

Countryside Community Church WORSHIP



In Too Deep, © Nicolette Faison. Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25. 30"x40"
acrylic and marker on canvas Sanctified Art LLC, sanctifiedart.org/

December 21, 2025
Fourth Sunday of Advent

† Indicates those places where those who are able are invited to stand.
Text in **bold** indicates places where the congregation is invited to join in response.

Gathering

COMMUNITY TIME (9:55)

Adam Witte

PRELUDE

There Is No Greater Love

Isham Jones / Marty Symes

WELCOME

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

†CALL TO WORSHIP & LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLE

Rainbolt Family

One: We light this candle for Love, the steady flame that casts out fear.
Love that takes our trembling hands and whispers, "Do not be afraid."

Many: In the face of uncertainty, Love does not run – it stays, it heals, it holds.

-candle is lit-

One: The Christ who comes to us in vulnerability teaches us what Love really looks like:
courage that stays awake in the night, and kindness that takes flesh among us.

Many: We light this candle for Love – for God is with us, and we are not afraid.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

One: The Peace of God be with you.

Many: And also with you.

HYMN OF RESPONSE

Hymn #128 *One Candle Is Lit* (vs. 4)

CHILDREN'S TIME

Heather Moran

Children are invited to join Heather for a lesson at the chancel and then head to Discovery Kids classes. Nursery is available for children 0-4 years.

SUNG RESPONSE

Go Now in Peace (x 2)

**Go now in peace, go now in peace,
may the love of God surround you
everywhere, everywhere, you may go.**

Hearing the Word

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 41:5-10

Reader: Shannon Shultz-Thomas

The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.

Each one helps the other,
saying to one another, "Take courage!"

The artisan encourages the goldsmith,
and the one who smooths with the hammer encourages the one who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, "It is good,"
and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant;
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

MUSICAL REFLECTION

Love Be Yours, Love Be Mine

Joel Raney

SECOND LESSON: Matthew 1:18-25

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

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. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

MESSAGE

Fear Doesn't Get the Last Word

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

Responding to the Word

PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father 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 thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SHARING OUR GIFTS & CHRISTMAS OFFERING

Adam Witte

This morning, we invite you to use the QR code on the back of your bulletin—or visit the Spotlight table in the narthex—to learn more about our December community partner, CIRA, the Center for Immigrant and Refugee Advancement. That same link also takes you to Countryside's giving page, where you can support our annual mission spending plan. Countryside is fully supported by the generous gifts of our members. Thank you for all the ways you help sustain our vibrant and welcoming community!

Christmas Offering Video

CIRA

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (unison)

Holy God, receive these gifts as signs of our hope and our longing for your love made near. Use what we offer to bring comfort, courage, and joy to a waiting world. Prepare our hearts to welcome Christ with generosity and grace. Amen.

SERVICE OF COMMUNION

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

Invitation to the Table

One: The Lord be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: We lift them to God.

One: Let us give thanks to the God of love.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Words of Remembrance

As you are able, please come forward to receive the bread and cup. If you prefer to take communion in your seat, raise your hand and a server will bring the elements to you. At Countryside, we serve gluten-free bread and non-alcoholic grape juice to support a diversity of needs. Communion cups may be discarded in the basket as you leave the sanctuary.

Healing Prayer

Anyone is welcome to join Rev. Dr. Norman Pavey in the prayer corner in the rear of the sanctuary. You are invited to share a prayer request for yourself or others, and receive a prayer of blessing or anointing with oil as a reminder that God's presence is with you.

Communion Meditation

Silent Night

Gruber / Mohr / Young arr. Mark Benson

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give thanks, gracious God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us your presence. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Communion is served 'At the Table' on 1st and 3rd Sundays. Beginning again in January, on 2nd, 4th, and 5th Sundays, communion is served immediately following the service in room Anna, which is directly across from the sanctuary off the narthex)

Sending

†SENDING HYMN

Hymn #119 *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

†BENEDICTION

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas

POSTLUDE

What Child Is This?

16th century english melody / William C. Dix

Countryside Choir - Adam Witte, director - Doyle Tipler, trumpet
Alex Ritter, organ and piano - Carlos Figueroa, drums - Steve Gomez, bass

Sunday Flowers This Week

Flowers were given today by Cathy and Rick MacInnes
in memory of Charles "Mac" MacInnes.

Joys & Concerns

Join us as we pray for our congregation members and their loved ones who are on our Joys and Concerns list every week on Thursdays at 9 am in the Sanctuary. If you have someone who would benefit from prayer, want to share a joy or be included on the bulletin list, and /or be included on Countryside's Prayer Chain, contact the church office at 402.391.0350 or email office@countrysideucc.org.

Prayers of Gratitude for the following Joys:

We rejoice at the birth of the Christ Child and celebrate the season of his birth. May our celebration lead to action. As the theologian Howard Thurman famously wrote, the "work of Christmas" truly begins when the carols end:

Healing the Broken: Finding those who are lost or suffering and offering genuine presence.

