

# Union News

## December 2025

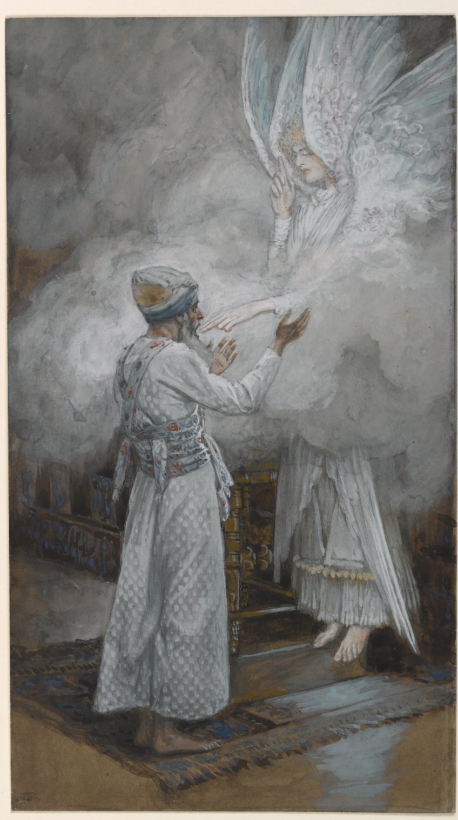


Dear Friends and Covenant Partners (members) of Union Community Church,

One of my favorite people in the Christmas story is Zechariah. As you read the opening chapters of Luke, it becomes quite clear that John the Baptist and Jesus are being compared to one another. The author of Luke wants us to see that even though John the Baptist and Jesus are both special and uniquely called by God, Jesus is superior in every way. The author cuts back and forth between telling us about John the Baptist and Jesus' birth. Zechariah is told that John will prepare the people Israel for the Lord but Mary is told that Jesus will be the Son of the Most High. When Mary visits Elizabeth, Elizabeth blesses Mary. Mary on the other hand, praises God. When Zechariah is once again able to speak, he prophesizes at John's birth. At Jesus' birth angels fill the sky singing praises.

Even when Gabriel appears to Zechariah and Mary there is a difference. Both are blessed by God. But Mary accepts Gabriel's words and is called the favored one by God. Zechariah doubts the angel and is struck mute.

I like Zechariah's story... frankly because can I relate to it. While God has definitely blessed me and called me to uniquely serve him, many others have been called and used by God in much more grandiose ways. I've read many biographies of followers of Christ through the centuries... my faith often looks small in comparison. I have to admit that often my trust in God looks more like Zechariah's faith than Mary's faith. And yet, even though Zechariah and Elizabeth might be having a lesser "experience" than Mary and Joseph and even though Zechariah's faith might not reach the level of Mary... Zechariah and Elizabeth were still called, blessed, and given an incredible gift by God. Zechariah's story reminds ALL OF US that God is with us and can use us no matter where we are in our walk with God. I like that message.



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### **December Elders**

Carol Beasley  
Claire Cabral  
Jan Meek  
Jason Morrison

**Communion**  
November 2

**Stated Session**  
November 16

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*Continued from front page*

## Zechariah Struck Dumb

by Cody Watson

Too old, we can't conceive, so alone in the temple I pray:

"Oh Lord, restore our land, send us hope."

"Your prayer is answered," a voice comes that day-

I yelp... surprised. I'm shattered. I'm left to grope.

"Do not be afraid," says Gabriel of old.

He calls down to me. Oh, my soul. I'm undone!

The scent of incense and the lampstand of gold

Were nothing compared to this Holy One.

"Despite your age, you now will gain a boy.

He'll cry out in the wild lands, wearing wild fibers.

The Holy Spirit will mark him with joy;

At Jordan's banks, they will turn from vipers."

"I'm old, too old! I can't have a son!"

"You favored fool, You are loved- and now stuck dumb."

To all the other favored fools like Zechariah (and me) out there, I wish you a special Merry Christmas!

