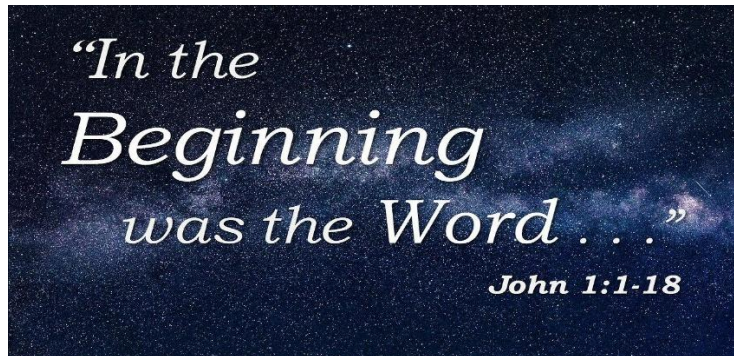


**SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2026**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**  
**JOHN 1:1-18 "THE WORD WAS GOD"**



**ST. JOHN**  
**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

10207 Lincoln Trail  
Fairview Heights, IL  
Telephone 618-397-6323  
e-mail– [stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.stjohnfairview.org](http://www.stjohnfairview.org)

Rev. Rosemary Captain  
*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*  
*Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay*  
*Communion Liturgy – Rev. Thom Shuman*  
*Ushers –*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431  
Unless otherwise noted, all scripture texts  
are from the **Common English Bible (CEB)**  
\*Please stand if comfortably able  
and respond with words in **bold** print

**SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS**  
From "Preaching Through the Christian Year"  
**Fred Craddock**

**Jeremiah 31:7-14** The early church proclaimed that, in the coming of Christ, the Old Testament prophecies and productions were fulfilled. Jeremiah speaks of the redemption, to come, when the scattered of Israel would be gathered from the farthest corners of the earth and when merriment, gladness, and feasting would signal the status of the new affairs.

**Psalms 147:12-20** The psalm praises God for God's great gifts but above all for the fact that God has not dealt with any other nation as with God's own people.

**Ephesians 1:3-14** contributes its melody to the theme of the Incarnation and the dwelling of God among humans.

**John 1:1-18** describes Divine Wisdom which like the Word in the prologue, is said to have existed with God from the beginning and to have become implanted like a tree in Israel.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**PRELUDE: "Joy To the World" Robert J. Hughes**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION:**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP: (Inspired by Psalm 147)**

One: Extol the Holy One! Praise the God who protects, strengthens, and redeems!

**Many: God is the source of peace. God nourishes us with abundance.**

One: Extol the Holy One! Praise the God who protects, strengthens, and redeems!

**Many: The Holy One is the Still Speaking God, whose word reaches the hearts of the receptive.**

One: Extol the Holy One! Praise the God who protects, strengthens, and redeems!

**Many: Creator makes all things new and prepares our days. Praise the Holy One!**

**INVOCATION:**

Wise God, renew our minds so that we may be present with you as you are among us. Renew our spirits so that we may worship you and praise your name. Renew our hearts so that we might be receptive to your wisdom, correction, and call. In you, we find compassion and hope, courage and clarity, righteousness and grace. Surround us and forge us as a community committed to bring you honor and glory. Amen.

**\*OPENING HYMN: 126**

**“Angels from the Realms of Glory”**

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

**Holy One, a new year invites us to begin again. As we reflect on the future, we ask that your grace would meet us as we strive to be the people you have called us to be. Help us to heal spiritually, emotionally, relationally, materially, physically, and financially. Strengthen us and reorient our expectations of ourselves and one another. Give us courage to be true to our faith and values. Remind us that we carry no burden that you do not share with us. Shine your radiance through us. Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

Image bearers of the holy, the Radiant God knows your struggles, honors your commitments, and meets you in your hopes. Receive the grace of God to liberate you from the past and release you to embrace the future with anticipation that the One who began a good work in you will abide with you through the journey toward renewal and revitalization.

**\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (Repeat two more times.)**  
**(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

## **SCRIPTURE LESSONS:**

### **FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON: Jeremiah 31:7-14**

#### **From “The Message”**

<sup>7</sup> Oh yes, God says so:

“Shout for joy at the top of your lungs for Jacob!

Announce the good news to the number-one nation!  
Raise cheers! Sing praises. Say, ‘God has saved his  
people, saved the core of Israel.’

