

# Hagersville United Church

## Christmas Eve Service

December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 7:00pm

Minister: Pastor Peggy E. Bartlett

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*Hush ... Can you hear it? An expectant silence, a hushed anticipation, as if the very galaxy is holding its breath. There are some truths even the stars know, like darkness, like loneliness and how the night can be a living thing. And how once, long ago, the night waited in wonder along with the darkness and the loneliness, for the sound of a baby's cry, for the miraculous to come down to the earth mundane.*

“O Holy Night “

### WELCOME

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome to this most magical night  
when angels and shepherds mingle  
and the birth of a baby changes the world.

**We come to celebrate with joy and wonder.**

Celebrate the light that shines all around us.

**We will sing and praise our most wondrous God.**

Let us kneel before the Christ child,  
who makes God's promises come true.

**OPENING VIDEO CAROL:** All Come All Ye Faithful

#### OPENING PRAYER

O wondrous God of the stars, we come tonight with breathless wonder to see the babe who will change our lives. We hear the names “Wonderful Counselor, “Mighty God,” “Prince of Peace,” and we are in awe.

You have touched the earth this night with your unconditional love. Touch us—touch our hearts and minds and souls. May we never tire of this story. May we never take it for granted. Make this night magical again. Amen.

**VIDEO:** Music by Sophia Gill – Do You Hear What I Hear

#### LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH AND CHRIST CANDLE

Advent hope moves us; Advent love leads us; Advent joy stirs us; Advent peace stills us, that we might affirm our Jesus was born on night like this so long ago.

*(Light the advent Candles)*

It is time we set flame to this Advent affirmation by lighting the Christ Candle.

**God we believe that your are with us, and your son Jesus was born 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.**

Rejoice, a Savior is born.

**A savior is born, indeed. Joy to the world! Let the heavens be glad, let the earth rejoice!**

*The Christ Candle is lit.*

#### CANDLE LIGHTING RESPONSE

**CHILDREN'S MUSIC VIDEO:** Light of Christmas

#### CHRISTMAS LITANY: WELCOME THE LIGHT!

In a little town, known for nothing much, God's holy child was born.

**Welcome the Light!**

By the faint light of the moon, Mary and Joseph found their way.

**Welcome the Light!**

Shown by a courtyard fire, the open stable door.

**Welcome the Light!**

Warm breath of resting beasts, kindly sparkle in their eyes.

**Welcome the Light!**

In the shadowy stable stall, Joseph kindled a lamp.

**Welcome the Light!**

There Mary gave birth to Jesus, called God-With-Us.

**Welcome the Light!**

Angels opened the doors of heaven, sang, “Glory to God in the heights!”

**Welcome the Light!**

Shepherds saw the sky ablaze, left their sheep and came to see.

**Welcome the Light!**

In the darkest winter night, God set a brilliant star.

**Welcome the Light!**

Magi from the East divined God’s shining sign.

**Welcome the Light!**

And on this Christmas night with joy, we greet the Child.

**Welcome the Light!**

**VIDEO:** Mary Did You Know / Breath of Heaven

**INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE**

Over two thousand years ago, a weary world awaited its promised savior. At the appointed time, a governor’s order sent the messiah’s parents from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Imagine, a decree of the Roman empire becomes the means to fulfill God’s prophecies. Timeless stories, timeless truths, timeless love: our messiah has come! Christ is here!

Luke 2:1-20

New International Version

**The Birth of Jesus**

**2** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

**CAROL:** “Away In A Manger”

**REFLECTION:** “The Best Christmas Gift Ever”

The Reason for the Season. Christmas Eve. The magical night. For small Children tonight is the night when Santa will arrive mysteriously and leave gifts,

tonight is the night of Christmas movies – When Scrooge is visited by the spirits of Christmas and has his life altered.

Or Jimmie Stewart realizes that life really is wonderful.

Or when Linus will take center stage and recite the Christmas story...ending with that is what Christmas is all about... Charlie Brown

This is the magical eve of the day after, when gifts are exchanged and we indulge vigorously in too many rich foods.

