now with joy is ringing.**

**Hark! A voice from yonder manger,  
Soft and sweet, does entreat:  
"Flee from woe and danger;  
Come and see; from all that grieves you  
You are freed; all you need  
I will surely give you."**

**Come, then, let us hasten yonder;  
Here let all, great and small,  
Kneel in awe and wonder;  
Love Him who with love is yearning;  
Hail the star that from far  
Bright with hope is burning!**

Reading

Mary Oliver

"Snow Geese"

<sup>+</sup>Hymn #58

Winchester Old

"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks"

**While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground,  
The angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around.**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**"Fear not!" said he, for mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled mind;  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and humankind.**

**"To you in David's town, this day,  
Is born of David's line  
The Savior, who is Christ the Lord,  
And this shall be the sign:**

**"The heavenly Babe you there shall find  
To human view displayed,  
All humbly wrapped in swathing bands,  
And in a manger laid."**

**Thus spoke the seraph, and forthwith  
Appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God, who thus  
Addressed their joyful song:**

**"All glory be to God on high,  
And to the Earth be peace:  
Good will to all from highest heaven  
Begin and never cease!"**

Reading

David Whyte

"The Journey"

<sup>+</sup>Hymn #61

Une Jeune Pucelle

"Twas in the Moon of Wintertime"

**'Twas in the moon of wintertime,  
When all the birds had fled,  
That mighty Gitchi Manitou  
Sent angel choirs instead.  
Before their light the stars grew dim  
And wondering hunters heard the hymn:  
Jesus, your King, is born,  
Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

Within a lodge of broken bark  
The tender babe was found;  
A ragged robe of rabbit skin  
Enwrapped his beauty round.  
The chiefs from far before Him knelt  
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt:  
Jesus, your King, is born,  
Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.

O children of the forest free,  
O you of Manitou,  
The Holy Child of earth and heaven  
Is born today for you.  
Come kneel before the radiant boy  
Who brings you beauty, peace, and joy.  
Jesus, your King, is born,  
Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.

Reading

Maya Angelou

“Amazing Peace”

<sup>+</sup>Hymn #47

Still, Still, Still

“Still, Still, Still”

Still, still, still,  
He sleeps this night so chill!  
The Virgin's tender arms enfolding,  
Warm and safe the Child are holding.  
Still, still, still,  
He sleeps this night so chill.

Sleep, sleep, sleep,  
He lies in slumber deep  
While angel hosts from heaven come winging,  
Sweetest songs of joy are singing.  
Sleep, sleep, sleep,  
He lies in slumber deep.

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

Prayer

Offering

Offertory

“Holy Night, Blessed Night (Hymn 33)”

*Holy night, blessed night,*

*Stars shine brightly, earth is still.*

*Hills and valleys, field and woodlands,*

*All surround the small town Bethlehem.*

*In a manger Christ the Lord sleeps.*

*Holy night, blessed night,*

*Angels sing praise, shepherds fear,*

*Earth and heaven ring with praises,*

*Alleluia all creation sings.*

*Tell the good news: Christ is born now.*

*Holy night, blessed night,*

*Christ has come down, dwells with us.*

*Sacrifice, love, peace and justice,*

*Shine upon us like the morning sun.*

*Grace and glory bless the whole world.*

<sup>+</sup>Prayer of Dedication

**God of yesterday and tomorrow:**

**Always you startle us into new understandings**

**just when we think we have it all sorted out.**

**Startle us again.**

**Break open our preconceptions**

**and confound our pat answers,**

**that we might be gifted with new vision. Amen.**

<sup>+</sup>Doxology

**So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;**

**Come, one and all, to own Him.**

**The King of kings salvation brings;**

**Let loving hearts enthrone Him.**

Greensleeves

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

Affirmation of Faith

Jane Hirshfield

“Counting, this New Year’s Morning, What Powers Yet Remain to Me”

<sup>+</sup>Closing Hymn #57

Venite Adoremus

“The Snow Lay on the Ground”

**The snow lay on the ground, the stars shone bright,  
When Christ our Lord was born on Christmas night.  
Venite adoremus Dominum. Venite adoremus Dominum.  
*Refrain:* Venite adoremus Dominum. Venite adoremus Dominum.**

**'Twas gentle Mary maid, so young and strong,  
Who welcomed here the Christchild with a song.  
She laid Him in a stall at Bethlehem;  
The ass and oxen shared the roof with them. *Refrain.***

**Saint Joseph, too, was by to tend the Child,  
To guard him, and protect His mother mild.  
The angels hovered round and sang this song:  
Venite adoremus Dominum. *Refrain.***

**And thus that manger poor became a throne;  
For He whom Mary bore was God the Son.  
O come, then, let us join the heavenly host;  
To praise the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. *Refrain.***

Benediction

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

“Joyful Christmas Day Is Here”

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Chime throughout the land, He was born in Bethlehem;  
Baby Jesus came into this world on Christmas day.  
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Baby Jesus came into this world on Christmas day.  
Sing together, celebrate; Christ is born today.  
Ding, ding, dong, dong, Christmas day is here.**

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## Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Heather Laureles**.