<sup>8</sup> “Watch what comes next: “I’ll bring my people back

from the north country and gather them up from the  
ends of the earth, gather those who’ve gone blind  
And those who are lame and limping, gather pregnant  
women, even the mothers whose birth pangs have  
started, bring them all back, a huge crowd!

<sup>9</sup> “Watch them come! They’ll come weeping for joy

as I take their hands and lead them, lead them to fresh  
flowing brooks, lead them along smooth, uncluttered  
paths. Yes, it’s because I’m Israel’s Father and Ephraim’s  
my firstborn son!

<sup>10-14</sup> “Hear this, nations! God’s Message! Broadcast this  
all over the world! Tell them, ‘The One who scattered  
Israel will gather them together again. From now on he’ll  
keep a careful eye on them, like a shepherd with his  
flock.’ I, God, will pay a stiff ransom price for Jacob;  
I’ll free him from the grip of the Babylonian bully.  
The people will climb up Zion’s slopes shouting with joy,  
their faces beaming because of God’s bounty—

Grain and wine and oil, flocks of sheep, herds of cattle.  
Their lives will be like a well-watered garden, never again  
left to dry up. Young women will dance and be happy,  
young men and old men will join in. I’ll convert their  
weeping into laughter, lavishing comfort, invading their  
grief with joy. I’ll make sure that their priests get three  
square meals a day and that my people have more than  
enough.” God’s Decree.

### **RESPONSIVE PSALM: Psalm 147:12-20 Page 720-721**

#### **EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 1:3-14 (CEB)**

##### **The believers’ blessings**

<sup>3</sup> Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He  
has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing that  
comes from heaven. <sup>4</sup> God chose us in Christ to be holy  
and blameless in God’s presence before the creation of  
the world. <sup>5</sup> God destined us to be his adopted children  
through Jesus Christ because of his love. This was  
according to his goodwill and plan <sup>6</sup> and to honor his  
glorious grace that he has given to us freely through the  
Son whom he loves. <sup>7</sup> We have been ransomed through  
his Son’s blood, and we have forgiveness for our failures  
based on his overflowing grace, <sup>8</sup> which he poured over  
us with wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup> God revealed his  
hidden design to us, which is according to his goodwill  
and the plan that he intended to accomplish through his

Son. <sup>10</sup> This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth. <sup>11</sup> We have also received an inheritance in Christ. We were destined by the plan of God, who accomplishes everything according to his design. <sup>12</sup> We are called to be an honor to God's glory because we were the first to hope in Christ. <sup>13</sup> You too heard the word of truth in Christ, which is the good news of your salvation. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit because you believed in Christ. <sup>14</sup> The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance, which is applied toward our redemption as God's own people, resulting in the honor of God's glory.

#### **\*GOSPEL: John 1:1-18**

##### **Story of the Word**

1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup> The Word was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life,<sup>[a]</sup> and the life was the light for all people.

<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

<sup>6</sup> A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through

him everyone would believe in the light. <sup>8</sup> He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light.

<sup>11</sup> The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him.

<sup>12</sup> But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children,

<sup>13</sup> born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"

<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;

<sup>17</sup> as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known.

**Footnotes a.** [John 1:4](#) *Or Everything came into being through the Word,/and without the Word / nothing came into being that came into being. In the Word was life.*

**MESSAGE: “Who is the ‘Word’”**

**With thoughts by Rev. N.T. Wright**

“In the beginning . . .” – no Bible reader could see that phrase and not think at once of the start of Genesis, the first book in the Old Testament: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Whatever else the author of the Gospel of John is going to tell us, he wants us to see his book as the story of God and the world, not just the story of one character in one place and time. The Gospel of John is about the creator God acting in a new way within God’s much-loved creation. It is about the way in which the long story which began in Genesis reached the climax the creator had always intended. And it will do this through “the Word.” In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God’s image. In John 1, the climax is the arrival of a human being, the Word become “flesh.”

In the Old Testament, God regularly acts by means of God’s “word”. What God says, happens – in Genesis itself, and regularly thereafter. “By the word of the Lord”, says the psalm, “the heavens were made” (33.6). God’s word is the one thing that will last, even though

people and plants wither and die (Isaiah 40:6-8); God’s word will go out of his mouth and bring life, healing and hope to Israel and the whole creation (Isaiah 55:10-11). That’s part of what lies behind John’s choice of “Word” here, as a way of telling us who Jesus really is.

