

When **GOD**
does something

*Advent & Christmas
Devotional &
Sermon Guide
2025*

About this booklet —

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas!

This booklet has been lovingly prepared for you by the pastors, staff and congregation members Community Church. You will find enclosed a devotional written by church members just like you. Each person has had the courage to share a bit about their story, their life and what their assigned passage meant to them.

Please take a book. Keep it close and use it daily to spend time with God. Bring it back to church on the weekends to take notes during the sermon.

If you would like to discuss the sermon notes and/or devotionals with a group of people, please contact the church office. A group is meeting on Wednesday evenings from 6:30-7:45pm and other opportunities may be made available. We would love to have you!

If you'd like to write a devotional for next year's booklet, please email ESomes@communityumchuch.com

Thursday, November 27, 2025

Psalm 122; Daniel 9:15-19; James 4:1-10

Now therefore, our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. Daniel 9:17

We all do it. We pray this mighty prayer of Daniel in this season, often without even thinking about it.

For my family it starts with Heather, with me helping—as grunt labor—getting the storage containers out of the garage. Decorations, garlands, tins are then set out with purpose while the 'old' is put away. What has grown stale (read: desolate) comes to have the shine of the Christmas season upon it.

Then, we wait.

We wait for the day of a special birth.

Not the Day you are probably thinking of, we get to that Day eventually.

We wait to mark the birth of our middle child—those easily-forgotten and left-out middle children. Her birthday early in December marks the day when we enact Daniel's wonderful prayer by letting light shine upon our house and in our hearts by going, picking out, and putting up the McPherson Christmas tree.

With college a reality now, we suggested getting a fake one and doing this routine at Thanksgiving when everyone is home.

The middle child called that plan "diabolical."

And maybe she's right... because when any of us who mark the birth of the One who has come to be our Light and Salvation by decorating the house, putting up the tree, and shining new lights of glory for the neighborhood to see ***we are putting into action that ancient prayer.***

O Lord, make your face shine upon us once again in this season in the Glory and Wonder of who Jesus is for us! Amen.

Rev. Dr. Seth McPherson is the Lead Pastor of Community Church. He puts the lights on the family tree. His wife Heather will decorate everything else. Their daughters Laylah and Eliyah will probably help too. Tyson, the dog, will watch... and, oh, the middle child, Naavah will be there also.

Friday, November 28, 2025

Psalm 122; Genesis 6:1-10; Hebrews 11:1-7

By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain. It was what he believed, not what he brought, that made the difference. That's what God noticed and approved as righteous. After all these centuries, that belief continues to catch our notice. Hebrews 11:4

And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists *and* that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.

When we go through life as Christians, we're told different ways to be "good" Christians. Read the Bible. Go to church. Make the right choices. Act kindly. Love others. Repent. Serve. Sometimes, we're even told these are the steps to get to Heaven.

For a long time, I tried to do all those things as I was told, and hoped that it would be "enough." But when challenges and anxiety came, and I knew I should turn to Jesus, actions and words didn't bring me any closer to Him. Through the wisdom of people around me, I started to realize I hadn't spent much time on the foundation of Christian acts - *faith*.

This passage reminds us that what we bring to God through actions and offerings doesn't mean much unless they're backed by faith. *Believing in Him* is what brings Him praise and honor, not just showing up. And when He sees our faith, He rewards us with peace, joy, and comfort.

In the last year, which was one of loss and sadness for my family, faith is what carried us through when nothing else worked. Believe that God is here, even when you can't see and you don't understand, and joy will be yours.

Kimmi Baston Jacaszek began attending Community Church in 2017 and joined the choir shortly after. She now serves on the Modern Worship Team and as Chair of Church Council.

Saturday, November 29, 2025:

Psalm 122; Genesis 6:11-22; Matthew 24:1-22

Everything on the earth will perish. But I will establish My covenant with you. Genesis 6:17-18

I will never forget the date, June 5, 2018. I was called into my supervisor's office and introduced to a lawyer. We had a legal crisis going on in the organization I worked for and I was on the executive team. The thought that went through my mind was the lawyer was going to update me on the legal crisis.

How wrong I was. My supervisor started by thanking me for 10.5 years of dedicated service and then said, "as you know we have a budget crisis and a legal crisis, we have to eliminate several positions, and one of them is yours." I could feel the air leaving my body, as if I was dying (perishing).

When we hear news like this, we have choices. We can choose to be negative and remain dead. Or we can choose to rise, look to our faith in Jesus Christ, and remember his covenant.

For three months I chose to rise, look at Jesus, and remember his covenant. Like Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, my journey that summer wasn't always easy. In addition to remembering God's covenant, what got me through that summer was the phrase, "God is rarely early, but he's never late."

Bob Sherwin, his wife Debbie, and their sons have been members of Community Church for 7 years. He serves on the tech team and is co-chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Sunday, November 30:

**First Sunday of Advent HOPE
Sermon Notes & Reflection**

1. Was there a moment when Jesus became a living presence of hope in your life?
2. Are you trying to manufacture or materialize hope rather than receive it freely from God?
3. Read Psalm 33. Where in your life are you waiting for hope?
4. Read Isaiah 40. Have you had a time in your life you experienced hope in this way?
5. Picture a space where you often frequent. How could embody Christ's hope in that space and what might that look like?

