**First United Church**

*Seeking to be a welcoming community of Christian faith, proclaiming and celebrating the love of God in Jesus Christ through the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit*

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Christmas Eve

December 24, 2019 7:00pm

***GATHERING AS GOD’S PEOPLE***

***MUSICAL PRELUDE:*** John Anderson

***WELCOME & INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE***

***THE CHRISTMAS STORY***

*Reader 1:*

Tonight’s the night, the darkest night

When shines no moon to give us light,

Celestial stars above us bright,

Now whisper from their lofty height.

“Be calm, you shepherds, have no fright”,

A voice from darkness speaks at night,

And somewhere far beyond our sight,

A Father holds his baby tight.

“To earth, be gone, O Child of light,

 With flocks of angels, take your flight,

Forsake your Throne, your Power, your Right

And in a manger dwell this night.”

*Reader 2:*

Dear Mary’s Son, you know our plight,

So in our darkness, be our light,

Lend strength and power to do the right,

And be the North Star in our night.

We thank You, Spirit, God of Might,

Who to the clans on Sinai’s height,

Gave Law and Wisdom and insight,

In which the Prophets took delight.

*Reader 3:*

We thank You, Creator, God of Might,

 Your door You never did shut tight,

A draft of warmth, a crack of light,

All spoke of life beyond our sight.

***All:***

**And now, O Christ, Great God of Light,**

**Whom our stubbornness sees and then takes flight,**

**We stand before You, our delight,**

**And join the angels in this night.**

**“All Glory to the God of Might,**

**Who now appears to human sight,**

**To guide us from our greatest fright**

**And bring us home to heaven tonight.”**

***CAROL:*** VU#64 O Little Town of Bethlehem (v1 & 2)

**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 streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.**

**For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above**

**While mortals sleep the angels keep their watch of wondering love.**

**I morning stars together proclaim the holy birth,**

**And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.**

**Reader:**

The people who walked in darkness
    have seen a great light.
For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—
    light! sunbursts of light!
You repopulated the nation,
    you expanded its joy.
Oh, they’re so glad in your presence!
    Festival joy!
The joy of a great celebration,
    sharing rich gifts and warm greetings  (Isaiah 9:2 *The Message (MSG)*

***ENTRANCE OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST***

*Sing:*(VU#82)

***A light is gleaming, spreading its arms throughout the night,***

 ***living in the light.***

***Come share it’s gladness, God’s radiant love is burning bright,***

 ***living in the light.***

***LIGHTING OF THE TRINITARIAN LIGHTS***

One: I will light a light,  *(first candle is lit)*

**All: in the Name of the Creator,**

**Who lit the world and breathes the breath of life into me.**

One: I will light a light,  *(second candle is lit)*

**All: in the Name of the Son,**

**Who goads the world to the manger this night**

**and brings me up to dwell by his healing side.**

One: I will light a light, *(third candle is lit)*

**All: in the Name of the Holy Spirit,**

**Who returns us from the despair of bitterness and fear**

**and blesses my soul with the yearning of the Divine.**

One: Three lights we perceive yet the source still is One,

In our humanity is the birthplace of the Sacred, the Christ,

**Though we may perceive we are alone.**

**Three flames we see burn yet the flame came from One,**

**And we, though many live upon One Sacred Earth.**

***HYMN***: “Child of the High King”  *(Tune: Morning Has Broken)*

**Child of Beauty, infant of Mary,**

**Born in this stable, a manger for hope,**

**You’ve come to our Wilderness, loving all places.**

**Happy are we to be at your side.**

**Lamb sent from heaven came to our moorland,**

**Low and unnoticed in our midst.**

**Now we perceive You, Mighty Redeemer,**

**Hidden and held in sacred shadows**

**Gather your people, God of Creation,**

**Outcasts and strangers, monarchs and me,**

**Into this Kingdom without ending,**

**A stable from where your children are raised.**

*(Original Irish Prose Mairi NicDomhnall, Engish prose Ivan Gregan, revised Daryl Webber)*

***GATHERING PRAYER***

One: O Christ, the Good Shepherd, come gather your people.

**All: The lost and the lonely, the broken and breaking,**

**the tired and tortured, the anguished and aching.**

**The done-in and doubting, the waiting and wishing,**

One: O Christ, the Good Shepherd, come gather your people.

**All: The puzzled and pondering, the proud and pretentious**

 **the sure and superior,**

**the never inferior,**

 **the bright and the bustling, the stirrers and shakers,**

One: O Christ, the Good Shepherd, come gather your people.

