Prelude  
*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*  
arr. Eugene Butler

Welcome

Scripture  
*Luke 3:1-6*

*Prayer of Confession (from Zephaniah 3:14-20)*

The prophet says, “Rejoice and exult with all your heart!”

**We confess: Our hearts sing over sports more than they do in prayer.**

“Do not fear; do not let your hands grow weak:

**We confess: The world is a scary place, and we tire of trying hard.**

“I will save the lame, and gather the outcast, changing their shame into renown.”

**We confess: Our lukewarm toleration of the other is far from your extravagant welcome of us.**

**We confess: We do not really trust your hope and joy. Will you forgive us, and restore us, and even change us?**

(silent prayer)

*Words of Grace and Sharing the Peace of Christ*

*Song (next page)*  
*“People, Look East”*

A Time With Kids – Lighting of the 3rd Advent Candle

Moment for Mission  
*The Christmas Fund*  
Chuck Maney

Anthem  
*“Come, Jesus, Prince of Peace”*  
Diane Hannibal, arr. Brad Nix  
Colleen Maney, violin

A Time of Prayer

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

A Time of Personal Prayer

A Time of Responsive Prayer  
*“God, in your grace,”*  
*“You hear our prayer.”*
People, Look East

Luke 3:7-18

Message

Preparing the Way, Inside and Out

A Time of Offering
Invitation
Offertory
Prayer of Gratitude and Dedication

Generous God, use our gifts not to keep this church alive for us, but to prepare us to receive your true life. Reshape us to better live your way of compassion, justice and joy. Make us, your church, a sign of your new creation in Christ. Amen.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Communion, including The Prayer Jesus Taught:

Our Father, who is in heaven: hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
Announcements

Blessing

Postlude  

Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming  
arr. Richard Brown

Those assisting with worship:
Sarah Reckmeyer, piano & clarinet
Donna Martin, flute
Terri McTaggart, bassoon
Donna Martin, choir director
Peg Breslin, reader
Dave Hayes, usher
Meredith Martin Olsen, communion preparer
Dee Dressler and Mary Malinsky, tech team
Sharon Karasti and Sarah Reckmeyer, counters of our gifts
Welcome to Open Table United Church of Christ. We are an open table where all are welcome. We celebrate diversity, nourish and serve others, work for justice, and grow together in faith through the teachings of Jesus Christ and the voice of the still-speaking God.

Open Table UCC firmly believes in science and is following directives from state and federal agencies. To keep people as safe as possible those coming into the church building must wear a face mask and remain socially distant from staff and others present who are not from their household. We are now holding hybrid worship, meaning you are welcome to come to in person worship or join us through Zoom in the comfort of your home, with the exception of the last Sunday of the month which is a Zoom only offering.

Today, we will share the meal of Holy Communion. At Open Table UCC, we celebrate an open table where all are invited to eat the bread and drink the wine or juice as we remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and offer thanksgiving for God’s amazing love. Communion will be served in individual packets. Those at home are invited to gather some bread, crackers, water, juice or whatever you have at hand.

We hope you find our church family warm and welcoming, and that you experience worship as meaningful and spiritually uplifting. We are an Open and Affirming congregation, and we take seriously our commitment to create a worshipping community where ALL people feel welcome, affirmed, and valued. Please stay and join us after worship for an opportunity for fellowship. And please, when you are ready, share with us your contact information so that we can keep you up-to-date on all the exciting things happening at Open Table UCC!

Today
10:00 a.m. Hybrid Worship
11:00 a.m. Fellowship Hour
12:00 p.m. Second Sunday Lunch
5:00 p.m. PADS Team

12/14 - Tuesday
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Pastor’s Office Hours
6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Youth Outlook

12/15 - Wednesday
12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Pastor’s Office Hours
3:00 p.m. Leadership Table Meeting
4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Music Lessons
6:00 p.m. Choir Rehearsal

12/18 - Thursday
7:00 p.m. Hybrid Other People’s Poetry

12/17 - Friday
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Music Lessons in Sanctuary

12/18 - Saturday
11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Music Lessons in Sanctuary