Monday, December 1, 2025:

Psalm 124; Genesis 8:1-19; Romans 6:1-11

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 124:8

I sat on the couch in our living room. It was here where it happened just a week ago. She went from feeling normal to unresponsive in a matter of minutes. Eight hours later, Kay was gone. In what seemed like an instant, my world changed forever. Our life that had seemed so safe and predictable was suddenly upended and filled with questions. The biggest one being where was God in all of this?

Kay had an unyielding faith and she lived it every day of her life. I was certain - almost - that she was with the Lord, her parents and all those she loved. Yet I was left feeling little else but an all consuming loss. As I looked at the place where I had held her in my arms until the first responders arrived all I could think was that, once they took over, she was alone and no longer had loving arms around her. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a thought as clear as if it had been an audible voice entered my mind saying, "I had My arms around her." I realized then that God was where he has always been, sending his Son to comfort us when we need it most.

In the past, as a bereavement counselor, Van Brenlove felt called to facilitate a number of GriefShare sessions at CUMC. A year ago, he returned to CUMC and is again helping to guide those who are grieving

Tuesday, December 2, 2025:

Psalm 124; Genesis 9:1-17; Hebrews 11:32-40

When I see the rainbow in the sky, I will remember the promise that I have made to every living creature. Gen 9:16:

Advent is a season of waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. Today's Scripture describes Noah seeing the fulfillment of another promise made by God -- the rainbow after the flood and many dark days of rain and ridicule. It sounds so serene—we wait in hope, right? How beautiful. Except, reality check: waiting is hard. I want to see the fulfillment of God's promises for me when I want it, not in God's timing.

My husband and I waited years for our second child. It was a season of loss and heartbreak. I know God is faithful - I see countless examples in the Bible -- and yet when it was my turn, I sometimes thought that God must have forgotten me. It was a season of holding on, trusting one day at a time, even minutes at

time. Could I believe that God's promises were true for me? In hindsight, it's obvious that my faith grows the most during times of waiting.

So what can we do while we wait? We pray and we praise. We gather and serve. God's promise will be fulfilled at exactly the right time and in exactly the right way – just like he did for us in the form of our daughter, Iris. Is she the kid I was expecting? Absolutely not. Is she exactly the right kid for us, sent at exactly the right time? I can answer that with a resounding yes. He is faithful, and he will fulfill his promises at exactly the right time.

Also, the name Iris? It means rainbow. We found out when she was several months old. Coincidence, right?

Allison Florio has been attending CUMC since the age of five. She is married to Mike and they have two children, Linus and Iris. She enjoys leading small groups and volunteering with Community Women.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Psalm 124; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:23-35

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Matthew 24:35

The seasons change with quiet faithfulness—spring blossoms fade into summer's warmth; autumn's beauty gives way to winter's rest. Each one reminds us that life itself moves through rhythms of change.

Jesus' words in Matthew 24 remind us that just as we can read the signs of the changing seasons, we can also look for God's work unfolding in our lives and in the world. He speaks of days of uncertainty, when people may lose sight of truth or chase after false hope. Yet He anchors us with promise: "My words will never pass away."

In every season of life—when faith feels like spring's renewal or winter's waiting—God's Word stands firm. Circumstances shift. People change. Plans unravel. But the promises of Christ remain steady through it all.

Just as trees trust the rhythm of the seasons, we too can trust the rhythm of God's timing. Spring will come again. Light will return. The same God who holds the earth in order holds our hearts in His care.

Kathy Shusteric has attended CUMC for 64 years! She has been involved with children & women's ministries and now part of the staff as Financial Secretary.

Thursday, December 4, 2025:

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

May He defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. Psalm 72:4

When my oldest son was about four years old, we were at the park near our home. There were some “older kids” there who invited Logan to play basketball with them. They were so sweet to him, and he was having the best day ever, but it started to rain. I packed up our things, grabbed him & Caleb, and as we started to walk away, Logan turned back to his new friends and yelled “Everybody! It’s raining! Come to my house for Popsicles!” And they...all...did! Thankfully I’m the mom who keeps popsicles on hand for all occasions, but this was truly my first experience with inviting “strangers” into my home.

What a beautiful reminder for families to look up & look around. Are there needs that maybe you can help with? Especially in this Christmas season, set the example within your family to be a helper. Look for those who could use the gift of a friend, or an invite to church. Be generous with your resources & share without judgment with those who are in need. And don't panic if on this day, your abundance is just some kid-friendly frozen juice. Trust that God can use even a popsicle to build community & share His blessings.

Erin Kerstetter is the Director of Kids Ministry at Community Church. Erin is married to Ty, and mom to Logan, Caleb, & Gavin. We're not sure if this day at the park was the official start, but the Kerstetter home has been a gathering place for neighborhood kids & teens ever since. And popsicles are still a favorite option for a snack.

