

Music talent to shine at Dayspring services on Christmas Eve

By Janie Magruder

If you're like me, you didn't dare deviate last month from the annual crowd-pleasing Thanksgiving dinner menu — roast turkey, stuffing and mashed potatoes drenched in rich gravy, (canned) green bean casserole with French fried onions, (canned) jellied cranberry sauce, dinner roles and pumpkin pie.

As lyricist Sheldon Harnick wrote in "Fiddler on the Roof" — Tradition!

Acknowledging the heartfelt chords that often are struck this time of year, Dayspring United Methodist Church in Tempe will serve up a heaping helping of convention with a side of something special at two Christmas Eve Communion services.

"Because of the place that Christmas holds in the liturgical year and in people's emotions, we want it to be really special, because it is really special. It's tantamount to bringing out the good china," said David Schildkret, Dayspring's director of music ministries.

"You don't deviate from the traditional songs on Christmas Eve. What people love is hearing 'Silent Night.'"

Dayspring is pulling out all the stops at 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 24, with rare opportunities to hear an 11-piece string orchestra, comprising ASU graduate students.

The church is leaning into its considerable in-house talent, including Chandler resident Schildkret, who retired from ASU in May after a 21-year career as a professor and director of choral activities, and pianist Robert Mills, an ASU clinical professor and accompanist for ASU's Music Theatre and Opera. Nathan Arch, who holds a doctorate in collaborative piano from ASU, will play the organ, and the Burn City Quartet, ASU graduates who are Dayspring's artists-in-residence this year, is the core of the evening's orchestra.

"Dayspring has an extraordinary music program because of the level of the talent and the level of worship," Schildkret said. "But it's not excellence just for the sake of excellence, because we're trying to deliver a message about the birth of God's son that we think is important, and that deserves to be

done in the best way."

Because Christmas hymns typically are arranged for brass, not strings, Schildkret is arranging four hymns and one anthem for the orchestra, piano, organ and 50-voice Dayspring Celebration Chorale. They pieces include "Jesus, Jesus, Rest Your Head," "Go Tell in on the Mountain," and "Love Came Down at Christmas," among others. "Silent Night" will be sung outside in the courtyard by candlelight.

"Brass instruments are festive, and strings can be, too, but strings are more sound-equivalent to candlelight," Schildkret said. "There's a certain warmth and sweetness to them."

Pastor Jeff Procter-Murphy thinks strings will produce a more tranquil celebration.

"Music has a deep, rich history in the Methodist church — co-founder Charles Wesley penned some 6,000 hymn texts, including 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,' and music has always held a prominent place in Sunday celebrations at Dayspring," Procter-Murphy said. "This year's Christmas Eve services will feature extraordinary musicians leading the congregation in carols arranged especially for this Silent Night by David."

Dayspring's aim is to choose music, often with updated, progressive lyrics, that reflect the church's commitments to inclusion, justice, compassion and peace.

Schildkret, a Brooklyn native, joined Dayspring in 2019. He has a long career in music education, conducting and arranging, starting as an undergraduate at Rutgers University, then in master's and doctoral programs at Indiana University. Schildkret's faculty appointments include the University of Rochester and the Salem College School of Music, where he was dean, and at ASU, starting in 2002.

In the community, Schildkret is the new conductor of the Chandler-based Arizona Cantilena Chorale, and is founder and conductor of Euphony Ensemble, comprising professional musicians from the Phoenix area and based at Dayspring. He also directs the Mount Desert Summer Chorale in Maine, and in 2018, he conducted at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and will do so again at the renowned concert venue in 2025.

At both Christmas Eve services, Dayspring will be collecting diapers for AZCEND, a Chandler nonprofit that helps vulnerable people struggling with hunger, poverty and homelessness.

AZCEND CEO Trinity Donovan, a Dayspring member, said any size are welcome, but the greatest need is for sizes 3 and 5.

All are welcome to join Christmas Eve services at Dayspring, 1365 E. Elliot Road, in Tempe.

"I hope people will receive from us that sense of a warm hug," Schildkret said.

'The Journey': Jan. 22 event features survivors' stories about the power of healing

By Barbi Walker-Walsh

Join Amplify Voices, a local nonprofit dedicated to empowering marginalized communities, for a free screening of the documentary "The Journey" on Jan. 22.

This event coincides with Human Trafficking Prevention Month and aims to raise awareness about this critical issue.

"The Journey" offers a compassionate look at the stories of trafficking survivors and their journeys toward healing. The film highlights the diverse experiences that lead to trafficking, showcasing the remarkable strength and resilience of ordinary women who have never spoken openly about their experiences.

Following the screening, Amplify Voices will host a Q&A session with survivors featured in the film, providing an opportunity to learn more about their experiences, ask questions and gain a deeper understanding of an all-too-prevalent issue.

Amplify Voices, founded by Tempe businesswoman Deborah Shapiro, created the non-profit to empower individuals from various marginalized communities through its unique speaker training program.

This powerful program helps individuals find their voice and share their stories, leading to profound personal transformations.

Beyond raising awareness, Amplify serves those who have been historically silenced, working with individuals impacted by trafficking, sexual assault, incarceration and breast cancer. In 2024, they will expand their reach by launching a new initiative focusing on mental wellness.

Amanda Schneider, Amplify Voices' executive director and a survivor, emphasizes the importance of community involvement.

"Raising awareness is the first step in prevention," she said. "This film and event, while emotional, will leave you feeling hopeful, inspired, and deeply connected to humanity."

Join the movement by attending the screening and learning more about Amplify Voices' mission at <https://amplifyvoices.org/>.

Event Details:

- Date: January 22
- Time: 7 p.m.
- Location: Majestic Tempe 7 Theater
- Admission: Free