Sincerely in Christ,

Pastor James

## PASTOR VACTION AND STUDY LEAVE

During the month of December, Pastor James will be on Study Leave **December 8-10** and on vacation **December 25-27, and December 29-January 5**. If you have an emergency pastoral need please contact one of our Session Elders: Carol Beasley, Claire Cabral, Tim Grigg, Allison Jones, Janice Meek, Jason Morrison, Eric Nelson, George Ratchford, Glenn Sparrow, Frank Suggs, or Lyn Wollenberg.

## MISSION GIVING 2025

In addition to all the many special offerings and collections over the year, this year Witness and Service has elected to give \$500 to Crisis Assistance Ministry and \$500 to Global Missionary "C" from Union's general budget. Union Church believes strongly that Mission giving should always remain a priority at Union and be a part of our regular expenses every year! Thank you for your giving that allows us to give to these agencies!

## CHRISTMAS "LOVE" OFFERING

The candle that we light on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent is the Candle of Love. During the Children's Program/ Breakfast and worship on December 21, there will be an opportunity to share some "love" through our special Christmas Offering. This offering will go to the church's Community Care Fund. This fund can be used by Session and the Pastor to provide care and help to those in the community. This fund is often used to buy groceries or gas to individuals in need who stop by the church. It also can be used to help people in the community with emergency home repairs or even help organizations trying to make the community a better place. We hope that you will give as you are able.

## WORSHIP FOR DECEMBER

### Advent Sermon Series: A Savior is Born

November 30- Luke 1: 26-38, "A Savior is Born... Gabriel Announces"

-First Sunday of Advent

December 7- Luke 1: 46-55, "A Savior is Born... Mary Sings"

-Second Sunday of Advent; Celebration of the Lord's Supper

December 14- Luke 1: 67-79, "A Savior is Born... Zechariah Speaks"

-Third Sunday of Advent

December 21- Luke 2: 8-14, "A Savior is Born... Angels Proclaim"

-Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 28- Luke 2: 25-35, "A Savior is Born... Simeon Blesses"



## STEWARDSHIP

If you have not yet turned in a pledge card for 2026, we encourage you to do so! Pledge Cards are simply guesses on how you might support Union financially this next year. Session knows that people's lives can change dramatically over the year but it is so helpful to get a good guess at the giving of the church as Session puts together a budget for the next year! You can pick up a pledge card from the office or at entrances to the Sanctuary (and turn it in in the offering plate or main office). Thank you for your continued support of Union Church!

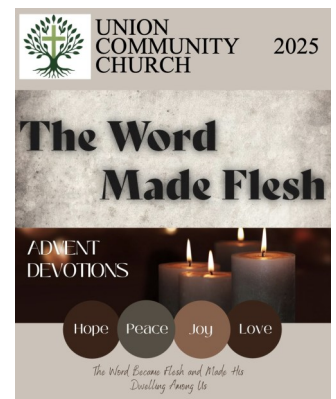
## ADVENT DEVOTION

This Advent season we invite you to consider using Union's Devotion. This devotion book uses 5 different free online devotions that you can mix and match during Advent this year. There are paper copies of the devotion and a version on our website. Use whichever format works best for you.

(1) Maybe this Advent, you want to get in the habit of reading a short scripture every day. The devotion includes a list of Advent related daily Scriptures you can read.

(2) Maybe this Advent, you would like to light your own Advent candles at home once a week, read a Scripture, and pray. We have included a weekly devotion from Muscadine Press for that.

(3) Maybe you want to read a full devotion or each week. The Devotion includes 4. The 1<sup>st</sup>, from Advent Conspiracy, is a traditional Advent devotion with Scripture, some questions to reflect on, and a prayer. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, from Wycliff Bible Translators, explores some of the people of the Christmas story. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, from Frontier Fellowship, connects Advent to our 5 senses and Christianity throughout the world. The 4<sup>th</sup>, also by Advent Conspiracy, includes questions and activities that the entire family can do as you are challenged to worship fully, spend less, give more, and love all this holiday season. There are even a couple of extra activities to do with kids and grandkids in the back of the devotion!