Friday, December 5, 2025:

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26; Acts 13:16-25

People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Isaiah 30:19

December 5, 2017, one of the saddest days of my life. It's the day my mother passed, in the middle of the Christmas season. How could I feel joyful? How could I be filled with the Holy Spirit when all I wanted to do was cry. Fortunately, we decorated, baked, & prepared our holiday foods ahead of time. I wondered how we would ‘GET THROUGH CHRISTMAS’. We decided to have our traditional Slovak Christmas Eve at my mother's house as usual. It was sad yet helped us re-

member the true spirit of Christmas. We felt her there with us. I thought December would always be tainted for me. Fast forward 8 years. I never imagined the joy December brings me with the blessings of living near grandchildren, sharing their Christmas and passing on our traditions. I will always miss my mom. I will always remember December 5 as the day she passed. Yet I thank God for all the help He gave me during my early grieving. For all the help He gives me as I continue to grieve. I especially thank Him for all the blessings he bestowed on me since. Seven times brighter? Way more than that.

Donna Bruun moved to North Huntingdon in 2020 from NJ to be near her daughter's family. She and her husband, Dan, joined CUMC in 2023. Donna leads the Wednesday Zoom Bible study.

Saturday, December 6, 2025

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 40:1-11; John 1:19-28

Growing up, the phrase “remember who you are and whose you are” was the warning when I went out with friends. It took time to learn that this phrase was not an admonition for behavior, but a question of who I really was.

Who are you? We all wear different hats in life. My favorite one says that I'm a child of God. Sometimes I forget. One particularly bad workday, a woman came to the store to buy a suit for her husband. I was annoyed because she interrupted what I was working on. I asked what size she needed and all she could say was it didn't really matter she just wanted him to look nice in his casket. Words failed me. I was ashamed of my attitude, and my heart was broken. We talked about him and his faith, so by the time she left, I remembered who I was. John the Baptist told the priests he was a man,” the voice in the wilderness calling to make straight the way of the Lord”.

So, wear your child of God hat proudly and remember who you are and whose you are.

Tracey Sepe is a married mother of three, and a member of CUMC for 28 years. She has been involved with the choir, brass choir, and children's choir. She enjoys being a part of Community Women, Kid's Club and is currently serving as a co- lay leader.

**Sunday, December 7:
Second Sunday of Advent PEACE
Sermon Notes & Reflections**

1. Picture peace in your life. Draw a picture or imagine it.
2. Can you recall a time when you encountered the presence of Jesus in the middle of chaos or pain? How did that shape you?
3. What areas of your life and environment do you find yourself striving to control peace, what would it look like to surrender it Christ?
4. Read John 16. What promises does Jesus offer?
5. How might our community, social media, the world look different if the church lived as if peace-making was a shared mission and calling?

Monday, December 8, 2025

Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Danger ahead! God's about to ravish the earth and leave it in ruins. Isaiah 24: 1 (MSG)

I think to myself: "A devotional on a passage that starts with 'Now the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate. (Isaiah 24:1a)' Darkness, desolation, disorder, disruption, despair...for the haves and have nots alike? What am I supposed to do with that? Pass! A little harsh for the Advent season."

Though, I found myself coming back to that passage. A word in a line in Eugene Peterson's The Message version jumped out "...no more joy for this old world." (Isaiah 24:5-13)

In this season of Advent, this season of preparation, how do I need to leave this old world behind and move toward the Light? How do I shed the dark and evoke the late part of this passage, to sing and shout for *joy*, not just in this season, but in my life?

By stepping toward the Light, by showing love to those around me, by serving those in need, by supporting those who are downtrodden, by stewarding with what I have been lent by the Lord, by showering the broken in prayer. With acceptance of Christ as my savior, those are some things I can do so that I am prepared at His coming, when I can lift up my voice, give glory and praise to the Righteous One, and sing and shout for *joy*! (Isaiah 24:14-16a).

Mike Florio is the husband of Allison and father of Linus and Iris. He is a tinkerer and overthinker by nature. He has been a member of Community Church for over 15 years and has served in different capacities across that time.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Psalm 21; Isaiah 41:14-20; Romans 15:14-21

I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. Isaiah 41:18

My parents had always loved gardening, but when my Dad passed away, my Mom lost the joy she once found in growing her own vegetables. The once bright garden became overgrown and full of weeds. Grief had dimmed her joy of gardening.

One spring morning, a neighbor saw her outside and quickly went to get a lily plant explaining she didn't seem to have the green thumb my Mom did to make this plant flourish. My Mom reluctantly took the plant and placed it on the ledge beside her chair. Each day she watered the flower and felt the warmth of the sun on her face. Slowly she began to clear a part of the garden again-one small patch at a time.

As life returned to the soil, something stirred within her heart. Mom remembered God's promise: "I will make rivers flow on barren heights and turn the desert into pools of water." She realized God had been with her all along, patiently waiting to bring light into her darkness.

By summer, the garden bloomed again just like the hope reborn in my Mom's heart.

Jesus came to fulfill his promise. He entered a dark and weary world because we needed Him-needed His mercy, His peace, His love, and His light. In Him, fear gives way to faith, emptiness turns to joy, and hopelessness is replaced with renewed purpose. Let us give out hearts to the Light who came to restore, redeem, and renew.

Denise is a retired special education teacher who is married to Buddy. They have attended CUMC for 3 years. Denise works in The Well and volunteers as a liturgist, at the Information Center & with the Kids.