12/19 - Sunday
10:00 a.m. Hybrid Worship
11:00 a.m. Fellowship Hour
Our December Mission of the month is the Christmas Fund; caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years by providing extra monies for pensions, health insurance, emergency grants, and a Christmas “Thank You” gift to low-income retired UCC ministers. Emergency assistance to clergy and lay employees and their families is also available. When giving to this mission please write Christmas Fund in the memo section of your check, if giving online through our website; ucottawa.org (“Donate”) or Open Table UCC Ottawa Facebook page (“Learn More”), make a note in the memo or notes section that the donation is for the Christmas Fund. This year’s theme is Good news..Great joy..All the people! Coloring books supporting this theme are available in Fellowship Hall or via the attachment in the Weekly Menu email.

Join us today for a free community meal of lentils with Italian sausage and fresh baked bread. Lunch begins at noon, is carry-out only, masking and social distancing are still in effect for everyone present. We offer a free meal to the community the second Sunday of each month at noon, please extend an invitation to anyone that might like to attend.

Our PADS Team will be working at the local homeless shelter next Sunday, if you would like more information on how you can help out please contact Steve Malinsky or Wendy in the office; 815-433-0771 or office@opentableottawa.org.

Leadership Table meets this Wednesday at 3:00 p.m. If you have an item to bring to the table please contact one of the members: Moderator: Jordan Johnson, Moderator-Elect: Steve Malinsky, Clerk: Sharon Karasti, Treasurer: Donna Martin and Member at Large focusing on Ongoing Small Projects: Sarah Reckmeyer.

Do you like to read poetry? Perhaps you prefer to listen. Join us this Thursday, December 16 at 7:00 p.m. for hybrid Other People’s Poetry. If attending in person please wear a mask and remain socially distant from those not in your household.

Would you like to be a reader during our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service? Sign up on the sheet in our worship space or contact Pastor Jennifer or Wendy in the office: 815-433-0771 or office@opentableottawa.org.
This year we are decorating the altar with silk poinsettias. You are welcome to sponsor a poinsettia in honor or memory of a loved one. Please contact Wendy in the office by Monday, December 20 to share your loved one’s information; 815-433-0771 or office@opentableottawa.org. Loved ones will be listed in the Christmas Eve service bulletin.

The office will be closed for Christmas on Friday, December 24 and Monday December 27. We will be closed for New Year’s on Friday, December 31. Have a beautiful Christmas and Happy New Year!

Please remember that if you would like to make a contribution to Open Table UCC for the 2021 tax year, the church must receive that contribution in 2021 prior to December 30 as December 31 is the Federal observance of New Year’s Day and the office will be closed. Donations/contributions received after December 30 will be credited toward the 2022 tax year. If mailing a check, please allow sufficient time for the donation to be delivered to the church before the 30.

2022 offering envelopes are available in the living room area of Fellowship Hall. You are also welcome to pick up a set on Sunday or during office hours.

In May we began the Building the Future process in which we committed to gathering information from everyone in order to later present a plan, guiding our ministries and mission for the next five years. This Strategic Plan will represent the best of our corporate discernment of God’s dreams for Open Table. On Sunday, January 16, 2022 there will be a congregational update regarding the Strategic Plan, then on Sunday, February 6, 2022 the will be a semi-annual meeting to vote on that plan. Please save these dates and plan to be in attendance at the January meeting to share your thoughts on the Strategic Plan and then attend in February to vote on the proposed Strategic Plan.

Trinity Lutheran Church sends their thanks:

Dear Pastor Jennifer,

On behalf of Trinity Lutheran Church’s council, I would like to thank you for the letter of affirmation your Leadership Table sent us earlier this month. It is comforting to know that the level of support in our church community extends beyond ourselves, to embrace one another so wholeheartedly.

We also appreciate your generous monetary gift to help us initiate our involvement in the Sunday Community Lunch ministry. We are looking forward to partnering with you and the Christ Episcopal Church in this program!