We hope that you might challenge yourself or family do try something a little different this Christmas season!

## THANK YOU!!

Our sincere thanks to everyone involved in the planning, preparations and participation in the 175th Anniversary Celebration! Giving of your time, talents, resources and financial gifts brought this church together in an awesome way for the glory of God. The sweet, sweet spirit of this congregation was felt throughout and we believe will continue as we serve our Lord.



**CHRISTMAS CAROLING****December 7, 2:30 PM**

Join us in the church parking lot at 2:30 PM as we head out to sing Christmas Carols to some of our church shut-ins and Assisted Living Facilities.

**CANDLES & CAROLS CONCERT****December 14, 7 PM**

Join us in the Sanctuary for a wonderful evening celebrating Christ's coming. There will be congregational carols, soloists, special readings, and music from our Ensemble & children. Please bring your favorite batch of Christmas Cookies to share!

**BREAKFAST & CHILDREN'S PROGRAM****December 21, 8:30 AM**

Instead of Sunday School this Sunday join us to hear the story of Jesus' birth from our children and youth. Breakfast starts at 8:30 AM!

**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE****December 24, 8 PM**

This year our traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Service will be a 8 PM. Join us we listen to the story of Jesus' birth from Luke and end by singing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" by candlelight.

**UNION COMMUNITY CHURCH****5615 Union Road Gastonia, NC 28056**



## BOOK CHICKS

Join us monthly during our Book Chicks book club meetings for some food, fun, and fellowship! For more information or to find out what book we are reading, please reach out to Kim Morrison. Our next meeting is **Monday, December 15th, at 6:30 PM. We will meet at the Union Road Library this month!**

## UNION ENSEMBLE PRACTICES

The Union Ensemble will practice right after worship this month on **December 7!** An additional practice might be needed as we finish preparing our Christmas music! Hope you can make it!!

## ANGEL TREE

A big thank you to everyone who participating in the Angel Tree program this year. We were able to sponsor 25 kids and had a ton of additional gifts brought in as well! It's amazing to see Union's commitment to bring joy to so many children in need this Christmas!



## SOUL SISTERS SMALL GROUP

The **Soul Sisters Small Group** will meet on **Monday, December 1st at 7 PM.** Come and enjoy a fun evening of Bible study, refreshments, and fellowship. If you don't already attend, we would love to have you join us.

## GOLDEN GIRLS CIRCLE

We will meet on **Monday, December 1 at 11 AM** in the Fellowship Hall. Our Annual gift bags for Crisis Assistance Ministry senior adult men and women will be packed at this meeting. For our meal, please bring a salad or dessert to share. We welcome all women to attend.