Wednesday, December 10, 2025:

Psalm 21; Genesis 15:1-18; Matthew 12:33-37

Words are powerful, take them seriously. Matthew 12:37 (MSG)

Words can be whispered, spoken and screamed. They can be said with patience, kindness, reverence, love and joy ...or with sorrow, anger, frustration and hate. Scripture tells us "

I have purposely spoke words that are hurtful when I was angry. I have sometimes hurt people with words when I was oblivious to what that person was dealing with in that moment. The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me" has never held true for me. Words can hurt, very deeply sometimes...but they can also heal, communicate concern, speak love, share hope, convey joy and bring peace,

For many years I had James 1:19 posted on my refrigerator. "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." That little note was a daily reminder how I wanted to treat others especially my kids. It became even more important when we moved into the teenage years. I tried and failed to follow this scripture, tried again and was sometimes successful. Practice helped but I still have not fully mastered this advice. I recently shared this scripture with 2 of my grandsons when frustration was causing some harsh words. It is a goal to try and master. If we all tried to live by this reminder to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry and then speak words filled with God's love what a better place this world would be.

Tina Okel has been a member at CUMC for about a decade. When she's not helping coordinate missions projects for Community Women, she can be found sewing at Busy Hands or with kids.

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10

The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. 2 Peter 3:10

Jesus is coming back again

Advent is a season where we spiritually prepare ourselves for Jesus' arrival by remembering His arrival from 2000 years ago. In this passage, Peter is writing to remind us to remember the words of Jesus and all that He commanded — to love God and our neighbors as ourselves, to not condemn others, and to make disciples (to name a few).

How would your Christmas season be different if you knew that Jesus were coming back tomorrow? Would you tell someone? Would you love others differently?

Sometimes we get caught up in not-so-wholesome thinking. The world wants us to think that Jesus isn't real, that Christmas is about buying stuff, and that you ought to do whatever will fulfill your desires today, and that you're always right. Our hope is built on something greater though — because Jesus *is* real, Christmas is about *salvation* being offered to all who will believe in Jesus, and you ought to place your hope in the saving grace of Jesus alone because He is the *only* thing that can satisfy, justify, and save.

Jesus is *surely* coming back again. In the midst of all our gift-giving and receiving, we must consider our lives; we're called to live with and share that expectation, that preparation, that cleanliness of heart and mind for a day or for *thousands*.

Kevin Jenkins is the Director of Modern Worship at Community. He's married to Kennah and they are new parents. He sings & plays several instruments. His favorite is the piano.

Friday, December 12, 2025

Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2 Peter 3:18

As I read and reflect on this passage it's about the destruction of the heavens, but if you follow Jesus you will be saved. It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer and how encompassing that prayer is and how it always gives me comfort.

A person's walk with Jesus is always growing. Like a plant that needs water and sunshine to grow. My first memory of attending church was in fifth grade. I was a very shy child and didn't join in Sunday School, which left me out of many opportunities to learn more about Jesus. We attended church as a family when it was convenient.

When my grandma retired she started to get more involved in the church kitchen. I was in ninth grade and still very shy, but I loved being with my grandma. During summer vacation she would take me grocery shopping and then to the church kitchen to prepare a meal (funeral lunch, Rotary lunch).

At the age of 19, I received my first Bible from my parents, I remember opening it up and diving in to read page 1. Soon became confused with all the genealogy and put it down. A few years later I committed my life to Jesus through baptism, still wanting to learn more.

As years passed, I got married, had a child, moved away from friends and family, and started to develop new friendships. All the while attending church, looking for a new church in an unfamiliar place, then joining a small group, then another small group, then leading a small group, volunteering at church, and working at a church. All of this time I've been growing with Jesus and still have a lot more growing to do.

Each person's walk with Jesus is different in how it started, when it started and how it's going. Just don't stop growing with Jesus.

Betsy Smith is the Kitchen Manager at CUMC, where she leads Wednesday Dinners, Fish Fry during Lent, hosting and/or catering of special events and other kitchen ministry activities. She is a proud wife and mother.

Saturday, December 13, 2025:

Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Samuel 2:1-8; Luke 3:1-18

There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. 1 Samuel 2:2

In this verse Hannah gives praise to God for being a “Rock.” Referring to God as a rock is a symbol that God is a place of safety, and strength during times of trouble. In God we can find security.

During times of changing circumstances, and instability, where do you find your sense of security and peace? As I reflect on times of uncertainty throughout my life, I have often felt alone and sometimes like God hasn’t heard me in my plea for His direction.

It has been during these difficult or chaotic times, that I have been reminded that God is always in control. With God, there are no accidents. During these difficult times I have thought that God was telling me no. After reading Hannah’s pleas to God, and her devotion and faith, I have come to realize that God’s answer is not always a concrete yes or no, but rather His answer is “not yet”, or “wait, I have something even better!”

Keeping my focus on His faithfulness and love has brought me the peace and joy that is only found in Him. It is my prayer that you grow closer to God and experience His peace and joy this Advent season.

Jean Ann is the Traditional Music Director at CUMC. She is beginning her third year and considers it a blessing to be able to serve and worship alongside everyone. She considers it a blessing to be able to worship and grow alongside this community of people.

Sunday, December 14:

Third Sunday of Advent JOY Sermon Notes & Reflection

Reflection & Discussion Questions:

1. Does joy feel accessible in your current stage of life and personal setting?
2. Can you name a moment when you experienced joy through something good – like a meal, a conversation, or time in nature? Have you ever experienced joy in the midst of pain or hardship?
3. What are some examples of joy in scripture?
4. How is the Holy Spirit growing joy in you right now?
5. Is there something you’re longing to experience joy in again, or for the first time? Pray now and ask the Holy Spirit for that gift.