**All: From corner and lamplight, from mansion and campsite**

 **from fears and obsession,**

**from tears and depression,**

 **from untold excesses, from treasured successes.**

One: O Christ, the Good Shepherd, come gather your people.

**All: We saw You a stranger, coming into our midst,**

 **we put food on your plate, we put drink in your cup,**

**played music in your ear, gave warmth to your being,**

 **You laughed & You blest us, in your heart You held us,**

**the lark sang above You, now we know her sweet song,**

 **“Among us lives Jesus as a stranger disguised”**

***OFFERING OURSELVES, TITHES & GIFTS***

Solo: “O Holy Night” Rachel Ginther

***INVITING BELIEVERS FROM THROUGHOUT TIME***

*(now we recall and invite our predecessors, a great cloud of witnesses in the faith, to be present among us tonight. There are those unsung Saints in our hearts through whom the light of Christ has shone and still shines; men and women who desire and we desire to be with us this evening)*

One: O Parenting God who sought me,

**All: Come and surround me, Come and surround me.**

One: O Incarnate Son who bought me,

**All: Come and surround me, Come and surround me.**

One: O Holy Spirit who taught me,

**All: Come and surround me,  Come and surround me.**

One: Mary of God, the mothering one,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Joseph of God, the fathering one,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Shepherds of God, the tending ones,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Angels of God, the singing ones,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Zechariah of God, the speechless one,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Elizabeth of God, the delighted one,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

One: Anna of God, the seeing one,

**All: Come and surround me, come and surround me.**

*(you are invited to say the name of those you desire to be near you tonight)*

One: God the Conceiver, God the Redeemer, God the Inspirer,

Come and surround me, come and surround me.

**All: Come and surround me, Great God of all time.**

One: Surround me with friends, surround me with saints,

**All: Enfold me in clouds of Witnesses great,**

 **in prayer let me join with those beyond time,**

**who stand by me now surrounded in light**

 **to offer this prayer which is their delight.**

***HYMN:*** VU#44 “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” (v 1,4)

**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 all,**

**from heaven's all-gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.**

**For, lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.**

***SCRIPTURE LESSON***:  Hebrews 1:1-3 - 2:1-4, 10-13

Going through a long line of prophets, God has been addressing our ancestors in different ways for centuries. Recently he spoke to us directly through his Son. By his Son, God created the world in the beginning, and it will all belong to the Son at the end. This Son perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God’s nature. He holds everything together by what he says—powerful words!

It’s crucial that we keep a firm grip on what we’ve heard so that we don’t drift off. If the old message delivered by the angels was valid and nobody got away with anything, do you think we can risk neglecting this latest message, this magnificent salvation? First of all, it was delivered in person by the Master, then accurately passed on to us by those who heard it from him. All the while God was validating it with gifts through the Holy Spirit, all sorts of signs and miracles, as he saw fit.5-9God didn’t put angels in charge of this business of salvation that we’re dealing with here. It says in Scripture,

What is man and woman that you bother with them;
    why take a second look their way?
You made them not quite as high as angels,
    bright with Eden’s dawn light;
Then you put them in charge
    of your entire handcrafted world.

When God put them in charge of everything, nothing was excluded. But we don’t see it yet, don’t see everything under human jurisdiction. What we do see is Jesus, made “not quite as high as angels,” and then, through the experience of death, crowned so much higher than any angel, with a glory “bright with Eden’s dawn light.” In that death, by God’s grace, he fully experienced death in every person’s place.

It makes good sense that the God who got everything started and keeps everything going now completes the work by making the Salvation Pioneer perfect through suffering as he leads all these people to glory. Since the One who saves and those who are saved have a common origin, Jesus doesn’t hesitate to treat them as family, saying,

I’ll tell my good friends, my brothers and sisters, all I know about you;
I’ll join them in worship and praise to you.

Again, he puts himself in the same family circle when he says,

Even *I* live by placing my trust in God.

And yet again,

*I’m* here with the children God gave *me.*

***MINISTRY OF MUSIC***: Senior Choir

***GOD HOLDS IN FAVOUR***

One: Not the powerful, not the privileged,

 not the famous in the land,

**All: But the homeless and the needy,**

 **were the first to hold God’s Hand.**

One: Not the wealthy, not the wise ones,

 not the ones who own God’s Grace,

**All: But the lonely and forgotten**

 **were the first to see God’s Face.**

One: God determined to be different from the standards

 we think best,

and tonight God holds in favour those whom

 we ask to be blest.