For children the celebration of Christmas often revolves around presents under the lights of the tree. Those brightly wrapped boxes hold the

wonderful mystery of Christmas. Will they find deep inside the box the toy they have stayed awake at night dreaming about?

For the next few moments, would you consider with me that while all of these things make this a wonderful night, we often don't stop and realize why all of this occurred. Why do we have Christmas? Many will say, "It's all about the children." While that makes a nice sentiment, it's not true.

This is the night we remember a young couple traveling 75-100 miles to register for the census and higher taxes, who couldn't find a place to stay and probably found refuge in a cave or barn for animals or a caravan camp ground. We remember and focus on the birth of their baby, and on angels who appeared to shepherds and shepherds who witnessed the awesome sight of a baby in a manger and angels praising God. We even focus on wise men that came to offer gifts and to worship this new child designated to be the King of Kings and Savior of the world.

Many have traced the tradition of giving Christmas presents back to the Wise Men who brought to the newborn King gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This traditional is alive and well in North America where the fate of retailers rests on the excessive spending of shoppers during this season. Christmas has come a long way from an infant King sleeping wrapped in blankets in a stable.

In 1957 Dr. Seuss released his latest children's book entitled *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Not since Charles Dickens' *Scrooge* had there been a Christmas character as dark and mean spirited as the Grinch, who swept into Whoville in the dark of the night and stole all the Christmas presents. To his amazement on Christmas morn he heard the sounds of Christmas below in the village.

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before.

What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.

The ol' Grinch that fateful day discovered the mysterious secret of Christmas. You cannot buy it in a store, or receive it wrapped in bright paper with a big bow. No Christmas happens in the heart.

The first Christmas gift was not gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The first Christmas gift was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. It was God himself taking on flesh and blood and giving Himself to us. The secret of giving the best Christmas present of all is not where you shop or what you buy. The secret is giving yourself to those you love just like Jesus is given to us once again.

Merry Christmas!

**SONG VIDEO:** "Noel"

**CHRISTMAS PRAYER "The Season for Miracles"**

If we were to list the miracles of Christmas we'd probably talk about virgin births angels, perhaps and stars that light the sky but perhaps there's another miracle: one of Mary saying 'yes' when God asked her to believe and Joseph saying 'yes' when God asked him to trust. They had to change everything about their lives and the birth of the Christ-child wasn't possible until they did. What does it mean for you to say 'yes' to this story? to believe that it might be possible for the darkness to be transformed to light and for peace to come in the world? Those who know the darkest of the world know the fragility of light; we hold our breath as the candles flicker we know they don't always last. the birth of Jesus doesn't make everything right but it shows us that the only way the darkness can be beaten is to say 'yes' to the birth of light. In the silence, we pray for those we love and miss today and we pray for a broken world...

*[Time of silence, then invite people to light their candles from the ushers that will move through the worship space. After they are lit, we say the following prayer:]*

God, this is the season for miracles and we pray for one today.

Where there is sorrow,

**we pray for your grace to light the darkness.**

Where is despair,

**we pray for your hope to light the darkness.**

Where there is hatred,

**we pray for your forgiveness to light the darkness.**

Where there is war,

**we pray for your love to light the darkness.**

Where there is confusion,

**we pray for your peace to light the darkness.**

Where there is injustice,

**we pray for your courage to light the darkness.**

Where there is fear

**we pray for your joy to light the darkness.**

It is the season for miracles and we pray for one today:

Come, Lord Jesus, may your light come into our world. May we feel your presence and the light and love that is all around us this holy night.

Amen.

**CAROL:** Silent Night, Holy Night

### **SENDING FORTH**

Go now in wonder.

Go to bring light to those in darkness,

joy to those who can find no joy,

magic to a world steeped in realism.

Go with the songs of angels in your ears,

and the love of God in your hearts.

Go and spread the word—

the babe of Bethlehem is born for all.

**CLOSING VIDEO:** The Blessing by Caleb and Kelsey