Monday, December 15, 2025

Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24; Acts 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. Acts 5:12a

I love the church. My earliest memory is a sunny day literally skipping into the church carrying my baby Bible in its little white box that I had teethered and chewed on. I have devoted my life to a calling of vocational ministry. I love the church. It's people. The Lord.

The book of Acts is one of my favorite books in the Bible. Acts is a historical account of the formation of the church after Jesus was crucified and risen and the Holy Spirit came. In this particular passage, many people are being healed and becoming believers in Christ—not because of something Jesus did right before their eyes but because of what the church people (the apostles) did! Wow! What an exciting time and example!

In the darkness and trials my family and I have experienced; battles with infertility, cancer, chronic diseases, loneliness, confusion, job loss, to name a few—church people came through. In the celebrations of life; births, graduations, promotions, new jobs, improved relationships and more — church people came through. In the everyday, church people are “my” people.

Despite the flaws and imperfections of its people, somehow God still uses the church for his Plan A purpose to care for the world and the people of it. You and I are a part of that fascinating and miraculous plan! It's an exciting time! How will you be a part of the experience? Advent and Christmas offer us a unique mechanism to be the Church and show the world God's peace, joy, hope and love.

Elizabeth Somes can be found just about anywhere at the Church, but usually she's in the office. When she's not trying to get you connected into the Church, she enjoys exercising, puzzling, & listening to good books.

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Psalm 42; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Jude 1:17-25

My bones suffer moral agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long “Where is your God” Finding Peace in the Midst of Loss Psalm 42:10

Thirty years ago, when I lived in California, my best friend and her family lived across the street from me. One evening, after dinner with her and her three small children, we received devastating news that her husband had suddenly died.

He was a loving husband, a devoted father, and the soul provider. There was no accident, no warning, his heart simply stopped. My friend was left with three little ones, ages 2, 4, and 6, and a heart full of grief.

As we planned the funeral and tried to comfort the children, her family asked me a question I couldn't answer: “If God is loving and kind, how could He let this happen?” I was asking the same question myself. Why would God take away someone so needed, so loved?

Through my journey of faith over the next thirty years, I've learned that it's okay to be angry with God. It's okay to question Him. We may not receive answers, but we can trust His presence to carry us through. In time, His peace, the kind only He can give, begins to fill the emptiness in our hearts.

A few years later, my friend remarried and had another child. Today, she is happy again. During those dark days, we couldn't imagine joy returning, but God was faithful. Grief may change us, but it doesn't have to destroy us. When we hold on to Jesus and His promises, we can walk through the valley of sorrow and come out knowing peace, joy, and love once again.

Pam French, has been a member of Community Church for 23 yrs. She is currently coordinator for the Food Pantry, VP of Community Women and Lay leader to Annual Conference

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

Psalm 42; Zechariah 8:1-17; Matthew 8:14-17, 28-34

(Jesus) touched her hand, and the fever left her. Matthew 8:15

Jesus entered Peter's house found his mother-in-law with a fever. He touched her with his hand, and the fever left her, and she began to serve him. After that, many with sicknesses or demons were brought to Jesus, and he held them all, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy he would take infirmities and bear our.

This reminds that Jesus' compassion is very personal and very powerful. He came close to people to heal them, not from a distance. Touching sick, restoring the weary and bearing everyone's pain. This same savior today brings us healing to our bodies, minds, and hearts.

Healing isn't always instant; it often will come overtime. This is where your faith works, and his presence brings wholeness. We will not only be restored, but we will be called to serve., just like Peter's mother-in-law.

Invite Jesus into your life and your house, let him touch you where you feel weak, worried, or confused. He is a compassionate healer, and he will make you whole.

I thank God for guiding me, healing me and touching my life every day. I pray he will help us to help each other.

Bob Hengstenberg has been a member of community since 2013. He works and serves by doing maintenance at the church. The church belongs to God and is Bob's church family. He thanks God daily for it!

Thursday, December 18, 2025:

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Galatians 3:23-29

Awaken your might; Come and save us. Restore us O God; make your face shine on us. Psalm 80:2b-3a

Having attended a 1-8 grade three-room elementary school with almost always the same seven classmates, I was an extremely shy, bashful, confidence-lacking freshman in a large high school. One of my early classes was "Speech" and an early assignment was to get in front of class and tell a fairy tale. I was deathly afraid of public speaking, of being embarrassed or laughed at. Even worse, with my turn coming up to speak, despite worrying myself sick, I was unable to think of a fairy tale to tell. Petrified with fright I turned to praying to Jesus for help.

Suddenly, as it was my turn to speak, I thought of a simple tale of the Princess who laughed all the time about everything, even when occasions called for sadness and tears. This was very disturbing to her father, the King. As the fairy tale goes, after the King had exhausted all his trusted court in changing her laughter to tears, the royal gardener finally succeeded. But, how? By having her peel onions.

I was able to tell my tale and, as it went over well with my teacher and classmates, I gained some confidence which helped me throughout my school years.

