

**HAGERSVILLE UNITED CHURCH &
SPRINGVALE UNITED CHURCH
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31st, 2023**

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Ministry of Caring: The Whole People of God
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REGIONAL COUNCIL PRAYER CYCLE

Beamsville: Trinity

“The Child is Among Us...Halleluiah!”

“As we say goodbye to this year and welcome the new one, let's do it with a thankful heart. Let's start the new year with peace and faith. We should let go of any hard feelings or frustrations from the past year. Take this opportunity of new beginnings to say sorry to those we've hurt or to extend forgiveness to others. Remember, God loves us and wants the best for us. Let's step into the new year ready to live the life that He wants for us!”

OFFERING PRAYER

Lord, as we embark on this new year, we lift up to you our loved ones, our communities, and the world. May your peace reign in our hearts and in the hearts of all people. As we give these offerings this morning may they bring healing where there is brokenness and reconciliation where there is division. Receive these gifts in Jesus' name we Pray. Amen

PRELUDE AND WELCOME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, BIRTHDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Praise the Lord! Let all the angels praise the Lord.

Praise the New born King.

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, shining stars;

praise him, highest heavens.

Let them all praise the name of the Lord!

For Jesus has been born to us once again.

God promise has come and continues to live among us forever.
Praise God, girls and young men, old people and children too.
**Let us all praise the name of the Lord,
and worship the new born Prince of Peace.**

OPENING CAROL: #59 Joy to the World Verses 1&2

- 1 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.
- 2 Joy to the earth! the Saviour 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.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Leader: As we light these candles today, we thank God for hope he gives us, for the peace he bestows, for the joy he pours into our hearts, and for the love that redeems us and shows us the way.

People: We thank God for his gift of Jesus. We thank him that thru Christ his light has come into the world and made it possible for us to see, and in seeing, to rejoice. His truth, his love, his very self, transforms all who receive him.

Light the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Christ Candle

All: Loving God, Emmanuel, we thank you for being with us - for sending your Son to walk with us and to lead us. As Christ Jesus was born of Mary, so may he be born in us and through us revealed to the world. Grant that the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love of which we have heard and spoken of throughout Advent may be fully realized in us as we worship and serve you through him, this both now and forevermore.

CAROL: #59 Joy to the World Verses 3 & 4

- 3 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.
- 4 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.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

God of wonder, we gather in joy and thanksgiving
to praise you for the gracious gift of Jesus, your child, our friend
and Saviour. Yet, in our joy, help us to remember that the world into
which he was born was a world not unlike our own, a world of danger
and pain for many people. Help us, in this season, in the new year to
come, and throughout our lives, to bring the presence of your love
that came long ago to a manger in Bethlehem into our world once more.
Amen.

ANTHEM: Sing Allelu by Ruth Elaine Schram

CHILDREN'S TIME – THE DIME

Bobby was getting cold sitting out in his back yard in the snow. Bobby didn't wear boots; he didn't like them and anyway he didn't own any. The thin sneakers he wore had a few holes in them and they did a poor job of keeping out the cold. Bobby had been in his backyard for about an hour already. And, try as he might, he could not come up with an idea for his mother's Christmas gift. He shook his head as he thought, "This is useless, even if I do come up with an idea, I don't have any money to spend."
Ever since his father had passed away three years ago, the family of five had struggled. It wasn't because his mother didn't care, or try, there just never seemed to be enough. She worked nights at the hospital, but the small wage that she was earning could only be stretched so far.

What the family lacked in money and material things, they more than made up for in love and family unity. Bobby had two older and one younger sister, who ran the house hold in their mother's absence. All three of his sisters had already made beautiful gifts for their mother. Somehow it just wasn't fair. Here it was Christmas Eve already, and he had nothing.

Wiping a tear from his eye, Bobby kicked the snow and started to walk down to the street where the shops and stores were. It wasn't easy being six without a father, especially when he needed a man to talk to. Bobby walked from shop to shop, looking into each decorated window. Everything seemed so beautiful and so out of reach.

It was starting to get dark and Bobby reluctantly turned to walk home when suddenly his eyes caught the glimmer of the setting sun's rays reflecting off of something along the curb. He reached down and discovered a shiny dime. Never before has anyone felt so wealthy as Bobby felt at that moment.

As he held his new-found treasure, a warmth spread throughout his entire body and he walked into the first store he saw. His excitement quickly turned cold when the salesperson told him that he couldn't buy anything with only a dime.