Blessed now is Christ’s Hand, that so clings to mine,

 leads even me to a meager manger,

 to feed upon his bread and wine.

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION. FRACTION. DISTRIBUTION***

***AN TALADH CHRIOSDA – LULLABY FOR CHRIST & COMMUNION***

***BLESSING AT THE CRADLE***

(*If you have a baby present, you are encouraged to come and place your baby in the Manger for a traditional blessing. If your children or grandchildren are not present but you wish them to be blessed, you may come forward and figuratively place them in the manger by mentioning their name or placing a piece of paper with their name upon it in the manger (you are welcome to pick up a card with the blessing printed on it to take home), then continue on to partake in communion).*

***MINISTRY OF MUSIC****: Sarah Muma*

***CRADLE & COMMUNION HYMN***: “O Come Little Children”

(Irish - Twenty One Years)

**O come, little children, O come, one and all,**

**Come look in the manger in Bethlehem’s stall,**

**For there, little children, on this holy night,**

**Our God sends from heaven, his Son, our delight.**

**Adore like the shepherds! Your glad voices raise**

**With those of the angels who sing in His Praise,**

**Your chorus will echo from earth to the sky,**

**“All Glory to God in the Heavens most high!”**

**Away in a manger no crib for a bed,**

**The little Lord Jesus, laid down his sweet head,**

**The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay,**

**The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.**

**The cattle are lowing the baby awakes**

**But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes,**

**I love You, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky**

**And stay by my side until morning is nigh.**

**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.**           Author unknown

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION***

***MINISTRY OF MUSIC****:* Duet: Rachel & Theresa Ginther

***SCRIPTURE LESSON***: Luke 2: 1 – 20

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David’s town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn.

There were sheepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God’s angel stood among them and God’s glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David’s town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you’re to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.”

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God’s praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him. As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the sheepherders talked it over. “Let’s get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.” They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the sheepherders were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The sheepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they’d been told!

***HYMN :*** VU#59 “Joy to the World” (v 1, 4)

**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 earth with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.**

***THE LIFE AFTER TODAY***

Now we take this Christ child into our adult lives.

In our strong and full arms His life generates hope in some

Others hold the gift of peace to tend to.

To some are given joy,

And still others are being reared up into love.

Such that the world may know

that the sacred presence breaks in and is birthed upon Earth

Into adulthood we are given Christ’s spirit and purpose.

Let us ponder and prepare to prayerfully furnish our lives with the gift of flame.

***LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES***

We light the candles of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. May they be set to burn within us. As we set to flame the candle of Christ’s birth may we be carried in his light all of our days

***LEAVING THE PLACE OF WORSHIP***

***PARTING RUNE***

One: All Grant us Glory, Saviour Dear,

God’s affection, love and fear,

Saints and angels do not cease

Day and night to give us peace,

Day and night to give us peace

Saints and Angels do no cease.

You made my hand for holding,

You made my eye for seeing,

**All: You made my soul for glory,**

**You wrote in me your Story.**

One: Guide me homeward, Saviour true,

until at last I’m home with You.

**All: From all darkness to the Light,**

 **steer my feet and bless my sight.**

One: Amen, Amen, again Amen!

***SAYING GOOD NIGHT TO THE TRINITY***

(Extinguishing the three candles lit at the beginning of worship)

***HYMN*** : “Come and Sing” (Welsh traditional tune: Ar Hyd y Nos)

**Sleep my child, may peace attend thee, - this Holy night.**

**Guardian Angels God will send thee, - this Holy night.**

**As the darkness comes descending,**

**May your light all shadows rending,**

**Be for us a joy unending, this Holy night.**

**Jesus, Saviour, Child of Mary – this Holy night,**

**In a world confused and weary – You are the Light.**

**God is in a manger lying,**

**humanity taking, Self –denying,**

**Life embracing, death defying – this Holy night.**

**Lord of all! Let us acclaim Him – this Holy night.**

**Prince of Peace among the nations – through earth’s dark night.**

**Cradle born  – let us adore Him, all the earth is waiting for Him,**

**Son of God – we go beside beside him – this Holy night.**

*(Michael Perry et al.)*

***BENEDICTION***

***CONGREGATIONAL CANDLE LIGHTING***

***HYMN:*** VU#67 “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.**

**Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight:
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah,
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour 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.**