The above is not how I think Jesus wants us to live, only praying as a last resort, but rather to be prayerful and grateful always. Throughout my life, in family matters, work life, and everyday living, knowing that He is with us always has been a comfort and blessing.

John Forringer & wife June have been CUMC members for over 40 years. He has served on Trustees, SPRC, Finance, the Building Committee, chaperoned youth trips, worked on the TMWC & helped with fish fries. They are very grateful for the church family!

Friday, December 19, 2025

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:18-22;
Galatians 4:1-7

So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. Galatians 4:7

A few years before I retired from Westinghouse, I had to make a commute which previously was fifteen minutes and was now an hour. This made my workday about twelve hours long and didn't leave much time for anything else. In particular, I found very little time for reading the Bible and prayer. I felt like I was backsliding.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he expresses his concern that the churches he had established there were also backsliding. They were being influenced by people who told them that they needed to become slaves to the Old Testament Laws before they could become true Christians. Paul very adamantly tells them that this is not so and that only through faith in Jesus Christ do they become heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Now that I am retired, I have found more time for daily devotions and participation in Bible study groups. It is through this exposure to God's word and prayer that I, like the Galatians, have been brought to the light of a closer relationship with God as a loving Father.

Lamar has been a member of CUMC for over thirty years during which time he has served on several committees and as lay leader. He is currently serving on Trustees and is participating in the Jesus in the Gospels Bible study.

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36

...for God gives the Spirit without limit. John 3:34

John reminds us that Jesus comes from above, bearing the very words of God. Jesus is not just another voice among many—He is the Light breaking into our darkness. “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.” To believe in Him is to receive life; to turn away is to remain in shadow.

I have learned this truth not only in study but in life. Through the grief of losing my daughter, I discovered that God does not leave us in despair. His Word became my anchor, drawing me closer to the One who transforms and restores. During sorrow, Christ's light broke through, offering hope where I could see or feel none, peace in the chaos of loss, and even joy (that surprised me) in the emptiness.

This same light is what I now share in prison ministry. Many behind bars know darkness all too well—shame, regret, abandonment. Yet the promise of John 3 is for prisoners too: the Son has come, and in Him is life. My prayer is that Christ's light would penetrate even the deepest shadows, bringing hope, peace, love, and joy to those the world has overlooked. And with His help to believe the testimony of Your Son, and to walk in His light.

Mark Pasek has learned through grief that God transforms and restores, and now he carries Christ's light into Kairos prison ministry—walking humbly as a fellow traveler, drawn ever closer to the Word that sustains and renews.

Sunday, December 21
Fourth Sunday of Advent LOVE
Sermon Notes & Reflection

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Create a list of what love is not. On the other side of your paper, write out the things love is. Compare and contrast these lists. Circle the ones you feel most greatly today.
2. When have you been tempted to fix yourself up or prove your worth?
3. God's love forms us. How has experiencing his love changed how you see yourself and others?
4. What spiritual habits do you practice to receive God's love, not just as duties but instead to receive? Does your perspective need to change about receiving Christ's love?
5. Is God's love leading you toward a particular person, people group or place right now? Respond this week.

Monday, December 22, 2025
Luke 1:46b-55; Isaiah 33:17-22;
Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20

Where is the one who counted? Where is the one who weighed the tribute? Where is the one who counted the towers? Isaiah 33:18

Isaiah gives a desperate plea for leadership; for accountability; for restorative action.

Late in my Air Force flying career I became medically disqualified from flying. It was devastating. I had associated my identity with the Air Force and flying and seemingly overnight it all evaporated. Even my perception of myself as 'healthy' was upended.

A few verses later, Isaiah reassures us that, "*the LORD is our judge, The LORD is our lawgiver, The LORD is our king; He will save us.*" (Isaiah 33:22)

Isaiah reminds us that we have a King that is superior to all that surrounds us. He reminds us that we have hope in an everlasting and loving King that knows our needs and desires and who gives us a view of a time when all the sources of our worries will be permanently vanquished.

That hope kept me from complete despair back then. I can look back in awe at the many blessings that came during and out of that time.

Advent is a time of promise, of looking ahead in anticipation of a coming Messiah. It is a time when we can confidently set aside those things in our daily world which may cause anxiety or bring heaviness to our heart and prepare for the celebration of a King's arrival—remembering that we have a share in the holy city where all anxieties vanish and love prevails.

Tad Somes is married to Elizabeth. He is involved with the Kairos Prison ministry, sings in the choir & toots a horn on occasion. He is a proud veteran.

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29;
Galatians 3:6-14

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Luke 1:46b-48a

After many years of writing and directing various dramas of the Christmas story, I have always been intrigued by Mary. Here's this teenage girl of low economic status who is doing what society expects of her – preparing to marry the hardworking Joseph. But all of that changes with the angel's visit, and despite any reservations she may have, Mary agrees to God's plan. I cannot imagine the mix of emotions she must have experienced. She needed to talk to someone who could understand, and that's where her cousin, Elizabeth, comes in. Because Elizabeth had received a divine call of her own. And it's in that moment that Mary is able to celebrate what God is doing in her life.