Let’s look again at verses 1-2 and 18. “1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The Word was with God in the beginning.” And verse 18 “<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made God known.” They begin and end this whole passage by stressing that the Word was and is God, and is intimately close to God. John knows perfectly well he is making language go beyond what’s normally possible, but it’s Jesus that makes him do it; because verse 14 says that the Word became flesh – that is, became human, became one of us. He became, in fact, the human being we now as Jesus. That’s the theme of this gospel: if you want to know who the true God is, look long and hard at Jesus.

The rest of this passage clusters around the central statement. The one we know as Jesus is identical, it seems, with the Word who was there from the very start, the Word through whom all things were made, the one who contained and contains life and light. The Word challenged the darkness that is found, tragically, within creation itself. The Word is bringing into being the new

creation, in which God says once more, “Let there be light!”

But when God sends the Word into the world, the world pretends it doesn’t recognize him. Indeed, when he sends the Word specifically to Israel the chosen people don’t recognize him. This is the central problem which dominates the whole gospel story. Jesus comes to God’s people, and God’s people do what the rest of the world do; they prefer the darkness to light. That is why fresh grace is needed, on top of the grace already given as we can see in verse 16. The law, given by Moses, points in the right direction, but, like Moses himself, it doesn’t take us to the promised land. For that, you need the grace and truth that come through Jesus the Messiah, the son of God.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about this opening passage is that we’re in it too: To anyone who did accept him”(verse 12) – that means anyone at all, then and now. You don’t have to be born into a particular family or part of the world. God wants people from everywhere to be born in a new way, born into the family which God began through Jesus and which has since spread through the world. Anyone can become a “child of God” in this sense, a sense which goes beyond the fact that all humans are special in God’s sight. Something can happen to people in this life which causes them to become new people, people who, as verse 12

says, “believe in his name.” Somehow the great drama of God and the world, of Jesus and Israel, of the Word who reveals the glory of the unseen God – this great drama is a play in search of actors, and there are parts for everyone, you and me included.

### **SPECIAL MUSIC: “The First Noel” video Pentatonix**

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER:**

We draw near to you, Generous God, as we slow down our thoughts, take a deep breath, and relax in your arms. It’s been a busy few weeks as we welcomed your son at the manger and prepared for a new year to be thankful for your mercies. Today we come not just with complaints and petitions but with praise and contrition. We are in awe of your mighty mercy, forgiveness, and love for all humans and nature.

Heavenly Sovereign, save us from the jealousy that seeks to detract us from the accomplishments of others, especially the young and those who come late in life to your service, that all of us working together may find joy in serving you as one body, one in Spirit, one in mind.

Today we remember all those struggling with health problems. May they seek comfort in knowing you are with them always as you send others to help them. We pray for all those on our prayer list.

We remember all those affected by storms, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tornadoes and terrible fires. Those affected grieve for their loss, but they are reminded of God's hope for them that they remain in God's eyes. We pray all these things in the name of your Son . . .

**OUR LORD'S PRAYER:**

**PRAYER RESPONSE:**

**Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay  
close by me forever and love me, I pray.**

**Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

God has initiated everything in creation and made us co-creators so that the world in which we live also bears our imprint. Let us proactively, intentionally, and generously create the world in which we want to live by being good and faithful stewards of the gifts of time, talent, and treasure entrusted to our care.

**OFFERTORY: "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"**  
**Elliot/Matthews**

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;**

**Praise God above you heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**  
**Creator, receive these offerings as we dedicate them to  
you and your kingdom. Magnify them and continue to  
bless us so that we may collectively meet the needs  
and hopes of our community and world. Amen.**

**HOLY COMMUNION**

**The Invitation:** This is the table of God, the joyful host. Everyone, child, youth, and adult, is welcome to eat at this table. With the boldness of Jesus we invite everyone:

Come to this sacred table not because you must, but because you may.

Come not because you are fulfilled, but because in your emptiness you stand in need of God's mercy and assurance.

Come not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence and to pray for the Spirit.

Come to this table, then, my brothers and sisters, as you are. Partake and share. It is spread for all of us so that we might again know God has come to us, shared our common lot, and invited us to join the people of God's new age.

### **Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

May the God of newness be with you.

**And also with you.**

People of Christmas, offer your hearts to God.

