

4

Advent Four

LITANY OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

One: We have come in out of the cold to be warmed by the Spirit.

All: We have come in to dream God's dream.

One: We have come to listen for God's call.

All: We have come to be overwhelmed with love.

(Four candles are lit)

One: This morning we light four candles: the candles of hope, peace, joy, and today's candle, love. This candle reminds us that God loved the world so much that God sent the Christ child, so that we might be overwhelmed by nothing but the gifts of God. Today we celebrate God's gift of love, and we commit to sharing that love with the world.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: It is so tempting to go with the easy way, the world's way, the fearful way. Many before us have been challenged by that temptation. They too were strained and exhausted. They too were hurt and hopeless. They are part of our story. We can learn from them.

All: Holy God, we confess that sometimes we isolate ourselves from your story and your people. We are overwhelmed by the needs all around us. We are tempted to give up on love. Forgive us, renew us, and set a vision like a star in front of us. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

One: An angel spoke out to Joseph, do not be afraid! We need not fear the limits that others place on love. God's love casts out our fears, forgives our failings, renews our strengths, and inspires our dreams. Be assured in God's love for you. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

One: In a dream, the angel invited Joseph onto a path, to join in a ministry. Joseph wasn't perfect as he navigated the gap between God's calling and the world around him. And yet, he did it. He woke up, stepped forward and allowed himself to be overwhelmed with love.

The Christmas Fund offering is one way that we, in the United Church of Christ, can join with Joseph in answering God's call where it is really needed. The Christmas Fund is special because it lifts up those among us who are struggling- UCC pastors and lay employees who have suffered emergencies, health struggles, or poverty. Many of these leaders have faithfully chosen to serve in ministry settings that are smaller and don't provide as much security for retirement. It is wrong that they would be left without enough to eat or with a mountain of medical bills. Together, we can make sure that all have enough. This offering is a response from the wider church to be like Joseph, answering God's call to protect the vulnerable and overwhelm all suffering with love. Let us join with him as we share our gifts.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

All: Gracious God, signs of your love are all around us. We are grateful for this community and for every congregation collecting offerings of love today. Bless these gifts so that all might know of your great love being born again into the world. Amen.

JOY!