

Welcome to your spirit's home...

Union Church of Bay Ridge

of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.
Eightieth Street and Ridge Boulevard

IV Advent



Manger Service

*You will always be welcome here. This is God's house and a happy church home. Let us be your church family, for we are all beloved children of God. Join us regularly for Christian worship, nurture, and the doing of God's work in the world—
and all shall be well; all manner of thing shall be well.*



...Entre el buey y la mula Dios ha nacido, y en un pobre pesebre lo han recogido...

ORDER OF WORSHIP DECEMBER 21, 2008

IV Advent Manger Service: Blessing of Animals and People

+ God Waits for the World +

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

CALL TO WORSHIP

Song for the Child by Julia Cunningham

Rev. Speers

+CAROL no. 54

From Heaven Above

+ God Promises Light to the World +

FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

the Vuignier family

First leader says: This year, on the four Sundays of Advent, we give thanks to God, maker of all things, for the four Elements: Fire, Earth, Air, Water.

Second Leader says: Today we give thanks for water. Over it, the Spirit brooded at the beginning of creation. Upon it, the Ark of Noah floated all the animals to safety, the Dove brought back the olive branch, and God sent a rainbow in the mist as a promise. Through it, the People of God were saved from slavery and led to the Promised Land. In it, our Lord Jesus Christ received baptism from John. Without it, there can be no life at all. Let us give thanks for water, as we pray in silence... *(silence)*...*After the silence, the leaders light four candles on the ring, then lead these responses from Psalm 89:25-26:*

I will set his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers.

He shall cry to me, You are my Father, my Rock, the God of my salvation!

Come, Lord Jesus.

after a brief prayerful silence ...

+CAROL no. 37

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

+THE PEACE OF CHRIST

please offer the Peace of Christ to your neighbors:

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all:

And also with you.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

READING: *How Did the Animals Know?* by Julia Cunningham

+ *God Appears in Surprising Ways* +

THE STORY OF MARY AND ELIZABETH

Luke 1:39-45

ANTHEM *En Belén Tocan a Fuego* traditional Castilian carol from *Carols and Lullabies* by Conrad Susa

THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN A STABLE IN PALESTINE

Luke 2:1-7

READING: *The Stable Rat* by Julia Cunningham

Rev. Speers

+**CAROL** no. 24

Away in a Manger

+ *God's Love Fills the World* +

PRESENTATION OF GIFTS, TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY *Alegría* traditional Puerto Rican carol: *Alegría* means "Joy"

Conrad Susa

+**DOXOLOGY** no. 592 and **PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

Holy One, you who are complete in Yourself and the source of all power and grace, place within us the spirit of your holy child Jesus, fill us with such love and awe and delight that we become a blessing to everyone we meet, and send into your world through us the abundant life we have through the one who was, and is, and is to come, Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.

+ *God's Love Is Revealed in All Creation* +

+**THANKSGIVING AND PRAYERS FOR HEALING FOR ANIMALS AND PEOPLE**

...as the baby was born, they gathered round the mystery of Emmanuel: God With Us.

God our Maker, we give you thanks for life and love, for humans and animals, for plants and water and air and light, and for your immeasurable love in your gift of Jesus our brother, strong and good. May we be more like him: may we learn to be the people our animals think we are, the people you made us to be, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please gather in a circle for prayers and blessing of animals. The pastor and elders will pray with each family group according to their needs, concluding with all saying together...

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymnal p. 16: "debts"

MUSIC DURING THE PRAYERS *The Friendly Beasts* (see insert)

13c. French

+**CLOSING HYMN** no. 60

Silent Night, Holy Night

Elders Mary Cusack and Carmelo DiBartolo lead us in Silent Night as originally written: for guitar

+**BENEDICTION**

... let all creation cry, **Alleluia! Amen!**

MORE CHRISTMAS MUSIC

+all may stand; latecomers may be seated at these times. **Unison prayers are in bold.**

Luke 1:39-45 NRSV

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Luke 2:1-7 NRSV

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

How Did the Animals Know?

How did they know, what told them standing there
rooted under rough-hewn beam and rotted rafter?
What quieted the ox and caused the mare
to whinny twice, a hen to cluck like laughter?
Why did three shepherds usher in six sheep
to form a wall of warmth across the door?
How did they know that child so deep asleep
upon the straw of this hoof-hardened floor
would wake a world? Was it a winged spirit
entering their silences who came
speaking in hums that they might better hear it,
a heralding of him, this child without a name?
Grunt and crow, squeal and bark and bray,
they raised hosannas to this blessed day.

The Stable Rat

1

I am a shadow, gray, gray, gray—
never lightened by scarlet or splotched gold
or even a dot of the green I see
when I gaze from the cracks,
peering out of my necessary night.
I have often wondered,
what if I swallowed a tiny lantern?
Would my black eyes brighten
and show me where to go
other than here in this hostel
of beam and board and rafter?
I've heard the others, know their shapes
as clearly as my own;
the donkey braying at the foolishness of hens,
the cow content to give her daily pail of milk,
never withholding her placidity,
the horse too old for harnessing, who wakes to eat,
the sheep, clotting their corner
in four mounds of wool
white as moons.
They hear my teeth gnawing to keep them sharp,
they see my tail over the edge of sacks,
my mouth feasted full of grain,
but never turn to look, to recognize.
I beg their attention and in my pain
shriek like the prongs of pitchfork against stone.
I am alone and gray, forgotten,
a fill of skin so small among their legs.
They stare where I am not,
no thing to name,
no presence to be known.

