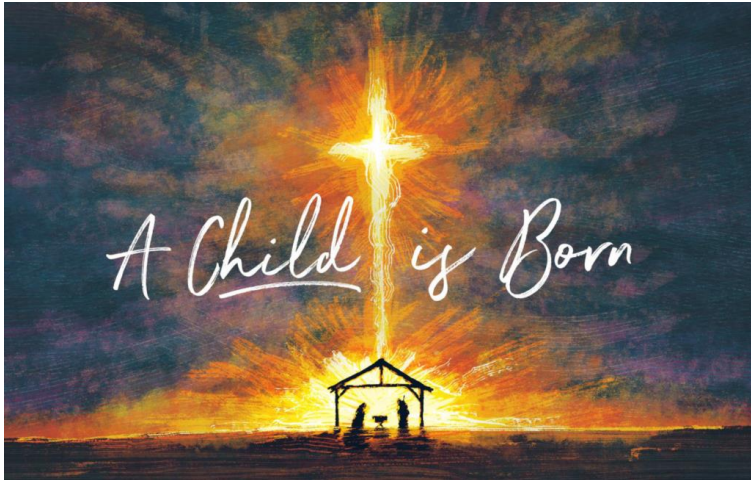


# CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24, 2022



## ST. JOHN

### UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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*Choir Director – Nancy Eisenhauer*

*Liturgy – Rev. Maren Tirabassi*

*Communion Liturgy – Rev. Thom Shuman*

#### LITANY OF THE ADVENT CANDLE:

One: For unto us a child is born! Unto us a Son is given!

**All: We are overwhelmed with joy!**

One: God brings us hope in the Christ child!

**All: We celebrate the birth of love!**

One: Tonight, we light all five candles: the candles of hope, peace, joy, love, and today's candle, the Christ candle. All five together represent God's constant and continuing flame of love in the world. Let us worship confident that, like these candles, God's presence is with us.

#### \*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

One: Tonight old dreams die and new dreams come to life.  
The Promise is fulfilled!

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

One: Hope gives way to joy and prayer to proclamation.

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

One: Our candles illuminate our story. Dawn invades midnight. The Light of the World has come.

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

One: And this light is a light for all, igniting a flame within the soul, warming us from within, radiating love, lighting our lives with the presence of God-come-alive in human flesh within us and among us now and always.

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

#### \*INVOCATION:

Emmanuel, we listen to the story of prophets and angels, young woman and carpenter, shepherd and magi, and we too come to Bethlehem for a blessing. We are filled with love because you have taken upon yourself our humanity;

we are filled with hope because you have offered us your life and light; we are filled with faith because all that is humble and vulnerable in us and in creation becomes holy this night. Our salvation appears in sweet sacred surprise and we too respond, "Glory to God and, on earth, peace." Amen.

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:** God has shown us the meaning of generosity in the beautiful diversity of creation, the birth of God's son, in the overflowing love of Jesus Christ, and in the never ending gift of the Holy Spirit! God has abundantly blessed us and called us to be community that blesses others through the sharing of our love, our talents, and our material possessions. Let us rejoice now in what we have been given and in what is ours to give as we present our Christmas offering.

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** Now, on this night of giftedness, remind us of those who struggle to put food on the table, to buy a single gift for their child, to wrap a warm blanket around a grandparent, so we might realize how blessed we are and share from our abundance. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**CANTATA: "What is This Jubilee?"**

**Created by Nancy Eisenhauer**

**Readings by James Howell**

**"Praise Noels" Music arranged by Don Marsh**

**NARRATOR: Sue Williams**

So many of the songs we sing at Christmas ask God to come. "O come, O come, Emmanuel", "Come, Thou Long

Expected Jesus". God already came. How can God come when God is everywhere? The word *come* implies God might be gone and needs to return. If anyone needs to return, it would be us back toward God. Yet in the Bible, it is God who comes. Ours is to wait. We sense somewhere deep in the marrow of our being that God isn't here but will come again. Perhaps this deep part of us feels empty; perhaps we don't know to fill the emptiness. As we look out our windows into the darkness, we plead desperately, "O come to us!"

**CHOIR - "Emmanuel Has Come/O Come, O Come Emanuel"**

Hope and fear seem to be opposites, as if they emerge from opposite ends of the soul. But aren't they kin, intertwined, coming out of the same place inside? At this intersection of hope and fear comes Jesus, born in the little town of Bethlehem at the crossroads of the continents, where "the hopes and fear of all the years are met." We meet Jesus at this intersection, and he meets our fears and calms them, and fulfills our hopes. "O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sins and enter in, be born in us today."

