

Christmas Eve service, 2020

In your homes, even if you don't have an advent wreath, have one candle in a holder, ready to light as we light the Christ candle – and then light your individual candles from. This year – an unusual year – you may choose to be creative with your candles. This may be the time to have a number of candles, spaced on a table. If you plan to hold one, please have it either in a candle holder, or cut a paper circle and insert your candle in the center.

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Rejoice, for God is with us -- Emmanuel.

In the darkness of our world shines God's holy light.

Now there is reason to hope, to love, to laugh, to live.

God is truly with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God!

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
born the King of angels,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation.
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
born this happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, with joy and thanksgiving we gather as your people. We have come to hear again the timeless story of Christ's birth.

In the excitement of this night, quiet our hearts that we may know the peace and fullness of this holy time. Shine, O Light, in the darkness of our world. Sing, O angels, in the stillness of our hearts, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those God favors." This we pray in the name of the Child of Bethlehem. Amen.

The prophet Isaiah speaks these words Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned.
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*

And from the Gospel of John: John 1:1-2, 4-5
*In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God and the Word was God.
² The Word was with God in the beginning.
Through the Word was life,^[a]
and the life was the light for all people.
⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.*

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Reader 1: Advent hope moves us; Advent love leads us; Advent joy stirs us; Advent peace stills us, that we might affirm our King, Jesus. It is time we set flame to this Advent affirmation by lighting the Christ Candle., here and in our homes. .

Reader 2: We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He was the long-awaited Messiah whose coming was prophesied. The same Jesus lives today in our hearts. He deserves our highest loyalty and total commitment. In Jesus Christ our hope is fulfilled; our love is consummated; our joy is complete; and our peace is sealed.

Reader 1: Rejoice, a Savior is born

Reader 2: **A savior is born, indeed. Alleluia!**

CHILDREN'S STORY PASTOR ALAIRE

TELLING THE STORY From Luke 2:1-18

² In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. ² This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. ³ Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. ⁴ Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. ⁵ He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was room for them in the inn.

Away in a Manger – piano and organ duet

*⁸ Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. ⁹ The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.
¹⁰ The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. ¹¹ Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. ¹² This is a sign for you: you will*

find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear that glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold
Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all gracious King.
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

First Coming

Madeleine L'Engle

God did not wait till the world was ready, till...the nations were at peace.
God came when the heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release.
God did not wait for the perfect time. God came when the need was deep and great.
God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.
God did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours of anguished shame God came, and God's light would not go out.
God came to a world which did not mesh, to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of Word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice for to share our grief, to touch
our pain. God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

So, if it seems hard to live into the joy of Christmas this year because of the heavy burdens you bear, or the messiness of your life or your family, or the pain of being physically distanced from those you love, know this: God does not wait. God does not wait until the world is ready or for a perfect time, or for perfect peace. God does not wait for pandemics to end. God does not wait for all the messes to be tidied up.

God does not wait because “Jesus is being born where people need him most.” God makes God’s home in the messiest of places—a stable—in the messiest of times— under the control of the Roman Empire—and with the most ordinary of people, a teenage girl and her fiancé and the shepherds.

Jesus is being born where we need him most. In the messes. In the hard places. In the dark and desperate places. In the lonely and lost places. In the places and with the people who seem too far gone.

Jesus is born into exactly those kinds of places and he spends his life with the most vulnerable and ostracized and brokenhearted of people.

The First Noel

The first noel the angels did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay.
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, noel, noel, noel. Born is the King of Israel

*¹⁵ When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other,
“Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened. Let’s confirm what the Lord has revealed*

to us.”

¹⁶ They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

¹⁷ When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them.

O Holy Night piano and organ duet

A number of years ago, a letter to Jesus was found in a shelter in Argentina. Here these words:
They told me that you came back to be born every Christmas. Man, you're crazy!
. . . With this stubborn gesture of coming back every Christmas you are trying to tell us something:
That the revolution that all proclaim begins first of all in each one's heart.
That it doesn't mean only changing structures but changing selfishness for love.
That we have to stop being wolves and return to being brothers and sisters,
That we . . . begin to work seriously for individual conversion and social change that will give to all
the possibility of having bread, education, freedom, and dignity.
That you have a message that's called the Gospel, and a Church, and that's us – A Church that wants to
be servant of all, a Church that knows that because God became human one.
There is no other way to love God but to love all people.
If that's the way it is, Jesus, come to this place this Christmas, come to my country, come to the
world of humanity. And first of all, come to my heart.

This request, come into my heart, is symbolized around the world by the lighting of candles on Christmas Eve. We receive the light from the Christ candle, and when we pass that light, we tip our unlit one into the flame, ...a sign of opening our hearts to receive. As you light your candles at home, carefully tip unlit into lit. Pass the light if there are others with you, or light more than one candle. Feel free to set your candles in holders on a table. May God's light be abundant. Please sit as you sing.

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.

Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from Heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, Love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy Holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth

Has it ever occurred to you that a candle does not lose any of its power and brilliance by lighting another candle?

No, a candle loses nothing by giving of itself. As a matter of fact, as long as a candle is lit; there is no limit to the number of other candles it can light. Its ability to share its brilliance is limited only by the length of time it can stay lit.

See how the light of one has spread. How many more could be have lit, even tonight in your home? And this is certainly the year we may want to receive and give God's light and love in abundance, in a new and different way. And, as our brother Christian in Argentina reminded us, we today, carry him in our hearts.

Because God became human one Christmas there is no other way to love God but to love all people. He was one child, who grew to be a man.

One man...and how brilliant his love and life could make this world, still today. He was only one... We are each only one... but we are one.

A candle does not lose any of its power and brilliance by lighting another candle. Never fear that lighting up the lives of others will deplete your own light.

Never fear that passing your glow to every soul you encounter is going to take anything from you. When you allow God's light to shine through you freely and unconditionally, you are truly "the light of the world."

May these words of Howard Thurman close this virtual time together.

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flocks,

Then the work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among all peoples,

To make music in the heart.

Go in peace to live and love and laugh to serve the Lord. Thanks be to God!

****Joy to the World***

Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.

Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing,

And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove^[L]_[SEP]

The glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love,

And wonders of His love, and wonders, wonders of His love.

POSTLUDE