



Bethany Presbyterian Church

Graham, North Carolina

www.bethanypreschurch.org

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December 24, 2020 – 5:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve



“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.”
- Luke 2:6-7 (NRSV)

GATHERING AS GOD’S PEOPLE

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

All the busyness of the season, the preparations, the shopping, the decorating, the cooking, the frenzy, has come now to this night. And so we gather as God’s people to pause, and to remember, and to rejoice!

PRELUDE: *Still, Still, Still*

GARY DAVIDSON / AUSTRIAN CAROL

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

* LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES AND CALL TO WORSHIP

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him.

The Advent liturgy helps us recollect the miracle of God’s becoming human for our sake. The candles spiral upward, causing us to remember the eternity of God’s love for us and for all humanity. Its greenery causes us to remember the newness of life we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us of the prophet’s HOPE for God’s salvation to come. [The Candle of Hope is lit.] The second candle reminds us of the angel’s song of PEACE for all the earth. [The Candle of Peace is lit.] The third candle reminds us of the JOY of the shepherds as they heard the good news of Jesus’ arrival. [The Candle of Joy is lit.] The fourth candle reminds us of the LOVE poured out for the world on that night so long ago.

[The Candle of Love is lit.]

We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Come, let us go and see this that has happened!

* HYMN OF PRAISE #41: *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

ADESTE FIDELES

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!

OFFERING OURSELVES FOR RENEWAL

A LITANY FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

Like pilgrim shepherds we have gathered tonight. Like children of royalty we have come together to celebrate the birth of true royalty.

Our Savior comes to us as a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes. He lays aside his crown to dwell among us and share the joy and sorrow of our pilgrimage. He passes through the curtain around God's love and, holding it aside, invites us in.

Oh, the humanity of God, the divinity of God's children.

What child is this? What love is this that seeks to share our burdens and lead us on in kindness towards a glory that is gentle and peaceful like a meadow in spring?

O God, roll away the stone in our hearts and let our spirits soar into that realm where angels laugh, martyrs weep for joy, and God's infinite love dances among the singing throngs of those who have gone before us.

That we may know what has been accomplished in this child, that we may see the world as you see it, Lord, sanctified, cleansed, and sojourning towards a healing so great we are almost afraid to hope in it.

On the night before his death, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Now the risen Christ, in perfect joy, graciously invites us to join him at the table, to break and share the bread of life and lift with him the cup of salvation.

O Lord, as we join you at your table on this sacred eve, accept us as we are, even in all our imperfections.

Jesus says: "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest upon your souls."

What shall we render to the Lord for all God's bounty to us? We shall lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

This Christmastide let our spirits so entwine that we form a wreath of joy, a circle of light from which God's precious and fragile love will shine out into the darkness of this world and into our own hearts. It is in the strong name of Jesus, who came to us as a child that we ask this. Amen.

AN OFFERING OF CONFESSION

This is the night we are reminded that God loves to be with us. Yet all too often – by our choices, our words, our silence – we choose not to be with God. Join me as we pray on this holy night to the One who was born to gift us with mercy and hope.

This was going to be the year when we were going to give away more than we spent, but we didn't. This was going to be the season when we spent more time with others, but we filled our calendars with meetings. This was going to be the Christmas when we wrote personal letters to friends and family, but spent too much energy filling out our to-do lists. This was going to be a truly holy season, but it just got to harried and hurried.

Forgive us and draw us closer to the Baby born not into wealth and power, but into poverty and weakness; to the One who loves unconditionally and welcomes all; to the Child who gathers other children to him, to bless them

and serve them; to the One who drew near to us, so we might be drawn to your heart – Jesus Christ, our Brother, our Lord.

AN OFFERING OF SILENCE

AN OFFERING OF GOD'S GRACE

Into the valleys of our death, Jesus comes with life; into the shadows of our world, Jesus brings light; into the brokenness of our lives, Jesus brings forgiveness and peace.

Thanks be to God for the gift of the Baby of Bethlehem, who brings joy and peace to us in these moments of forgiveness and in all the days to come. Amen.

* RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE #29: *Go, Tell It On the Mountain*

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUAL

Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;

Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

*Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.*

(Repeat chorus)

LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

THE SPOKEN WORD

A Reading from Isaiah 9:2-7

HYMN FOR CHRISTMAS EVE #44: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

ST. LOUIS

*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.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all on earth.
How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.
O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

THE WORD IN DANCE: *Silent Night! Holy Night!*

FRANZ GRUBER / ARR. D. KARTSONAKIS

MACIE SMITH, DANCE

THE SPOKEN WORD

A Reading from Luke 2:1-20

This is Holy Scripture for God's people.