Mary begins her song with two things: praise of God, and acknowledgement of her own humility. This is how we should approach Christmas. First, our hearts should be full of praise that God did not leave us in our sin, but sent his son, Jesus, to shine hope into our darkness. Second, we should acknowledge our lowliness. WE NEED JESUS. We have a way of trying to fill our God-sized hole with things that do not satisfy us. Like Mary, we need to be honest about who we are and our need for God. Let's approach this Christmas like empty vessels waiting to be filled with God's love.

Keeley DiMartino currently serves as the Associate Pastor for Community Church. The DiMartino family joined CUMC in 2012 and after taking a 4.5 year-long vacation to SC, returned this past summer.

Wednesday and Thursday, December 24 & 25 Christmas Eve & Day — God Does Something Sermon Notes & Reflection

1. What are you doing this Christmas?
2. What is God doing around you?
3. How do you need to get busy? How do you need to be still?
4. Who have you run into recently that needs a little extra love from you? What can you do to encourage or lift them up?
5. Pause and ponder this day. The coming of the King!

Friday, December 26, 2025

Psalm 148; Wisdom 4:7-15; Acts 7:59-8:8

Let everything He has made give praise to Him. Psalm 148:5

Warm weather walks on the beach. Sweatshirt weather hikes through the forest. Sitting mesmerized by the crackling fire and starry sky, no matter the season. The universe testifies to God's faithfulness, creation declaring His greatness in the most ordinary ways. As most precious of all His creation we can likewise give praise to God in the most ordinary ways. We are, after all, the reason He sent His son Jesus to rescue us.

As I walked on the trail I paused when close by a deer was grazing. Not much further, on the bridge, I paused. The recent rain had provided what the stream needed to flow. In a clearing I looked up to the clearest of blue skies with a single cloud. I paused, what shape was the cloud taking? Further along I passed by a runner. Reminding me I was on this walk for exercise. So I picked up the pace a bit.

What happens in our souls when we thank and praise God? When we consecrate a passing second by breathing gratitude and praise into it? With each moment of paused reflection we are set free. To walk in praise and thanksgiving opens our eyes to wonder in ordinary moments. It puts things in perspective. It restores the defeated soul. In the whole passage of Psalm 148 the writer illustrates individual parts of creation praising God who collectively praise God beyond measure. In that He is glorified for all humanity to be drawn to Him. Hope.

Heather McPherson came to Community Church in 2020. As pastor's wife she sees her role as Seth's support system at home. As mom she sees her role as being present in the everyday. As a church member she is ok helping behind the scenes and filling in where she sees a need.

Saturday, December 27, 2025

Psalm 148; Proverbs 8:22-31; 1 John 5:1-12

I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep... when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Proverbs 8:27, 29

Most of my childhood memories involve traveling around North America. My parents wanted me to see just how vast the world is outside our community. Because of our vacations, I was able to visit monumental wonders of nature: Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, the giant sequoias, the sand dunes, and more. My personal favorite experience was standing in an Arizonan desert at night under a clear sky of stars, each one reminding me how small I was in God's cosmic universe.

Feeling small is an experience people generally want to avoid. By standard definition, smallness is synonymous with insignificance—weak, disposable, undeserving. But one of God's most significant endeavors was moving from His grand throne to a tiny manger. In other words, our infinite God became small. He became as small as an infant. He became small with us. He became small *for* us.

While I was under those stars, I felt small, yet not insignificant. It took smallness to know that God's love is greater than His skies' horizons and His oceans' depths. I wonder if Jesus also saw His Father's reflection in the world's vastness and experienced a similar feeling. If He did, it must have felt amazing.

Aiden Mountan has been a member of Community Church since 2013 and serves with the Technical Ministries Team.

Sunday, December 28
First Sunday after Christmas
Sermon Notes & Reflection

1. When have you felt God breaking into a difficult circumstance and giving you light?
2. Did you have an idealized version of Jesus that has changed because of an encounter with him?
3. How has he offered hope in a time of waiting or disappointment?
4. In chaos or anxiety, did he offer peace?
5. In sorrow or emptiness, were you surprised by His joy breaking through?
6. When have you felt his love the strongest?

Monday, December 29, 2025

Psalm 20; Jeremiah 31:15-22; Luke 19:41-44

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
Psalms 20:1

I knew it was going to be a hectic day with a lot of things on my schedule. I was working at Legal Services in Pittsburgh at my first real job after college. The plans for the wedding were all coming together but it added another layer of stress to the days.

Then came the phone call. There had been an accident on the job, my fiancée was hurt and on his way to the hospital. I kicked into crisis mode and was out the door.

I don't remember getting to my car but I do have a distinct memory of driving down the Parkway and praying out loud. "Lord, please let him be alright!" And when words failed me I started singing, loudly. The only song that came to mind was UMC Hymnal #95 The Doxology, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow..." It was familiar and comforting.

The Lord answered my prayers and gave John the strength to get through the next 6 weeks of surgery and recovery. Jane and Larry Brammell were there with their son everyday. The 'new' pastor at our church, Jim Patterson sat with us, getting to know the couple he would marry at the end of that 6 weeks.

Becky Brammell has been a member of Community United Methodist church for about 60 years. She is currently a member of the choir, the Care Team and Chairman of the Trustees.

Tuesday, December 30, 2025

Psalm 20; Isaiah 26:1-9; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you...My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. Isaiah 26:3,9

It's hard to have "perfect peace" when you are going through despair.