2

That was then, but when this evening came
two strangers entered here,
two-legged, and the one wrapped round in cloth

lay down in straw, the other hovered over,
and soon the two were three.
I crept warily to where she lay
as did the others move close and closer still,
breathing upon the one
who had been born beneath this roof.
The donkey shunted me away with threat of hoof,
the horse loomed, and the hens
hopped so near, their feathers stirred his hair.
The sheep became a wall to block the wind
that seeped from every stall,
and I was left outside the circling of him.
Then I saw his hand grope for the shadow
that was me.
His fingers clutched my tail
And lovingly he turned me round to see

Suddenly I became green and gold and scarlet,
haloed by a flame, a fire as was he,
a rising higher than the evening star—
a glory given me,
shadow and self together.

Invitation to Prayers for Animals and People

Today it is almost Christmas, and we picture Joseph caring for Mary on their long walk to Bethlehem: they are almost there, and we know what they do not: they will find room only in a stable.

As we gather with the animals in this warm place, we pray for our neighborhood and our city, for rich and poor, happy and sad, and especially for the hungry and the homeless, the lonely and the fearful.

We give thanks for our creature comforts, and for the creatures who comfort us, for it was the animals who first shared their home with Mary and Joseph and the newborn baby Jesus: their straw, their manger, the warmth of their bodies, the softness of their fur.

And as the baby was born, they gathered round the mystery of Emmanuel: God With Us.

God our Maker, we give you thanks for life and love, for humans and animals, for plants and water and air and light, and for your immeasurable love in your gift of Jesus our brother, strong and good. May we be more like him: may we learn to be the people our animals think we are, the people you made us to be, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Song for the Child from *The Stable Rat* by Julia Cunningham

The still, small breathing of this child
cored a whirlwind. There a mild
soft stir of straw and moving sheep
awoke a century from sleep.

A lantern swung an arc of light
across the weeping face of night,
and to a world that gave no home
the many-mansioned child had come..

Announcements

Visitors, welcome! Please join us after worship for refreshments and conversation, and please sign the Union Church guest book (at the back) so that we may get to know you better.

Large-size men's dress shirts and ties for Gethsemane Church Gethsemane asks us for these in good condition, for job interviews. Bring them to the church, and church members will deliver.

All of us enjoy the Coffee Hour at the close of worship. You too can sign up for at least one coffee hour per season, and then, while you're signing up for a coffee hour, sign up for the same week as lector (since you'll already be here). It's easy, just ask Kristin Miller.

The Book of Remembrance is open to remember: 12/21—Josephine Coury; 12/28—Friends of Union Church; 1/4--Olive Buerk; 1/11—Emma Kirk Beck; 1/18—Edward Norstrand; 1/25—Leinda Mouacdie.

Prayer List requests should come to the church office by telephone **718.745.0438**.

Continue to pray for peace; for all living in the midst of war, poverty, natural and economic disaster; for prisoners and all who watch and pray for them, especially the Church of Gethsemane. Continue to pray for/stay in touch with: Paul Douglass and the Van Royen family; Diget and Ginny and the Moore family, Theresa and the Attara family, Vince and the Peterson family, the Boyle family, the Cleary family, Art Samuel and Mary Chamberlain, Iris Norstrand, Emile Serposs, Milford Anderson, Nazik David, Barbara Briggs, Amanda Silverman, Bill Louisa, Helen Kretiv; also Ed, Mark and Audrey, Helen, Wendy, Sally, Kevin. Please call the office to make changes to the prayer list.

Give food for free on line: visit www.freerice.com and www.thehungersite.com

Holiday Food Bank: The food collection box is on the table in the Sanctuary vestibule.

This Week and Ongoing

Support group for parents of children with special needs first Mondays, 11-1: call Isabel Morales 800.405.8818 if you or a friend would be interested: January 5 is the next planned date.

Yoga continues on Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:45-8:15 in the Sanctuary, **except for Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.** No experience or advance registration is needed for this gentle, restorative rasa yoga class. Each evening is \$15, pay as you go; wear comfortable clothes and bring a towel and a yoga mat if you have one.

The Rest of Advent and Christmas at Union Church

Still to come: the Union Church Manger Service 11am Sunday, Dec 21, the Manse Christmas Party after worship Dec 21, and our "midnight" Christmas Eve Communion service with carols, candles, and choir, 10:30pm Dec 24. Brad Whiteley will join us for Lessons and Carols December 28, and we celebrate Epiphany (Three Kings) with Communion on January 4, 2009.

Plain Living and High Thinking January 10

Budget process meeting 9am-12:30pm in the Parish House, and the inevitable Dismantling of the Greens, until next year, in the Sanctuary. All hands are needed for these unlovely, necessary tasks.