Thanks be to God!

THE WORD IN MUSIC: *Breath of Heaven*

CHRIS EATON / AMY GRANT

TINA PATTERSON, SOLOIST

THE PROCLAIMED WORD: *THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT*

REV. JOHNSON

* **HYMN OF PREPARATION #25:** *Away in a Manger*

MUELLER

*Away in a manger, no crib for his 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 poor baby wakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.
Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.*

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE INVITATION TO THE TABLE

God's Banquet is coming. The time we await when all will gather from North, East, West and South.

A banquet where the rich and powerful will sit with the weak and poverty-stricken.

A table where young and old will learn from each other. A time when all will sit together in peace, "and the wolf will lie down with the lamb".

Here at this table we get a foretaste of God's banquet. This is indeed God's table, not the church's, and so all who seek to follow The Way are welcome to eat and drink from it.

Come and taste the grace eternal, come and see that God is good.

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

May the God of silent nights be with you!

May the God of herald angels be with you!

Open your hearts to the One born in the little town of Bethlehem.

May Emmanuel come to abide in our hearts.

Join all believers in singing of our joy this night.

May our voices blend with those of the angels and shepherds.

You crept into chaos so long ago, so creation might be born . . . As we gather with children dressed in bathrobes, as we join with the voices around us, we sing praises to you this Christmas night:

We will not be afraid, for great joy is ours this night; we will look for the signs of your presence, grace swaddled in hope, love wrapped around broken hearts. Glory to you, God in the highest heavens! May peace fill the lives of all your children!

Leaving your side, God of holiness, your Child came to walk with us . . . On this night, when we sing of the baby in the manger, as the shadow of the cross is cast by the stars, we proclaim that mystery called incarnation:

Christ is our light, and we will join the angels in singing the good news; Christ is our life, and we will join the disciples in telling the Story; Christ is our promise, and we wait for the joy of his return.

Here in the silence and the singing, with children, carols, and candlelight . . . And when all time and history becomes silence, we will be gathered with our sisters and brothers from across the world, from every corner and moment of every universe, to join the angel choirs in forever singing your praises as we dance to the Table of wonder and grace, and pray as Christ taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

COMMUNION BY THE PEOPLE

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life into our hands; now we put our lives into yours. Take us, renew and remake us. What we have been is past; what we shall be, through you, still awaits us. Lead us on. Take us with you. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

Why do we now light the Christ Candle?

The Christ Candle reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world, come into our darkness to enlighten us and give us the light of God which we share with others, as he says in John's gospel: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

SPREADING OF THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

As the reading from John's Gospel proceeds, please light your own candles, symbolizing the spreading of lighting a dark world, announcing the coming of the Savior, the Christ Child, God-With-Us.

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL: JOHN 1:1-5, 9-14

* HYMN #60: *Silent Night, Holy Night*

STILLE NACHT

*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.
Silent night, holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.*

LEAVING TO SERVE IN GOD'S NAME

* CHARGE AND BLESSING

* CLOSING HYMN #40: *Joy to the World!*

ANTIOCH

*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.*

*Joy to the world! the Savior reigns: Let us our songs employ;
While field and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as the curse is found.*

*He rules the world 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.*

* POSTLUDE: *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*

WILLIAM BARNETT / IN DULCI JUBILO



Welcome to Bethany Presbyterian

WELCOME to Bethany Presbyterian Church's virtual Christmas Eve Service. Whether you are a member or a visitor we are so glad that you are worshipping with us this evening and pray that this time of worship will be both renewing and rewarding for you. If you have an interest in joining Bethany, please speak to the pastor or call the church at 336.227.4041. Please visit our website at www.bethanypreschurch.org or Facebook at www.facebook.com/bethanypresbyterian.

The message for our service this evening comes from author and Presbyterian pastor Michael Lindvall's book *Good News From North Haven*. The book is essentially a series of short stories following the lives of a small town Presbyterian pastor in northern Minnesota. If you are familiar with Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* radio broadcast, this is a good comparison to the tone and humor. Story-telling has long been a staple of Christmas Eve gatherings. As we all gather in our own homes this evening, a good story is a perfect way to spend the evening together, hearing once again the good news of the birth of Christ.

Session

Moderator: Rev. John W. Johnson

Clerk: Karen Maxwell

Treasurer: Glenn Patterson

Class of 2020:

Chip Allen
Randy Cousins
Karen Maxwell

Class of 2021:

Nancy Purcell
Ben Russell
Tracey Troxler

Class of 2022:

Bill Abplanalp
Helen Brown
Tina Patterson

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