**We lift them to the One who comes,  
new hope and life cradled in loving hands.**

People of the Holy One of Bethlehem, sing glad praises  
to our God.

**We come, for we have received the good news,  
we have believed the Word, we are given joyful songs  
to sing.**

When chaos thought there was no end, you began,  
fullness of all time. Your Word ran sprints through  
creation, scattering the seeds which sprang forth  
into fruit, flowers, mountains and molehills.

Your Spirit sang songs of wonder and hope, that  
Breath which gave your children life. We were as close to  
your heart as the blood which flows through ours, but  
the soft, insistent whispers of sin grew louder and louder  
in our ears, and we ran off, letting the shadows of  
seduction overwhelm us.

Time and again, every time you could, dear God, you  
sent your messengers to us, crying out in love and hope,  
'return!' but we did not recognize them nor listen to  
their words. So turning to the angels, you said, 'Watch!'

as you sent Jesus to bring us home to you.

So, with those in every place, and with those from  
every time, we join our voices, singing to you:

**SANCTUS: 790**

**Holy, holy, holy, God of love and majesty,  
The whole universe speaks of your glory,  
O God Most High.**

**Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God!  
Hosanna in the highest!**

You could have kept us scattered to the limits of  
loneliness, God of Wonder, but you sent Jesus, your  
Glory, to become the Gatherer of those who had  
wandered far from you.

Peering into the shadows of our lives, he is the Light  
which overcomes all our fears, our doubts, our worries.

Speaking into the hollows of our hearts, he is the  
Word who teaches us new songs of gratitude and awe.

Gathering the cross into his arms, he is the Deliverer  
who breaks sin's death grip on us, walking with us by the  
brooks of water, into the kingdom of life eternal.

As we begin this year with hope, we remember God's  
promise to be with us always, even as we tell of that  
mystery we call faith:

**At the beginning of time,**

**Christ was the Word of creation;**

**At the right time,**



**Christ was the Word of redemption;  
At the end of time,  
Christ will be the Word who brings us home.**

And in this time, in this place, with these people, we come to your Table, Gatherer of your children. The simple gifts we take for granted, the bread which has been a staple of life, the cup which refreshes us when we thirst, you transform into imaginative grace, the Meal which is blessed by the presence of your Spirit of power and peace.

You bring us from every point on the compass - young and old, the mother with her son, the grandfather balancing the girl on his knee, those who run circles around us, and those who point the way with their canes - welcoming that great parade of your children who come with outstretched hearts to receive every blessing imaginable.

And when our beginning has come to your fullness, when we come, our faces glowing with wonder, our voices ringing with the songs of freedom, we will gather around your Table in heaven, comfort and gladness our eternal inheritance from you. Amen.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

#### **Sending**

Go forth now, with God's Word echoing in your hearts.

We will go to share God's hope with all who are empty. Go forth now, with the grace of Jesus filling your souls. We will go to share the justice of Jesus with all who are forgotten.

Go forth now, with the Spirit's peace resting on you. We will go to share this peace, placing it like a shawl around the broken, the grieving, the lonely.

### **\*CLOSING HYMN: 31 "All Things Bright and Beautiful"**

#### **\*BENEDICTION:**

Go from this place as the remnant who  
Bring the good things of the past.  
Remember the testimony of resilience in struggle and  
The witness of joy despite despair, hope amidst  
destruction, and love beyond hate.  
Go from this place as the remnant who  
Embrace the possibilities of the future  
Commit to demonstrating the goodness of God  
Among siblings in humanity and all creation  
To the glory of God and for the love of people.

#### **\*BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

**"Let There Be Peace on Earth"**

#### **THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**POSTLUDE: "Keep Christ in Christmas" Robert J. Hughes**

**PRAYER LIST: Prayer list:** Terry Thorpe, Grandson Landon, Lynne Knecht, Camille Abboud, Becky Ballard, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Private Ben Boyle, Lorraine Brown, Geralyn Gammon, Sue Ganschinetz, Russ Hartmann, David Jacknewicz, Marilyn Paul, Ella Perez, Pam and Syd Safriet, Gloria Stephens, Yvonne Weber, Sue and Dave in Florida.

**CONGRATULATIONS:** Welcome to our world, Hendrick Kilian, baby born of Scott and Jessica Reiss Kilian, on December 21, grandparents Becky and Larry Riess. Brother of Otto.

**CONDOLENCES** to the family and friends of June Vandiver on her passing.