The Call to Worship is “Christmas on the Border, 1929” by Alberto Ríos.

The Opening Sentences are by Richard Holloway.

The Unison Confession is adapted from a liturgy by Sarah Speed.

The readers are **K.T. Tilford, Joyce Courteois, and Lewis Garvin**.

**Deacon Nancy Preston** gives the prayer.

The soloist is **Emily Ramsey Holien**.

The violist is **Jacy Grannis**.

The Prayer of Dedication is from *Worship for All Seasons, Volume 1*, edited by Thomas Harding.

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## About Today's Service

Covenant has used the Presbyterian Hymnal 1990 since December of 1994. Out of forty Christmas hymns, there were fifteen that had never been sung here as of this year. (Fun fact: we keep every worship bulletin archived in the office workroom!) Members of the Worship Committee gathered earlier this month to sing through and assess these hymns for use in worship. We found nine that were both enjoyable to sing and had a message that reflected the values of our church. Two of the hymns in today's service come from Asian countries; this hymnal aimed to reflect a wider range of international voices, especially responding to the growth of the Presbyterian church in East Asia. Several others are beloved hymns from my northern childhood about snow, a mythical force in Houston. Still others are oddly specific: see the six stanzas of Hymn #58 all focused on the shepherds! The six hymns that we looked at and rejected for use in worship had either underwhelming melodies and/or text that was overly focused on death to make sense for the Christmas season. This was a really fun process. If you are interested in future opportunities to sing new hymns after church, please talk to me!

*–Jason Steiner*

## Announcements

The Young Adult Group will volunteer at Montrose Grace Place on Monday, January 5. Please talk to Jason Steiner for more information.

## Children and Youth Announcements

January 4 - No Youth Fellowship

January 4 - Children's Worship Class after church

January 17 - CCSC Family Service Day, 12:00 -1:15 p.m.

February 15 - Children & Youth Auction

## Calendar

Mon. December 29	7pm	Insight Meditation, Huff Fellowship Hall.
Thurs. January 1	10am	Community Group, Zoom.
Sun. January 4	9:30am	Adult Education, 2nd floor of the Huff Fellowship Hall building (or on Zoom): Jason Steiner and Laura Mayo will present on Epiphany.
	9:30am	Handbell Rehearsal, Sanctuary.

## Information

**Childcare** is provided in the children's area beginning at 9:30 a.m. Children aged 2 and under are invited to the nursery. Children aged 3 to 9 are invited to the children's area after the Time for Children.

**All-Gender Restrooms** are located in the Huff Fellowship Hall building.

**Covenant Recycles:** If you do not wish to keep your order of worship, please recycle it by placing it on the stand located in the narthex.

**Office Hours:** The Church Office is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 8am-3pm, and Tuesday from 1pm-5pm.

**Helpful Links:** Scan here for digital Visitor and Celebration & Concern Cards; any sign-up forms mentioned in the Announcements; and other useful information.



*Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.*

*We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations, all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.*

*We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond to God's call to ministry with a personal understanding of God's all-encompassing love.*

*We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging and contemporarily relevant.*

*We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.*

*We value participation so that we might hear many approaches to our shared faith.*

### **Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation**

Members of Covenant, Ministers

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

Trena' Jamison, Director of Children and Youth

Heather Laureles, Director of Administration & Communications

David Lee, Director of Music

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jason Steiner, Organist and Associate Director of Music

Raymond Stubblefield, Minister of Congregational Life

Brendon Young, Moores School of Music Artist in Residence

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*Covenant Church recognizes the laws of the State of Texas and the rights of its citizens. Consistent with this acknowledgment and with respect for the values of our Church, we also acknowledge that our congregants and visitors seek a safe and comfortable space for worship and celebration. In that spirit, we request that all firearms be left in a secure place outside of the Church. We thank God for providing us with the opportunity to worship together and to continue to respect each other as human beings.*