## 5 CENT A MEAL- LEAST OF THESE



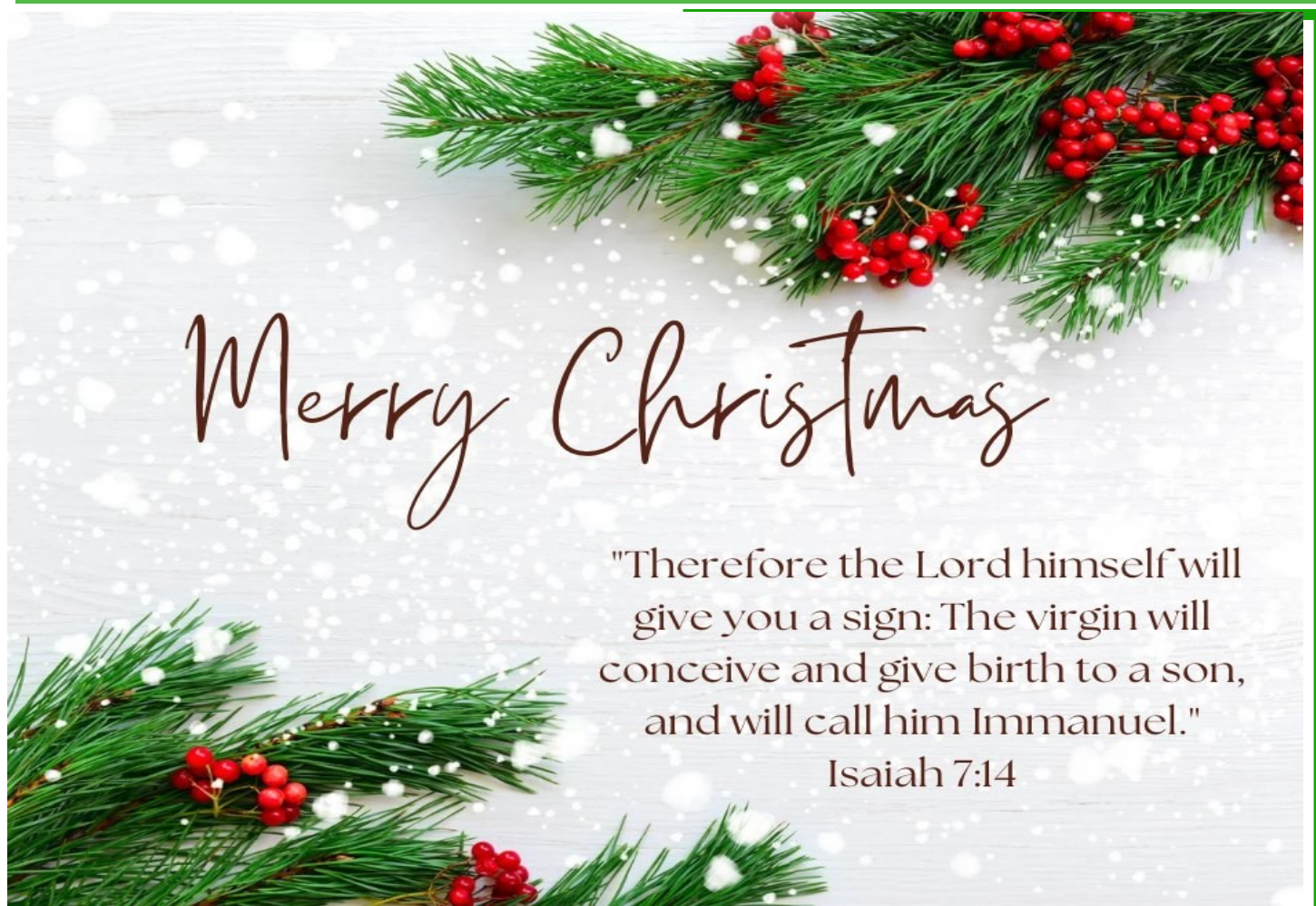
On the first Sunday of each month, we have a special offering at Union to support various local missions. Over the last year our 5 Cent a Meal Offering has benefited Crisis Assistance Ministry, Gastonia Street Ministry, and our own Blessing Box (a food box for those in need next to Forestview Highschool). Due to a lack of transparency and inability to more fully partner with Gastonia Street Ministry, the Witness and Service Committee and Session has decided to make a change. This December and every 3 months going forward, Least of These Carolinas will replace Gastonia Street Ministry as one recipient of our 5 Cent a Meal.

Least of These Carolina's mission is to impact the quality of life of children in foster care. Least of These headquarters is in Gastonia and it works in both North and South Carolina, helping over 16,000 children and youth and utilizing over 3,000 volunteers. Among other ministries, Least of These supports a special camp for children in foster care, provides basic needs to kids through its shoe program and bags of hope ministry, get's presents to children at Christmas, and provides care boxes to foster youth transitioning from High School to further education. Churches can help with Least of These programs financially or with donations, provide spaces for children while caregivers enjoy a night out, through volunteering at Least of These Events, and through prayer. This year Least of These has moved locations to 1000 S. Myrtle School Rd. Gastonia, NC 28052. You can find out more about what Least of These does at their website- <https://lotcarolinas.com>.

