

7PM Christmas Eve Service

WORDS OF WELCOME

Merry Christmas everyone! Thank you so much for joining McClure United Church for this time of worship tonight. It is our hope that even though Christmas perhaps isn't what we hoped it might be in terms of celebrating with family and friends... that you have still been able to dream into being that magical spirit of Christmas... that you have been able to hold for yourself and your loved ones the hope, peace, joy and love of the Advent season and now the miracle that is held in the birth of God's presence among us.

We celebrate this birth... of the baby Jesus... tonight with the help of many of our community members. Thank you to the Elchuk family... Mike, Erin, Brooke and Amy for lighting our Christ Candle tonight... to all of our readers who helped tell the story... to Annalise Reinhart for singing our Advent song and to all of the amazing musicians who came together to make this covid Christmas celebration amazing.

I just want to quickly invite you to join us tonight at 9pm for an online communion service using Zoom. We know that Christmas Eve communion has been an important tradition for many of you and we are grateful to be able to continue this tradition with the use of technology. Instructions for how to join and what to bring can be found on our website, facebook page and in the email link which was sent to you last Sunday. If you can't find it, please email or call me and I will get it to you before 9.

Also, the Children's Christmas pageant is now up on FB, Insta, Youtube and our website if you'd like to see the story again, told by the children. It's really quite something and I hope you have an opportunity to watch it.

So now let us move more deeply into this celebration time.

HYMN: "Dream a Dream"

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

HYMN: "O Come All Ye Faithful"

FIRST LESSON: In the Beginning...

Narrator:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through it, and

without it not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

HYMN: "A Candle is Burning" (v.5) VU #6

SECOND LESSON: Jesus' birth is announced

Narrator:

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said:

Angel:

'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

Narrator:

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

HYMN: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

THIRD LESSON: Jesus is born

Narrator:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 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.

Mary:

At last he is asleep, this child, the end of nine months waiting, wondering, worrying. A human life, like any other, destined to joy and sorrow, to decision and risk. He will make choices, as I have made choices. He will live and die by them, as must I.

Even now as I hold him, I begin to let him go. Out into the night, into mistrust and suspicion, into bitterness, resentment, jealousy – perhaps even to betrayal and death. But out, also, into sunshine and laughter, friendship and loyalty, love, trust and faithfulness.

This tiny child, who sleeps so trustingly in my care, calls me to trust. To trust in ultimate goodness, love and meaning, to decision and risk, knowing that nothing is ever lost or forgotten.

Joseph:

In the beginning there were only questions – questions and more questions.

By the time we had left Nazareth, I thought they'd all been answered. Now, as I watch this nursing child, I feel more questions seeping in with the cold night air. They whisper to me like mice rustling through the straw.

Mary smiles as a tiny hand closes around her finger. And the questions are stilled, for I see, finally, that love is the answer to all questions. At this moment, I am in the presence of love, and that love is present in me.

I will remember this when the questions come again; for come they will from nagging doubts and hidden fears. And I will teach this child what I have known this night. Either there is love or there is nothing. Either there is yes or there is no. And I find my heart shouting – “Yes... Yes... Yes!” to this child, “Yes!” to this woman, “Yes!” to this God, “Yes” to you, and – wonder of wonders – “Yes” to me.

HYMN: “Away in a Manger” VU #69

FOURTH LESSON: The Shepherds

Narrator:

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

Angel:

‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the

Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

Narrator:

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherd:

'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.'

Narrator:

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Shepherd:

It's something you learn growing up, how to stay out of trouble, how not to give offense. You walk with your head down and avoid everyone's eyes, you step aside. And you say to yourself, over and over, "I am worth something, I am worth something." But you never know for sure.

There on the hills, after the light had faded, it was hard to believe that God had chosen us, that we had been invited to go and see, to enter in.

How should we respond to this invitation? How could we accept this acceptance?

We went and found them.

They bid us enter, wished us peace, let us see the child. Standing there, we knew that the angel spoke truth. In the presence of this child there is peace and acceptance, worth and belonging. We have seen and been seen. And we will go from here, head held high, and share this good news.

HYMN: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" VU #48

FIFTH LESSON: The Magi

Narrator:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, scholars from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,

Magi:

‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.’

Narrator:

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet.

Then Herod secretly called for the scholars and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,

Herod:

‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’

Narrator:

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

HYMN: “Joy to the World” (vs. 1,2,4) VU #59

SIXTH LESSON: And then...

Narrator:

When the shepherds saw Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger, they told them what the angel had said about the child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Then the shepherds went back to their fields, singing praises to God for all they had seen and heard.

But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The scholars returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

An angel of God appeared in a dream to Joseph and told him that Herod would be looking for the child in order to kill him and instructed him to take the child and Mary and escape to Egypt until it is safe for them to leave.

So Joseph got up, took the child and Mary, and left during the night for Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died.

HYMN: "Go Tell It on the Mountain"

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE/LORD'S PRAYER

We come to you tonight with dreams tucked into our pockets,
admitting that at times it feels risky to dream.

At times it feels risky to ask for too much, to believe in that which we cannot see.

So instead we make wishes on stars and search for luck in clover fields.

Instead of sinking into you, we try to control the narrative.

However, somewhere rumbling deep in our heart,
there is a dream of a better world,
trapped like a caged bird.

Open our eyes to you in our midst.

Give us the confidence of Mary to sing into the mystery.

Dust your dream for us off the shelves of our hearts until once more,
we are those who dream.

Time for silent prayer

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught...

Amen.

SONG: "Silent Night" VU #67

BLESSING

As we go from our worship this night,

May the joy of the angels sing in our voices;

may the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds;

may the wisdom of the wise ones guide our steps;

may the courage of Joseph and the faith of Mary strengthen our spirits;

and may the love of the Christ shine in our hearts.

God's blessing be upon you all, this holy night and forever. Amen.