Feeding the Hungry: Transforming "charity" into a commitment to social and economic justice.

Releasing the Prisoner: Advocating for those oppressed by systemic injustice and "rebuilding the nations" through peace.

Please join in praying for the following new and ongoing concerns:

Prayers for **Tim Ekberg and Margaret Hayford**. Tim had the first of three deep brain stimulator surgeries last week. Margaret is having a cervical spinal fusion this week.

Prayers for **Derek (Sarah) Miller**. Derek was recently diagnosed with testicular cancer. He had surgery on December 19. A treatment plan will be developed after the biopsy report comes back. We pray for strength and comfort during this difficult time.



What's coming up in January 2026!?

January at Countryside is full of ways to connect, learn, and celebrate together! Kick off the year with our Star Words worship service, enjoy children's and family programs like Wednesday Wonder, Discovery Kids and FAME (Fellowship, Arts, Music, Etc.!), and dive into adult education with Imag(in)ing God: Beyond Belief. Don't miss community leader Leo Louis II, who will join us for a special Adult Ed event January 18. He'll be back to join us for a Q&A after the film viewing of *My Omaha* on January 29. From music rehearsals to service opportunities like our Blood Drive, there's something for everyone—take a look at the calendar and plan your month! For more information or more events, go to countrysideucc.org/calendar, or scan the QR code.

To visit Countryside's calendar,
scan the QR at right!



Jan. 4: Worship: **Star Words Service**

Jan. 4: Discovery Kids

Jan. 4: Discovery Kids Music

Jan. 4: Adult Forum

Jan. 4: Blood Drive

Jan. 4: Youth Open Gym

Jan. 6: Odd Tuesday Coffee Group

Jan. 6: **Adult Ed, *Imag(in)ing God: Beyond Belief***

Jan. 7: Wednesday Wonder, Snow Activity

Jan. 7: C4 Choir Rehearsal

Jan. 7: Handbell Rehearsal

Jan. 9: Fellowship, Arts, Music, Etc.!(FAME)

Jan. 11: Worship theme, Rise and See What God Is Revealing

Jan. 11: Discovery Kids

Jan. 11: Discovery Kids Music

Jan. 11: Youth Open Gym

Jan. 13: Adult Ed, *Imag(in)ing God: Beyond Belief*

Jan. 14: C4 Choir Rehearsal

Jan. 14: Handbell Rehearsal

Jan. 15: FAME

Jan. 18: Worship theme, Speak, God – We're Listening Now

Jan. 18: Discovery Kids

Jan. 18: Adult Ed, A Discussion with Leo Louis II

Jan. 18: Youth Open Gym

Jan. 20: Odd Tuesday Coffee Group

Jan. 20: Adult Ed, *Imag(in)ing God: Beyond Belief*

Jan. 21: Wednesday Wonder, Service Activity

Jan. 21: C4 Choir Rehearsal

Jan. 21 Handbell Rehearsal

Jan. 23: FAME

Jan. 25: Worship theme, The Courage to Do the Hard Thing

Jan. 25: Discovery Kids

Jan. 25: Discovery Kids Music

Jan. 25: Youth Open Gym

Jan. 27: Adult Ed, *Imag(in)ing God: Beyond Belief*

Jan. 28: C4 Choir Rehearsal

Jan. 28: Handbell Rehearsal

Jan. 29: Adult Ed film viewing, *My Omaha*, Q&A with Leo Louis II

Jan. 30: FAME



In Too Deep

by Nicolette Faison

Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25

My inaugural contribution to A Sanctified Art in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth.⁷ After having a challenging pregnancy of my own, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies and how that special type of relationship benefits the community. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and time again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change with his new wife. Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think more often of what it would feel like for someone else to come in and try to fit into my established family system.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness*.⁸ This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise. Why wouldn't an angel both resemble God and the people they are called to speak to? The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is styled in an outfit that is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought." At that time Beyonce was pregnant with her twins, Sir and Rumi, and gave one of the most outstanding performances someone so far along could provide. Her full costume also included a golden headpiece that resembled that of an icon, a goddess even. How appropriate for a woman of faith carrying twins—performing a song from an album where she experienced betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation—to perform at this last supper-like table in such an outfit, knowing her marriage and pregnancy could have killed her. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated. **REV. NICOLETTE FAISON**

Christmas Eve Services

Wednesday, Dec. 24, 5pm
Children & Families Service

Wednesday, Dec. 24, 7pm
Candlelight Service

Countryside Giving

2025 Contribution Deadline

Thank you for your generosity this year! To make sure your 2025 gifts are tax-deductible, please have your contributions postmarked or received at the church office by **December 31, 2025**.

Remember, the date on your check isn't enough—timing matters for IRS purposes. We appreciate your thoughtfulness in planning ahead!

Christmas Offering

Give a little, help a lot! Scan the QR code to support CIRA and Countryside's mission. Your generosity keeps our community warm, welcoming, and full of life!