He saw a flower shop and went inside to wait in line. When the shop owner asked if he could help him, Bobby presented the dime and asked if he could buy one flower for his mother's Christmas gift. The shop owner looked at Bobby and his ten-cent offering.

Then he put his hand on Bobby's shoulder and said to him, "You just wait here and I'll see what I can do for you." As Bobby waited, he looked at the beautiful flowers and even though he was a boy, he could see why mothers and girls liked flowers.

The sound of the door closing as the last customer left, jolted Bobby back to reality. All alone in the shop, Bobby began to feel alone and afraid. Suddenly the shop owner came out and moved to the counter. There, before Bobby's eyes, lay twelve long stem, red roses, with leaves of green and tiny white flowers all tied together with a big silver bow. Bobby's heart sank as the owner picked them up and placed them gently into a long white box.

"That will be ten cents young man," the shop owner said reaching out his hand for the dime. Slowly, Bobby moved his hand to give the man

his dime. Could this be true? No one else would give him a thing for his dime!

Sensing the boy's reluctance, the shop owner added, "I just happened to have some roses on sale for ten cents a dozen. Would you like them?" This time Bobby did not hesitate, and when the man placed the long box into his hands, he knew it was true. Walking out the door that the owner was holding for Bobby, he heard the shop keeper say, "Merry Christmas son."

As he returned inside, the shop keeper's wife walked out. "Who were you talking to back there and where are the roses you were fixing?" Staring out the window, and blinking the tears from his own eyes, he replied, "A strange thing happened to me this morning. While I was setting up things to open the shop, I thought I heard a voice telling me to set aside a dozen of my best roses for a special gift. I wasn't sure at the time whether I had lost my mind or what, but I set them aside anyway. Then just a few minutes ago, a little boy came into the shop and wanted to buy a flower for his mother with one small dime.

"When I looked at him, I saw myself, many years ago. I too, was a poor boy with nothing to buy my mother a Christmas gift. A bearded man, whom I never knew, stopped me on the street and told me that he wanted to give me ten dollars. "When I saw that little boy tonight, I knew who that voice was, and I put together a dozen of my very best roses." The shop owner and his wife hugged each other tightly, and as they stepped out into the bitter cold air, they somehow didn't feel cold at all.

CHILDREN'S HYMN: #47 Still, Still, Still

READING: Welcoming a New Year

A new year stands on my doorstep ready to enter my life's journey. Something in me welcomes this visitor: the hope of bountiful blessings the joy of a new beginning the freshness of unclaimed surprises

Something in me rebuffs this visitor: the swiftness of the coming the boldness of the entrance the challenge of a year's good-bye.

Something in me fears this visitor: the unnamed events of future days the wisdom needed to walk love well the demands of giving away and growing.

A new year stands on my doorstep. With fragile caution I move to open the door for its entrance, my heart leaps with surprise, joy jumps in my eyes, for there beside this brand new year stands my God with outstretched hand!

God smiles and gently asks of me: can we walk this year together?

And I, so overwhelmed with goodness, can barely whisper my reply: "Welcome in!"

VIDEO: Auld Lang Syn

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Matthew 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus Christ

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed[b] to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

MESSAGE

One of the things of which I have become more and more aware is that Christmas happens amidst the ordinary circumstances of life. Think about that first Christmas: an emperor issuing decrees and taxing people, a couple that is unmarried and pregnant, a no vacancy sign, field hands working the night shift. Those are real life circumstances and real life is always the world of Christmas. It was then and it is today.

For some people that means Christmas is a hard time of year. It's difficult and painful. For others it's the best time of year. It's joyful and exciting. For most of us, I suspect, it varies from year to year.

Take a moment and think back over the past year. How has your life changed since last Christmas? In what ways is your world today different from then? Has it been a difficult and painful year or has it been a year of joy and thanksgiving? Was it a memorable year or one you would like to forget? Maybe it was a mixture of all the above. Regardless of what the last year has been for us and whether we consider the changes it brought to be for better or for worse it is deeply rooted in the Christmas story.

Think about this.....

Every year we hear the Christmas story. The story never changes. We count on that. Every year it's the same story with the same characters, the same locations, the same plot, and the same ending. Mary and Joseph are pregnant. Emperor Augustus issues a decree to take the census. Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem. There's no room at the inn. Mary gives birth to Jesus and places him in a manger. The angel announces this good news to the shepherds. They come and see this thing that has happened. Mary treasures and ponders the words of the shepherds and they return to their fields.

You know that story as well as I do. You've probably heard it and told it multiple times. But have you ever considered the poetry of Christmas? I'm talking about the images and metaphors that tell the story behind the story. The facts of Christmas remain the same every year but the poetry of Christmas is what keeps the story alive, has preserved it through the ages, and allows us to relive it again every year for the first time.

