

Worship Service “Christmas Eve Service”

Christmas Eve, Year C,

24TH December, 2021

Isaiah 52:7-10 NRSV / Luke 2:1-20 NRSV / John 1:1-5 NIV

Prelude

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

“Please stand in body or spirit for the call to worship”

Call to Worship [responsive] (John 1)

One: In the beginning, there was the Word;

All: the Word was in God’s presence, and the Word was God.

One: The Word was present to God from the beginning. Through the Word
all things came into being... .

All: In the Word was life, and that life was humanity’s light- -

One: And the Word became flesh and stayed for a little while among us;

All: we saw the Word’s glory—

One: the favor and position a parent gives an only child—filled with grace,
filled with truth.

Invocation

O Word made Flesh, You have come into our midst as light and wisdom,
desiring to be known to us in our lives and to be found in the world around us.
Open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to recognize you where you
dwell—in our midst—Challenging, heartening, lighting the way
to truth, peace, justice.

Lighting of the Advent Candles (Responsive)

Pastor: Tonight we rekindle the lights that symbolize the change Jesus Christ
ushered into this world: renewed hope for peace, joy and love

All: *Now tonight we light the Christ Candle: the candle that symbolizes the light Christ brought to the world, the light made real in the Son of God and the light that came to earth at Christmas. In Christ, the grace of God has appeared bringing the Good News to all.*

Scripture Reading - Isaiah 52:7-10 NRSV

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God Reigns."

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion.

Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Hymn – Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming - 211

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 1-5 NRSV

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.

Hymn – Oh Little Town of Bethlehem - 191

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 6-7 NRSV

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.

Hymn – Away in a Manger - 194

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 8-12 NRSV

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."

Hymn – It Came Upon a Midnight Clear - 195

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 13-14 NRSV

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!"

Hymn – Angels We Have Heard on High - 197

Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 15-20 NRSV

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.

Hymn – What Child is This? - 215

Reflection - *Rev. Glenn Brumbaugh*

The great multitude of light sings, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." Do we believe this heavenly pronouncement? Do we really hope for peace on earth, peace in our lives and families, peace among us as religions and nations?

Several years ago in an interview the Dalai Lama was asked if he had hope for the future. He laughed and said, 'Of course I have hope. The future has not yet been decided.' Do we believe this? Or do we live as if we believe there is no hope, as if the future has already been determined, as if the fragmentations and divisions of our lives and world are permanent.

Today, throughout the world, we celebrate the birth of the Child of Peace. Even well beyond the Christian household, men and women with their families and children will celebrate tomorrow with gift-giving and celebration. People and cultures everywhere will hear again the song of hope and will look to the Child.

Shepherds were the first to look, shepherds living in fields. Unlettered, unwashed herders of livestock existing at the margins, far from the power-centers of respectability and prestige. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace." The shepherds were faithful to what they heard. This is a feature of the Christmas story. It is in fact a vital feature of Christianity, even though we have often failed to believe it--that new vision is born not necessarily among the holders of power. The message of hope emerges among the least significant, among shepherds, among those who could never have imagined that they would be forever remembered in human history.

Is this not where most of us are today, living in the 'fields' of our nations, in places distant from power and prestige? What is the message of hope today that we are to bear for the world and for one another? And where now are we to look for the Child of Peace? These are questions for us all. For each of us has a role to play in this most essential story, peace on earth. The greatest of songs has been sung. It is still sung at the birth of every child--it is a song of hope. Do we believe it?

We bow to the Child who was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, the Child who shows us what is at the heart of every child, every man, every woman. But it is not just to the past that we bow. We don't have to look back, nor do we have to look far. For the Child is here and now, in our midst right now, in our family and in every family. The Child lives in the streets of our nation and in the streets of every nation.

And the Child is as close to us as our very soul. Yes, often hidden away under doubts and denials in our lives, but deep within us waiting to be born anew. The question is not where will we find the Child, for the Child is everywhere. The question is whether we will bow to the Child. The question is whether we will serve the preciousness, the

sacredness, and the healing energies of God that have been planted deep within the Child, deep within us, deep within every person and nation, every species and life-form.

As we look to the Child today, we remember our own children and the children of our friends and families, wherever they may be. We remember their struggles and joys, their delights and their fears. We love them and deep within our hearts we long to overcome the things that may separate us from them, our distances, our differences. We also remember our brothers and sisters, those with whom we have shared life's journey of laughter and tears. And in remembering them we remember that we are all brothers and sisters, for everything in the universe is interrelated. And we remember our mothers and fathers, our grandmothers and grandfathers, those through whom the sacred river of life has flowed to us. These are the people we look to today. They are all born of God. We honor their preciousness, their sacredness, and the deep wellsprings of life and healing that are in them for the world.

What are the divisions in our lives and communities that we cannot imagine being healed? What are the problems in our culture we can't imagine ever being resolved? The future has not yet been decided. Do we believe this? If so, let us put our belief into action. Let us reshape the future together.

I invite us today to hear again the song of hope. I call on us to look for the preciousness of the Child in every nation. I call on us to seek the Child's sacredness in every religion. And I call on us as families to be faithful to the healing gifts of the Child in every family. This is the way of love, the way of transformation. Only the power of love will save us, not our love of power. Only love-force will create peace on earth, not brute-force.

The love-force of God is our true soul-force. Shall we open ourselves to what we could never have imagined happening? The Child of Peace can be born again. We carry within us the precious gold of life. We carry within us the sacred fragrance of God. We carry within us the healing salve of love. A new salvation can be born. Do we believe it? If so, let us live it together, truly giving "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace."

A Call to Serve

The Love of God is born new in the world as often as we embody that love in the works of compassion, peace and justice. Let us offer our gifts in a spirit of generosity and hope.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let our gifts point to your presence in the world, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

Fourth Reading - John 1:1-5 NIV

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

He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it

Candle Lighting Service

Pastor: We come to a special part of tonight's service. As Christ comes bringing the light of God's love, we light our individual candles to signify our individual and collective commitment to live as Christ's faithful in the world.

As you are able, please take your candle and Pass the light along until every candle is lit. As the candles are lit we will join in singing.

Hymn – Silent Night 193

Commissioning / Benediction

The story tells us that it's those who wait in the world's shadows who are the first to know of the Christ-child, born into darkness bringing great light. So leave here today to be carriers of the rumour of peace and the truth of love into a world longing for light. Pray for the justice another is waiting for, and speak of the hope another needs to breathe And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all Amen.

As you gently extinguish your candle, carry the light of Jesus' love with you into the world. Amen.