We may find ourselves on the receiving end of news that leaves us in shock and scared. We can spend hours, days, weeks, or longer dwelling on the circumstance causing these feelings, or we can choose to dwell on Jesus.

When we pray, read scripture, sing songs of praise, and even sit quietly with Jesus, our despair can miraculously change to hope. Our souls begin yearning for more of His presence in our lives. The more time we spend in His presence, we begin to see our circumstances differently. We know that no matter what the outcome, Jesus will be with us. We will not be alone. Our yearning for Him replaces our despair, and we realize that as long as Jesus is with us, we will be ok. Actually, we'll be more than ok. We will begin to experience that "perfect peace".

Let us keep our minds steadfast on Him and trust that He will be there no matter what the outcome.

Debbie Sherwin has been a member of Community United Methodist Church for 7 years. She leads a women's Bible Study and helps with Kids' Ministry.

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

Psalm 20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19

At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 1 Kings 3: 5-14

In today's reading, God is having a conversation in a dream with Solomon. He asks Solomon "What can I give you?" Solomon replies to God remembering the extravagant love God had with his father, David. David received a son, a faithful life, and just relationships. Solomon replies that God made him a servant and so, he would like to have a God-listening heart.

I have tried over the years to have a God-listening heart. One example from when I was a much younger Christian occurred in response to a call for aid to people in a disaster. Johnstown had been hit by a storm and experiencing floods. My church, Beulah Park

United Methodist Church was collecting clothes in response to the conference efforts to help. I wanted to be a part of this mission, so I chose to donate a raincoat to the cause. I even put a note in one of the pockets telling who ever received my coat that I would be praying for them.

My prayer is that God would help you to hear His voice as he calls you to serve you with a God-listening heart.

Carol Decker serves in various missions from local church, community, nationwide, and global calls for help. She's a quilter, enjoys genealogy and being a member of the DAR.

Thursday, January 1 New Year's Day

A Prayer for the New Year
John Wesley's Covenant Prayer

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Friday, January 2, 2026:

Psalm 20; Genesis 12:1-7; Hebrews 11:1-12

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. Hebrews 11:1 (MSG)

I was raised in the Catholic faith and held fast to all its tenants while growing up. But once I got to college, the ties that once held me no longer seemed so consequential. I was existing in a secular world that in retrospect was unfulfilling. I had good friends and a fun job that kept me busy, so it was hard to see the rut I was falling into.

Marriage in the church a few years later helped to give me direction and purpose, but it wasn't until our daughter was born that I realized I needed to make some serious changes. Getting her baptized was an early step toward the goal of renewed faithfulness. Being a good father to this little person was important to me, and I began to understand more fully, Jesus' love for us. How much more could he love me than I love Tina?

For me, the life worth living was this rekindled experience with faith, family and the church. Trusting in the Lord has given me a calming approach to everyday life. Bible study, Disciple classes, volunteering, and serving are ways I've grown and try to give back.

Steve Grasha joined Community UMC in 1990. Served on various committees since then, currently serving as Co-Lay Leader; Lead Counter on the first Sunday; Tech Team computer operator; prepare visuals for Sunday services; dishwasher for Wednesday meals.

Saturday, January 3, 2026

Psalm 72; Genesis 28:10-22; Hebrews 11:13-40

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. Hebrews 11: 39-40

The best is yet to come.

For many generations, back to the book of Genesis, and throughout the Bible, people have been following God. Chapter 11 of Hebrews contains a listing of people who trusted God with their future. They could not predict what God was going to do but, they trusted and had faith. All of them pleased God because of their faith! But still they died without being given what had been promised. Time is no factor with God.

I feel blessed having grown up learning to trust God. We can learn about trusting God from those around us. However, reading about Jesus in the gospels offers us the most clear picture of God.

Do you think about the future? Do not think about current situations in our world. Trust God for something new. As you begin a new year, look for something new. New opportunities. New people. New insight. Don't cling to the old. Rather, let it be a foundation to move out and on from. "However, as it is written: what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived, the things God has prepared for those who love him." 1 Corinthians 2: 9.

May God's peace guard and guide you this day.

Pastor Jim Decker was ordained to ministry in May 1967. He then served in United Methodist Churches at Alum Bank, Bedford County; Monroeville, California (PA), Otterbein, Greensburg & retired from Baden in Beaver County. In retirement he's been a part of Chippawa and Community Church's. If you are ever in need of prayer, Pastor Jim is your man! His list is confidential, personal and addressed daily.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

**Sun Nov 23 –
Decorating the Church**

**Sat Nov 29 – Nativity Festival
w Light Up Night & Sing Along**

**Sat Dec 6 – Kids Christmas
Fest & Breakfast**

**Sun Dec 7 – Student Christmas
Party for 6th–12th grade**

**Mon Dec 8 – Community
Women Christmas Party**

**Sat Dec 13 – Kids Christmas
Program & Worship**

**Sun Dec 14 – Penn Township
Community Band Concert**

**Tues Dec 23 – Christmas
Traditional Worship**

**Wed Dec 24 – Christmas
Family, Traditional, Modern
& Communion Worship**

**Sun Dec 28 –
PJs and Praise Worship**

Join Us & Bring A Friend

***Be on the lookout for opportunities to
give & serve this Christmas***

visit **communityumchurch.com** for details & registrations

