

Love



Lake Toxaway United Methodist Church
4th Sunday of Advent

Lake Toxaway United Methodist Church
Community Worship Service
December 21, 2025



*We have the closed hearing loop system.
You may be able to turn your hearing device to the "T" setting.*

To allow all worshippers to reflect and prepare for the service, please observe silence during the prelude.

4th Sunday of Advent

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

RINGING OF THE BELL

PRELUDE Come Now, Savior of the Gentiles J. S. Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP *(Please respond with words in bold)*

Beloved, God calls to us, like Joseph, through angels and messengers, inviting us to listen for the Spirit's guidance in the midst of half-truths and distractions.

Let us watch for the Lord is coming!

Sometimes, angels surprise us, like Mary, with good news too amazing to believe and yet too real to ignore.

Let us watch for the Lord is coming!

For generations, God has sent signs of God's coming kingdom in unexpected places—the birth of a child, the wisdom of the lowly, the faithfulness of a carpenter.

Let us watch for the Lord is coming!

Come! Let us worship God who calls out to us, inviting us to faithfulness as we watch, wait, and work for the day when the whole world knows the abundant love and grace of Emmanuel, Christ, God-with-us.

Let us watch and listen with anticipation, for the Lord is coming!

HYMN #202 People, Look East

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE *(Please be seated)*

Reader: Today, we come face to face with the scandal of Advent: Mary, the unmarried mother; God Incarnate growing in Mary's womb as a vulnerable baby; Joseph contemplating leaving Mary because of her pregnancy; God's love at work in ways that society and propriety could not understand; God calling Mary and Joseph to faithfulness despite the fear of disgrace.

All: With Mary and Joseph, we choose to wait, watch, and listen for the way of Love instead of responding in fear to the world's judgment.

Reader: We light this candle of love as a sign of our faithfulness as we seek, find, and follow Emmanuel, God with us.

Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.

Advent Prayer

Let us pray together: **Holy God of love, we long for your coming. Cast out our cynicism and judgement, our skepticism and fear. Hasten that day when those who seek you in every nation will come and sit together at the table in your kingdom, a place where suffering and pain, anger and oppression, division and death itself will be overcome forever. Hasten the day when we will be resurrected as a great family unified by your redemptive love to live in peace, harmony and joy. We gather today in anticipation of your coming. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 7:10-16 *The sign of Immanuel*

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." ¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Psalm 80:1-7, 14-19 UMH 801 *A Prayer for Restoration*
(Please respond with the words in bold.)

Romans 1:1-7 *Paul proclaims Christ, the Son of God*

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18-25 *An angel speaks to Joseph*
(Please stand as you are able.)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

L: This is the word of the Lord for the people of Christ.

P: Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

(Let us offer our silent confessions.)

O Holy God of Promise, we so often place our trust in the things we can see, and touch, and easily believe. But you did not ask us to believe what is easy; you have asked us to believe what is true! Forgive us, Holy One, when we doubt the ways you work. Forgive us when we find it hard to believe an ancient story. Forgive us when we question how you chose to enter the world, born as one of us. Forgive our lack of faith and belief in ways which seem so impossible to believe. Help us to look in faith, open our belief, and set aside our doubts that you sent your Son—the one who has come to set us all free. We offer these prayers in the name of your Son, Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes will not perish but have life everlasting.

In the name of Christ, in whom we see God's love for each of us and all creation, we are forgiven. Glory to God! Amen.

HOMILY

STATEMENT OF FAITH The Nicene Creed

UMH 880

(Please stand as you are able)

GLORIA PATRI #70

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

HYMN #206

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

OFFERTORY

Variation No. 1 on Noel

Marcel Dupre

OFFERING

<https://www.wnccumc.org/online-donations-to-churches>

DOXOLOGY #95

(Please stand as you are able)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise Him, all creatures here below.

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Faithful God of unfolding plans, when our certainty falters and our expectations collapse, you are still at work, inviting us into grace that redefines and redeems. Like Joseph, we bring our gifts and lay down our plans, trusting that your Spirit can shape our offering into something greater than we imagined. Let these gifts and our lives be signs of obedience, humility, and hope. May they help carry Christ into a world still longing for peace, hungry for love, and needing redemption. We pray in the name of the one who is Emmanuel—God with us. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING HYMN # 230 O Little Town of Bethlehem

(Please stand as you are able)

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Improvisation

(Please be seated)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The poinsettias on the altar are offered by Marcus and Kim Dodson to the glory of God in loving memory of Ruth Cech who faithfully served LTUMC as organist from the early days of its reopening until her death.

Sunday Morning Bible Study is taking December off as holiday and family events get into full swing. We will return on January 11th. All are invited to join as the new year begins.

Christmas Eve Services will be held at **5:00pm**
this Wednesday, December 24th.

Invite family and friends. Casual dress.

We look forward to sharing this holy celebration with you!

Year-End Gifts

If you are planning on mailing a year-end gift, please be sure to use our mailing address: **Lake Toxaway UMC, P.O. Box 83, Lake Toxaway, NC 28747**. Please let the church know if your winter address has changed by sending an email to pastor@laketoxawayumc.org to ensure your 2025 giving statement gets to you for your taxes. Giving statements will be mailed in the early part of 2026.

The Prayer Ministry meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 9:30 AM. Prayer requests may be mailed to LTUMCPrayerRequests@gmail.com. We will not be meeting on December 25th but welcome your prayer concerns.

AA Meets Every Thursday Night at 4:45 PM in the Dice Hall. To honor anonymity, please do not go to the Parish building from 4:00-6:00 PM. They will NOT be meeting on Christmas Day.

Congratulations to Luke Norton

We extend our congratulations to Luke Norton on his graduation on Saturday, December 13 from Western Carolina University with two degrees: Bachelor of Science in Education and Bachelor of Music. Luke is one of us and plays the trumpet in worship. We give thanks for Luke and pray God's blessings in his next chapter!

Invitation to Become a Scripture Reader for Worship in 2026

We are inviting anyone interested to become a scripture reader for worship in the new year. Contact Kim at mldkj@comporium.net or text 828-553-0283 to express your interest. She will work with Marcus to plan a schedule that works for you. Thank you for sharing your gifts in this way.

PRAYER CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY

Katie Monkus, daughter of Stan & Bobbie Moore,
as she begins radiation treatment for inoperable tumors on her liver;
Charlotte Gilmore; Cody Collins
The families of Mary June Warren and Beverly Goree
Those missing loved ones during this season

STAFF & LAY VOLUNTEERS

Pastor: Marcus Dodson: 828-553-0282, marcus61dodson@gmail.com
Organist: Bob Kintner: 828-329-2457
Lay Leaders: Paula Markert: 828-553-9434, Maria Buehler: 828-553-2128
Audio/Visual & Livestream: Joe Haraschak: 813-918-1916
Liturgist: Scott Walter
Advent Candle: Jack & Laura Wazen
Coffee Hour*: Paula & Fred Markert

*Volunteers needed in 2026—see chart in FH

Liturgical selections adapted from umcdiscipleship.org resources.