**CHOIR - "Shine on us/O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

The word *jubilee* brings to mind joyfulness and celebration. The jubilants are full of jubilation. What stronger words can we conceive for delight? The shepherds in "Angels We Have Heard on High" are asked, "Why this jubilee?" Why indeed! What do shepherds, the lowly workers who keep a handful of bleating sheep have to sing about? To those impoverished men whose homes were rocky, grassy fields out in the cold, who were exposed to the elements, Christ

came for these lowly workers before he came to anyone else. Even in his coming, Jesus held the poor, oppressed souls up to us for example. They heard the good news first.

**CHOIR –**

**“Angels We Have Heard on High/Shout to the Lord”**

Finally, we come to the child Advent has been seeking. If the world had invented a savior, it would have devised a mighty warrior who would crush evildoers. But God came to us as a small baby; God showed us God’s heart so our hearts might be won. Christ showed us that the true heart of God has no desire to conquer enemies; God loves, embraces, and risks everything, hoping we will love God and each other. What greater source of joy is there?

**\*CALL TO RECONCILIATION:**

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.

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:**

**This was going to be the year, God of silent nights, 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 a truly holy season, but it just got to harried and hurried.**

**Forgive us, dear God 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 One who drew near to us, so we might be drawn to your heart – Jesus Christ, our Brother, our Lord.**

*Silence is kept*

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

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.**

**\*THE LORD’S PRAYER: 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**\*INVITATION TO THE TABLE:** This is the table of God, the joyful host. Everyone, child, youth, and adult, is welcome to eat at this table. No matter what your religious affiliation, no matter what your particular beliefs or nagging doubts may be, you are welcome to share in this meal. With the boldness of Jesus we invite everyone: Come and joyfully share!

**\*HOLY COMMUNION:**

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: sheep gathering on hillsides, stars glittering in the night skies, sea horses frolicking in warm waters.

Silently, you gathered up the dust, shaping us in your image as the Spirit breathed life into us. All the gifts of your heart were for us, but we slammed the door of our hearts, saying there was no room for you in our lives.

Prophets came time and again, scattering your clues throughout the Story, but we were too busy enjoying the sleights of hand done by sin and death.

When you saw that we could not understand the Mystery on our own, you sent Jesus, to reveal everything to us.

As we join with the voices around us, we praise 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 through the cold streets of our lives. Born in poverty's shadows, he is the light which illumines

your heart for us. Unwrapped from glory's embrace, he gathers us from all the corners of our confused choices to make us one with you.

Placed in a rude feeding trough layered with our fears and doubts, he breathes in your hopes and lives your will, until he is placed in death's cold embrace, waiting in the silence, where he breathes in resurrection's breath, and brings forth life for all who follow.

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, we gather around the Table of joy, as you pour out your Spirit upon the most precious gifts of bread and cup.

As we feast upon the bread, we remember a young pregnant girl, and would serve those who are expecting, those who cannot have a child, those who have lost children.

As we drink from the cup, we think of a worried father, and would be with those who assemble toys this night, as well as those who will work this night to pay for food and medicine for their families. Because of your Son, Gracious God, all of them will be blessed.

When his arrest seemed near, Jesus sat at table in an upper room, with his closest friends and relatives. As he had done so many times before, he took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it and gave it to the disciples, this time saying, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Likewise after the meal he took the cup and after giving thanks he gave it to them to share.

As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ’s life, we lament Christ’s death, and we celebrate Christ’s resurrection until the kingdom. Now by the Holy Spirit, the breath of all creation, bless this meal of bread and wine and all of us gathered here.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Bountiful God, we give thanks that you gather us into the great congregation of your beloved at this table. Now send us forth into the world with rejoicing, that we may be salt, and light, and leaven in the struggle for shalom. By the strength of this meal and your grace help us to continue Christ’s ministry of justice and compassion. For it is in Christ’s name that we pray, and seek to live. Amen.

**NARRATOR:** As our sanctuary is darkened, as is our tradition, we light candles and sing of the silent night so long ago that brought a savior to us. Out of the darkness we sing “with the dawn of redeeming grace.” Dawn is the moment when the sun rises. At first, we see only darkness with a scattering of starlight. Then near the eastern horizon the first glimmer, advancing, brighter now, and finally the first peek of sunlight. Maybe redeeming grace is like that.

It doesn’t swarm in and overwhelm everyone at once. But you watch, wait and continue to look for the faintest trace of grace – and then, only then it comes.

### **\*RESPONSE:**

Jesus said: “You are the light of the world.”

Let your light so shine that people around you will be moved by the good things you do to glorify God in heaven. Forever go in peace; God is always with you. Amen.

### **\*COMMISSION FOR CHRISTMAS: Luke 1:38**

Mary spoke the words of faith and became the human vessel through which God entered history. Let her words be our own: “Let it be to me according to your word.”

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Larry Wagner, Melvin Wagner, Alister and Garrett Pickens, Floyd Lorenz, Shana Johnson.