We want to be reminded that light is still shining in the darkness, that good news is still being announced, that the child is still being born anew, and that God is still with us.

Yes, it is still true. All of it. Christmas happens in whatever the circumstances of your life. Christmas happens in whatever changes you've experienced over the last year. Christmas is as real and present in the difficult and painful times of life as it is in the joyful and exciting times.

I don't know how that happens. I only know that it does happen. I've experienced it in my life and I've seen it happen in the lives of others. I

cannot tell you how it happens but I can tell you this. It's about the poetry. Let me give you some examples.

- Who are the people, the Josephs, that have accompanied, protected, and cared for you through this life?
- Have you ever looked in the face of a newborn child and marveled at the miracle of life? Been inspired to be a better person? Wished for that kind of gentleness and innocence in your life and world?
- Think of a time that was so perfect, so beautiful, so profound that you were speechless and all you could do was treasure and ponder the moment.
- Have you ever woken up to the beauty and possibilities of a new day after living through a night of darkness?
- Recall a time when hope, strength, and courage were born anew in you.
- When was the last time you danced with joy to the music of laughter and a chorus of smiles?
- Have you ever done what seemed to you impossible or gotten through a hard time and not known how you did that? In fact, you didn't think you could or would.
- What are you cradling and cherishing in your heart that you know beyond a doubt is a gift from God?

That's all poetry. Those and a thousand other verses like them are the poetry of Christmas. And it is so much more than the facts of Christmas. The facts of Christmas are just the starting point of God in our Live.

Every year the verses of Christmas poetry are written anew using the circumstances of our lives. And yes, the celebration is over, I share these words of poetry with you, poet W.H. Auden writes, "Well, so that is that.

Now we must dismantle the tree, Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes – Some have got broken, and carrying them up to the attic. The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down, And the children got ready for school. There are enough Leftovers to do, warmed up, for the rest of the week – Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot....The reality of Christmas is.... the light of Christ was not meant to be tucked back in the attic with the decorations. The love of God as it shines through Jesus was meant to take root in your soul. And it still can, if you make room in your everyday life for light to shine in your darkness.

CAROL: #62 Once in Royal David's City

1 Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle-shed,
where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.

2 He came down to earth from heaven, who, with God is over all,
and his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall. There among the
poor and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy.

3 For he is our lifelong pattern; daily, when on earth he grew;
he was tempted, scorned, rejected, tears and smiles like us he knew.
Thus he feels for all our sadness, and he shares in all our gladness.

4 And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love;
for that child who seemed so helpless is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Blessed Lord, into our darkness you have brought the Light of your love. You have given to us a reminder of the many ways in which you care for us and guide us. This has been a hectic time for so many of us. We have invested ourselves, our energies, and our resources in a flurry of activities; and now we are coming to the end of this calendar year, with a new year in view, and we wonder how we are going to have the energy that the new year will demand. Help us place our trust and our lives in your care. As Joseph listened to the angel telling him to follow, help us follow you in all our ways. Give us strength and courage for the times ahead. Let love be the foundation from which all our actions spring. Bless and keep us in your care, for we ask this in Jesus' Name, AMEN.

LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING CAROL: #43 Go Tell it on the Mountain

**R: Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.**

1 While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light. **R**

2 The shepherds feared and trembled
when lo, above the earth
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Saviour's birth! **R**

3 Down in a lonely manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent our salvation
that blessed Christmas morn. **R**

BENEDICTION

Let us go into the new year with Jesus,
common in origin with us.

**We go into the new year with Jesus,
who treats us as family, as brothers and sisters.**

Let us go, placing our trust in God, just as Jesus did.

We go as children of God, with Jesus by our side.

And all of God's Christmas people say together:

Amen!

CHORAL AMEN

POSTLUDE

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**Please bring in your paper products for the
Hagersville Food Bank ☺**

Announcements

Friday, January 19th: Scrapbooking Setup in the afternoon/evening.

Sunday, January 28th: Deadline to have your reports to the office for Annual Reports.

Tuesday, February 13th: Pancake Supper at Hagersville. More information to follow.

Sunday, February 18th: Annual Meeting after 9:30am worship.

Sunday, February 25th: Annual Meeting after worship with potluck lunch.

Wednesday, March 6th: Office Board meeting at 10:30am at Springvale.

Now that the hustle & bustle of Christmas is over, it's time to ring in the New Year with some relaxation.
Happy New Year everyone!

