

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP
December 24, 2023 - 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Introduction to the Day

In winter's deepest night, we welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. Paul reminds us that the grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including lowly shepherds. Filled with the light that shines in our lives, we go forth to share the light of Christ with the whole world.

PROCLAMATION

P: Unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be on his shoulder; and his name shall be called wonderful, mighty counselor, the Prince of peace. O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he has done marvelous things. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

Pastor: Together we have traveled this Advent journey. We've sought hope while often surrounded by hopelessness.

Congregation: In that day, the journey was no different. Of all the places, in all the world, no one expected to be on the road to Bethlehem. Nothing good came from there. Why would anyone go? And they sure didn't expect to find hope there.

Pastor: But they went. Many went. Something had changed. Something was calling them, drawing them, inviting them to it.

Congregation: Because suddenly, the road that led to Bethlehem, was the road that led to God.

Pastor: In their journey, as they wondered while wandering, they longed for more. In the dark of night and loneliness of grief, they hoped for a Light that was lasting.

Congregation: We can relate. In the face of hopelessness and despair, the loneliness of grief on the darkest of nights, we seek the Light.

Pastor: The Light has been since the beginning. As God breathed life into creation, the Light was there.

Congregation: As God breathed life into humanity, the Light was there. We come seeking that light.

Pastor: God's story is bigger than any of us could ever comprehend.

Congregation: Yet, here WE are, finding OUR place in it.

Pastor: In the fullness of God's grace we gather this day. No matter where we find ourselves in life's journey, we come to the hope of the Christ Child. In the face of hopelessness, the loneliness of grief, seeking that Light that outlasts, we follow the star and gather together. In the embrace of community we hear the Good News, that there is a place for each of us in God's Big Big Story.

With the whole heavenly and the face of God in our midst, we sing our processional song "O Come, All ye Faithful"

PROCESSIONAL HYMN OF PRAISE "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

#283

INVITATION

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world!

He is the Light no darkness can overcome.

At darkest night we gather to celebrate the great light of our salvation.

With the heavenly host we sing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

In Christ, God’s Word is made flesh and lives among us.

With the shepherds, we will tell of the wonders we have seen and heard.

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: The Lord be with you C: **And also with you**

P: Let us pray.

C: Almighty God, You made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

READING **Isaiah 9:2-7**

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors

and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

L: The word of the Lord. C: **Thanks Be to God.**

SPECIAL MUSIC

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”
“Silent Night”

Heavenly Bells 10 a.m.
Children’s Bells 4:30 p.m.

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

GOSPEL Luke 2:1-20

Our Christmas Eve story comes from the Gospel of Luke.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON – "What am I looking for?"

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Hope is a funny thing. The scale of things that we hope for is immense, nearly immeasurable. At the beginning of Advent, a mere 28 days ago, as a congregation we asked ourselves 2 simple questions.

- What are you hopeful for?
- What gives you hope?

The answers were all over the place, and we heard them in worship the last 3 weeks, and now today, as our children helped us light our Advent Candles.

We learned that we are hopeful for a wide range of things.

- Good medical reports.
- The future of our church.
- That we have enjoyable times with the plans made with friends.
- World peace.
- Safe travels for holiday gatherings.
- The Green Bay Packers.

We were reminded throughout the season of Advent, as season spent on the verge of hopefulness, that all of these things, great or small, are placed lifted up to God, as each week when we would extinguish the candle lighter, the children would look with awe as the smoke would rise up, and then we would place our hopes at the altar. The source of where our hope comes from.

And, what does that source look like? How does God's presence in our times of feeling hopeful present itself?

What gives us hope?

- Through the laughter of children.
- Nana and Papa's toys.
- Hugs from a loved one and being hugged when we truly need it.
- Selfless service of others.
- Seeing people's generosity.
- Decorating for the Holidays.
- Beautiful music in church.
- Who we get to come to church with, and who brings us to church.
- Children in worship.
- The youth of the Packers roster
- The teamwork of sports
- The beauty of God's creation.
- Mom and Dad.

We, again, learn that how God, the source of our hope, presents themselves, is all over the board. And what we notice is that where we find hope isn't always in the big grand, but rather it is in the ordinary. It is in the things that happen in our daily lives.

But what about those moments when we are feeling hopeless.

What about the characters in this story? For many of them, their hope was found in the starry night sky. Going about their ordinary lives God made Godself known to them.

- Mary going about life preparing to be wed to Joseph is visited by an angel bringing good news of great joy.
- Joseph, wondering how he can make this whole story disappear is visited by an angel assuring him that all will be well.
- The lowly humble shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night are visited by the multitude of the heavenly host delivering them "good news of great joy for all the people: to you is a born this day a Savior, who is the Messiah."
- The wisemen who studied the night sky noticed the star at its rising and set out to find the "child, born the king of the Jews." They followed until it came to a rest over the place of Jesus' birth.