## MEN'S MINISTRY UPDATE

The Men of the Church will meet **December 17 at 6 PM**, to begin the **selection of 2026 MOC officers** and to start choosing the **2025 MOC Man of the Year**, recognizing a member who exemplifies faith and service. We will have a brief devotion followed by a simple and warm dinner of **soup, bread, and dessert**. All men are welcome—join us for fellowship and planning!





## PRAYERS NEAR AND FAR

### Prayers for ECO Churches in the Presbytery of North Carolina

- (1) **Jason Presbyterian Church, La Grange...** Please keep in prayer Jason Churches special Christmas concert and communion service on December 16. They are also doing the preparation work to help host Let it Shine on February 13.
- (2) **Lenoir Presbyterian Church, Lenoir...** Please keep in prayer 2 Christmas related events for Lenoir this month. They have an Advent Festival scheduled for December 7, and will be hosting a special Yorkfellow Handbell Concert on December 14.
- (3) **New Gilead Reformed Church, Concord**– November 30th is New Gilead's Greening of the Church. Also, please keep in prayer this church's small group ministries. They are using special meetings this month to help grow these programs!

### Prayers for Unreached People Groups

In partnership with the other ECO churches in our Presbytery, we have begun praying for unreached people groups each Sunday in worship. During the month of November we prayed for the Gelao Green, Nagarchi, Velakkithalanayan. Gandla. Munyoyaya, Valan, Gadaria, Morerebi, and Ulumanda people. Let us continue to pray for these groups thru the month of December. Consider praying specifically for those in these people groups who have never heard the Gospel Message. Pray for new opportunities for them to come to learn about Christ and open hearts when they hear.





SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>Sundays</b> <b>9AM</b> <b>Sunday School</b> <b>10 AM</b> <b>Worship</b>	<b>1</b> <b>11 AM</b> Golden Girls <b>7 PM</b> Soul Sisters <b>7 PM</b> Men's Bible Study	<b>2</b> <b>10 AM</b> Bible Study  <b>7PM</b> B&G	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b> <b>11 AM</b> Ensemble <b>2:30 PM</b> Caroling	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> No Bible Study	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
	Pastor James Study Leave					
<b>14</b> <b>2:30 PM</b> W&S Meeting <b>7 PM</b> Candles & Carols	<b>15</b>  <b>6:30 PM</b> Book Chicks <b>7 PM</b> Men's Bible	<b>16</b> <b>10 AM</b> Bible Study	<b>17</b>  <b>6 PM</b> MOC	<b>18</b>  <b>3 PM</b> Bingo	<b>19</b> <b>5:30 PM</b> Dress Rehearsal for Play	<b>20</b>
<b>21</b> <b>8:30 AM</b> Christmas Play  <b>2:30 PM</b> Session Meeting	<b>22</b>  <b>7 PM</b> Men's Bible Study	<b>23</b> <b>10 AM</b> Bible Study	<b>24</b>  <b>8 PM</b> Christmas Eve Service	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
				PASTOR JAMES ON VACATION		
<b>28</b> <b>11:45 W&amp;C</b>	<b>29</b>  <b>7 PM</b> Men's Bible Study	<b>30</b> No Bible Study	<b>31</b>			
	PASTOR JAMES ON VACATION					

## Union Community Church

5615 Union Road  
Gastonia, NC 28056  
Phone: 704-864-7681  
E-mail:  
unionpc5615@gmail.com  
www.union-  
communitychurch.com

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Reverend James Holeman  
Pastor

Tammy Biddix  
Administrative Assistant

Jennifer Nelson  
Communications Director

Jieeun Ha  
Accompanist

Church Hours  
3:00 PM—6 PM  
Tuesday and Thursday



December 7  
December 14  
December 21

Christmas Caroling  
Candles & Carols Concert  
Breakfast and Christmas Play