

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Pastor: Rev. Emily Cowser

Liturgist: Joy Edgar

Organist: Ann Swisher

“Don’t try to explain the Incarnation to me! It is further from being explainable than the furthest star in the furthest galaxy. It is love, God’s limitless love enfleshing that love into the form of a human being, Jesus, the Christ, fully human and fully divine. Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ, the Maker of the universe or perhaps many universes, willingly and lovingly leaving all that power and coming to this poor, sin-filled planet to live with us for a few years to show us what we ought to be and could be. Christ came to us as Jesus of Nazareth, wholly human and wholly divine, to show us what it means to be made in God’s image. Jesus, as Paul reminds us, was the firstborn of many brethren. I stand on the deck of my cottage, looking at a sky full of God’s children, knowing that I am one of many brethren, and sistren, too, and that Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Bathed in this love, I go into the cottage and to bed.”

- Madeleine L’Engle, *Bright Evening Star: Mysteries of the Incarnation*

*Welcome to First Presbyterian Church. We are grateful that you are with us –
whether you are present with us physically or joining us online – as we
gather to worship God. As you hear the music of the prelude,
may you feel God’s glory and God’s peace.*

**Please stand if you are able*

PRELUDE

“Variations on a Noel”

Claude Louis Balbastre (1729-1798)

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Do not be afraid; for see –

I am bringing you good news of great joy.

**ALL: To us is born this day in the city of David
a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.**

One: This will be a sign for you:

you will find a child wrapped in cloth
and lying in a manger.

ALL: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!

One: Let us go now to Bethlehem.

*CAROL

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

GtG #133

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!

True God from true God,
Light from light eternal,
born of a virgin,
mortal he comes;
very God, begotten, not created!

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!

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

Goodman & Koutecky Families

THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM ISAIAH

One: Glory to Go in the highest!

ALL: Alleluia! Amen!

*CAROL

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

GtG #132

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today;

Ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!

He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save!

Calls you one and calls you all
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!

*CALL TO CONFESSION

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

ALL: God of Love Incarnate, we confess that, with the shepherds, we are terrified of your glory; for in glory's light we see plainly all that is wrong in the world: how oppression still enslaves; how garments of war are still stained with blood; how those seeking refuge still find no place of safety. We also see what is wrong in us: how passionately we pursue the things of this world but forget to ponder the mystery of faith; how we do not practice the peace you intend in our relationships, our community, or even in the church. Forgive us, we pray, and help us not to be afraid. Like the shepherds, we want to follow and find you. In the Savior's name we pray. Amen. *(a moment of silent confession)*

*DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

One: Hear this good news of great joy: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven,

ALL: Thanks be to God!

One: Glory to God in the highest,

ALL: and peace to God's people on earth.

*CAROL

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

GtG #123

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.

Still through the cloven skies
they come,
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o’er all the weary world:

Above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o’er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the heavenly hymn
have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;

And we at war on earth hear not
the tidings that they bring;
O, hush the noise
and cease the strife
to hear the angels sing!

And you, beneath life’s
crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,

Look now, for glad and
golden hours
come swiftly on the wing:
O, rest beside the weary road,
and 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 splendors fling,
and the whole world give back
the song
which now the angels sing.

PSALM READING

Psalm 96

Page 934

One: The Word of the Lord

ALL: Thanks be to God.

CHOIR ANTHEM

“Jesus Child”

by John Rutter

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Titus 2:11-14

Page 1859

One: The Word of the Lord

ALL: Thanks be to God.

SOLO

“The Little Road to Bethlehem”

Michael Head

Art Bumgardner, bass

WELCOME

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

GOSPEL READING

Luke 2:1-20

Page 1590

One: The Gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to you, o Christ!

SERMON

*CAROL

“Joy to the World”

GtG #134

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 earth,
the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
while fields 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.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

Written by Nathan Nettleton

ALL: We believe in God, the creator and giver of life, who brought all creation to birth, who mothers us and fathers us, protecting, nurturing, and cherishing us. We believe in Jesus Christ: God born among us as a fragile baby, embodying both love and the need for love, and calling us to rest in God as trustingly as a tiny child. We believe in the Holy Spirit, breathed into us at our birth, always drawing us on to be born again, encouraging, exhorting, comforting, nourishing our growth, and inspiring our living. We believe in the reconciliation of the world to God, through Christ. Hunted at birth and humiliated at death, Christ entered our fearful darkness so that we might enter his glorious light and share the life of his resurrection. And we believe that each new child is a glimpse of the face of God, a sign of the life to come, and a call to live in peace and celebrate living together. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

One: God of glory, by your grace a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests on his shoulders, and in his name we pray.

Wonderful Counselor,

ALL: we pray for wisdom for the world's leaders, that they may use their power to lift burdens and break the bonds of oppression.

One: Mighty God,

ALL: we pray for the church of Jesus Christ our Lord, that you will multiply and increase our joy as we share in the harvest you have gathered.

One: Everlasting Father,

ALL: we pray for families, friends, and loved ones, that those who now walk in deep darkness may see the great light of your saving love.

One: Prince of Peace,

ALL: we pray for an end to violence and warfare, that your authority may

continue to grow until there is endless peace in every land.

One: Lord of hosts, establish your holy realm with justice and righteousness, from this time on and forevermore.

ALL: Amen.

THE OFFERING

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

OFFERTORY "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
Wilbur Held (1914-2015)

*OFFERING PRAYER

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

*CAROL "Silent Night, Holy Night!" GtG #122

*CHARGE

*BENEDICTION

Please extinguish your candle at the conclusion of the Benediction.

POSTLUDE Toccata on "Angels We Have Heard on High"
Richard Elliott (b. 1960)



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Weekly Sermon on HCTV Cable Channel 189, Wednesdays 6 p.m. & Saturdays 9 a.m.