As we continue through our transition and reorganization, we will most certainly be contacting you.
Thank you for your prayers and support!
In Christ,
Kevin Evensen
Trinity Lutheran Church Council President

“A Wonderful Connection to the Church I Love”

Since March of last year, our lives have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and many have experienced great loss. These months have also had a profound impact on United Church of Christ clergy and congregations—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

We have labored through this difficult time together, and because of gifts to the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, our active and retired pastors who have been affected the most have known they are not alone.

Last year, donations to the Christmas Fund helped pay the rent for low-income retired ministers and bridged the gap for one active minister’s family when her husband lost his restaurant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Christmas Fund gifts took care of the unexpected expense of a major car repair, helped a retired minister attend his brother’s funeral, and assisted in paying for daunting medical expenses, prescriptions, and groceries.

When money is tight and stress is high, your gift to the Christmas Fund brings relief and hope to the clergy and church employees who have dedicated their lives to serving our churches and each of us. You help the people who have helped us. You make a huge difference and bring great joy!

In the words of an emergency grant recipient . . .

“Your letter has brought great joy and relief. The grant is enough to allow me a little breathing room at the end of each month. Thank you for that gift. But equally important to me personally is this grant symbolizes a wonderful connection to the church I love. I have been blessed in so many ways.”

In 2020, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 276 retired clergy and lay employees ($1,180,187)
- Health benefits supplementation for 89 retired clergy and lay employees ($274,008)
- Emergency grants for 96 individuals and families ($214,649)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 504 retired clergy and lay employees ($252,000)

The Christmas Fund
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund
From the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

All Conference Chat is on hiatus for the month of December and will resume in January 2022.

As of December 3, congregants of churches in the Illinois Conference have raised $24,352 toward the Medical Debt Relief Campaign! That equals a total of $2,435,200 in medical debt that will be erased! The Illinois Conference is STRONGER TOGETHER when we act together for mission and justice.

The Movement toward Racial Justice is a UCC initiative to ignite action and inspire generations after us in the work of racial justice in the UCC through the sharing of stories. Read the stories of good antiracism advocacy, activism and healing work around the nation, done by individuals, congregations, Associations and Conferences. Click here for more information and to sign up for the newsletter, to encourage and inspire your commitment to work for racial justice.

What sparks you: Social justice? World issues? Examples of churches making a difference? Spiritual practices? The United Church of Christ offers so much to us! To read or subscribe to UCC News, go to ucc.org/news. To explore webinars, worship services, and presentations, visit the UCC Channel on YouTube. To hear Conference Minister Rev. Molly Carlson’s wonderful sermon at the opening of our Illinois Conference UCC Annual Celebration, visit the Illinois Conference UCC Channel on YouTube.

The 2015 General Synod Resolution to support a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict calls upon members of the UCC to "boycott goods identified as being produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the occupied Palestinian territories." The UCC is encouraging a boycott of Pillsbury products (crescent rolls, biscuits, pie crusts, cookie dough, etc.). Much of this product comes from a General Mills factory in the Atarot Industrial Zone in occupied East Jerusalem. Aside from possible exploitation of labor, lax regulation, and environmental costs, international businesses in illegally occupied territories further erode the rights of Palestinians for a just peace. Click here to learn more.

Staycations
Pilgrim Park provides a place of rest and respite for our guests, especially during the winter months when it’s “hard to get away”. We’re close but, but far-away and just a phone call away from a great escape from the everyday. Several options and accommodations are available, perfect for small families, family reunions and specialized retreats. This is an exceptional time to visit, enjoy the beautiful wildlife and scenery that our camp has to offer. We promise your soul will thank you. Call Pilgrim Park at 815-447-2390 to have us coordinate your perfect winter get-away.

Office Hours: Mon. and Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Tues. - Thurs. 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Phone: 815-433-0771
Email: office@opentableottawa.org
Address: 910 Columbus St., Ottawa, IL 61350
OTUCC Website: www.uccottawa.org
Facebook: Open Table UCC Ottawa
Pastor’s Office Hours:
Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Wednesdays 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
pastor@opentableottawa.org
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 7 pm
910 Columbus St.
All are welcome!
Corner of Jackson and Columbus Streets
Enter on Jackson St.
815-433-0771
office@opentableottawa.org