All of these characters had their own sense of hopelessness, but for each of them, even though hope appeared in a grand scale with the visit of an angel or even a multitude of them, found their hope in a baby.

And so do we. We find ourselves gathered this Christmas in a world that at times seems hopeless, whether that is the larger world or our personal world, we've all had those moments of hopelessness where hope shows up. We don't know how. We don't know when. But it does.

Sometimes it shows up in a phone call from a friend or a kind gesture from a stranger. Other times it shows up in a miracle diagnosis in the face of anything but. Whatever it is, hope shows up.

And if you find yourself sitting here today thinking the guy up front is feeding you a line and there is no hope, hear this. We gather because we believe. The certainty to which we believe is all over the board, and that is okay. But know this. If you're feeling like you maybe don't, that's okay. The person next to you, or in front or behind or across the sanctuary from you, they do. They have hope for you. They find hope in your being here today.

So, as we go from here and look up at the starry sky the next time we see it, we find ourselves connected to a much larger story than the one that we carry with us. It doesn't mean that our hope is less than others, or what we hope for isn't as significant. What it does mean is that we are divinely connected to the wonder and mystery of God's activity in each of our stories and the one the story that happened that Christmas.

Some 2,000 years ago the pain and fear of a weary world was pierced by the cries of the Christ child, God made flesh breaking into the world using that same voice that in the beginning created in the heavens and the earth, now made its home in the still small miracle that was Jesus.

This didn't happen SO THAT we wouldn't have pain and suffering, because Lord knows that we do, but SO THAT when we experience those things we don't experience them alone. Rather, our pain and suffering is pierced by the cry of the Christ child manifested through the love and support of a larger community, centuries of a faith passed down, from the story of Mary and Joseph, the hope shared by the Shepherds, the witness of the wisemen who knew of the evil king's plot. This promise has been passed down of the hope of the baby in a manger.

Emmanuel.

God with us.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

"Joy to the World"

#267

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary

and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

LITANY AND PRAYERS FOR THE CHRIST MASS:

P: I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever.

C: With my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

P: To us you have brought abundant joy.

C: Before you we rejoice and sing.

P: O God, to whom glory is sung in the highest while on earth peace is proclaimed to all people of goodwill, grant that goodwill to us, your servants. Cleanse us from all our sins, and give perpetual peace to us and to all people; through your mercy, O God, who blesses and governs all things, now and forever.

C: Amen

P: Tomorrow the iniquity of the earth shall be blotted out.

C: And the Savior of the world shall reign over us.

P: The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.

C: For those abiding in the land of death, a new splendor has appeared.

P: God of love, Father of all, the darkness that covered the earth has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made flesh. Make us a people of this light. Make us faithful to your Word, that we may bring your life to the waiting world.; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

P: Today for our sake, the King of heaven is born of a virgin mother:

C: To reclaim the lost for the heavenly kingdom.

P: All the angels cry aloud with joy:

C: For God has come himself to save all humanity.

P: Almighty God, you wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of Jesus Christ who came to share our humanity, and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

P: The peace of Christ Be with you always. **C: And also with you.**

OFFERING

“Away in a Manger”

Choir

OFFERING PRAYER

P: Good and loving God,

C: we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with these gifts, let them be a blessing for others. With the trees of the field, with all the earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

COMMUNION

DISTRIBUTION OF THE LIGHT:

“Silent Night”

Shepherd’s Kids verse 1

Congregation joins on verse 2

SENDING SONG

“Silent Night” (all sing)

1. Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

2. Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight; Glories stream from heaven afar, Heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia! Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

3. Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light Radiant beams from your holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

CLOSING PRAYER AND BENEDICTION

P: Light of the World, All good things shine brightly in your kingdom. Change us so that we shine with the brilliance of your grace and truth, for the sake of the Christ-child who brought light to the darkness and life where there was death, Jesus Christ our savior.

Amen.

P: The Almighty and Incarnate God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

Amen

“Silent Night”

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

P: Go in peace, God’s Word has become flesh and lives among us.

C: Thanks be to God!

All extinguish candles.

POSTLUDE

Worship on Sunday, Dec. 31 will be at 10 a.m. Please have all offerings for 2023 to the church by NOON Dec. 29.

December Financial Snapshot

Your Generosity in Action:



THANK YOU!!

As of Today...

Total Revenue **\$21,042**

December 22: \$35,773

Total Expenses **\$19,659**

December 22: \$29,365

Difference to date:

-\$1,383