**NPMC Christmas Eve Service 2019**

**Compiled by Co-Pastor Susanne Guenther Loewen**

[Lights Out – Only Peace Lamp candle lit]

Hymn – **O Come, All Ye Faithful** (HWB 212)

**SUSANNE:**

Welcome to NPMC on this Christmas Eve. My name is SGL and I’m co-pastor here. Reading with me this evening are co-pastor Patrick Preheim and youth leader Sarah Unrau, and our Musica Tribus group is providing accompaniment and special music. We welcome you to this service of candlelight, readings and carols as we celebrate the birth of the Christ-child among us once again.

A reading from “Redeeming Darkness,” by Barbara Brown Taylor:

…[In] Advent, the church season of deepening darkness, … Christians are asked to remember that we measure time differently …. We begin our year when the days are getting darker, not lighter. We count sunset as the beginning of a new day. However things appear to our naked eyes, we trust that the seeds of light are planted in darkness, where they sprout and grow we know not how. This darkness is necessary to new life, even when it is uncomfortable and goes on too long.

Ask any expectant mother if she wants her baby to come early and she will say no, she does not. As badly as her back hurts, as long as it has been since she has seen her toes, she is willing to wait because the baby is not ready yet. The eyelashes are ready, but not the fingernails. The kidneys are ready, but not the lungs. Those wing-shaped sacks are still preparing to make the leap from fluid to air. There is still more time to do in the dusky womb, where the baby is growing like a seed in the dark. …The church waits like this during Advent ...

There is one word for darkness in the Bible that stands out from the rest. It shows up in the book of Exodus, at the foot of Mount Sinai, right after God has delivered Torah to the people: "Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (20:21). … Here is a helpful reminder to all who fear the dark. Darkness does not come from a different place than light; it is not presided over by a different God. The long nights of Advent and the early mornings of Easter both point us toward the God for whom darkness and light are alike. Both are fertile seasons for those who walk by faith and not by sight. Even in the dark, the seed sprouts and grows—we know not how—while God goes on giving birth to the truly human in Christ and in us.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Special Music – All Through the Night – Musica Tribus*

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{{SARAH: Light First Advent Candle – from Peace Lamp}}

**PATRICK:**

A reading from Isaiah Chapter 9: *(v. 2, 6-7 {SLIDE})*

The people who walked in darkness  
    have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
    on them light has shined.  
6For a child has been born for us,  
    a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
    and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7His authority shall grow continually,  
    and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
    He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
    from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

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**SARAH: First Coming – by Madeleine L’Engle*[[2]](#footnote-2)***

He did not wait till the world was ready,  
till [all the] nations were at peace.  
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need was deep and great.  
He dined with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.  
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Hymn – **Lo, How a Rose** (HWB 211)

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{{PATRICK: Light Second Advent Candle}}

**SUSANNE: A reading from** *Luke chapter 1 (v.26-38 – Annunciation {SLIDE})*

26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”29But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

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**SARAH:** A reading by Alice Connor:

The Annunciation is “Mary’s origin story. She was chosen, maybe because she didn’t run away, because she pushed back, trying to understand. She settled into the moment and consented to being the caretaker of the baby God. This is important because, no matter what arguments we make about God’s omnipotence and predestination, God wants us to choose. One of my students says, ‘God is all about enthusiastic consent.’ … God, in the guise of the angel, said, ‘Mary, do you want this baby?’ and she said, ‘Yes. Yes, I do.’

What’s interesting is that while Mary’s first story is obviously a birth announcement, it much more closely fits a different form of biblical writing, the prophetic call. The form goes like this: encounter an angel; angel calls you to do something difficult; object to the call; you are reassured and given a sign. This is precisely what happens when Gabriel drops by Mary’s house. Like Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel before her, Mary is called to prophetic action.” [[3]](#footnote-3)

*Special Music – StS 11 – No Wind at the Window*

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{{SARAH: Light Third Advent Candle}} *{SLIDE}*

**PATRICK:**

*From Luke Chapter 1: (v. 39-55 – Visitation & Magnificat)*

39In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

46And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47    and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
    Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
    and holy is his name.  
50His mercy is for those who fear him  
    from generation to generation.  
51He has shown strength with his arm;  
    he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
52He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
    and lifted up the lowly;  
53he has filled the hungry with good things,  
    and sent the rich away empty.  
54He has helped his servant Israel,  
    in remembrance of his mercy,  
55according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
    to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Hymn – **My Soul Is Filled with Joy** – StJ 13

**SARAH:** A reading by Kathleen Norris:

“Just as surely as Zechariah has lost his voice, today Mary finds hers. After Elizabeth exclaims, ‘Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord,’ the Gospel continues, simply, ‘And Mary said,’ giving us little sense of what is to come. For Mary utters a song so powerful that its meaning still resonates in profound and disturbing ways. In the twentieth century Mary’s ‘Magnificat’ became a cornerstone of liberation theology, so much so that during the 1980s the government of Guatemala found its message so subversive that it banned its recitation in public worship.

The Magnificat reminds us that what we most value, all that gives us status – power, pride, strength, and wealth – can be a barrier to receiving what God has in store for us. If we have it all, or think we can buy it all, there will be no Christmas for us. If we are full of ourselves, there will be no room for God to enter our hearts at Christmas. Mary’s prayer of praise, like many of the psalms, calls us to consider our true condition…. And if we hope to [participate] in God’s new creation, where love and justice will reign triumphant, our responsibility, here and now, is to reject the temptation to employ power and force and oppression against those weaker than ourselves. We honor the Incarnation best by honoring God’s image in all people, and seeking to make this world into a place of welcome for the Prince of Peace.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

{{SUSANNE: Light Fourth Advent Candle}}

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**SUSANNE:** *A reading from Luke chapter 2: (v. 1-7 – Nativity {SLIDE})*

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph 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. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And 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.

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Did the woman say,

When she held him for the first time in the dark of a stable

After the pain and the bleeding and the crying,

‘This is my body, this is my blood’?[[5]](#footnote-5)

{{PATRICK: Light Christ Candle}}

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**PATRICK:** [***Message from the Manger***](http://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2016/12/message-from-the-manger.html) by Carol Penner

We love you in the manger, Jesus.

Your little hands and feet,

your soft breathing,

your eyes closed in sleep.

You may be a revolutionary,

but we like our revolutionaries in diapers.

Forgive us, Lord,

for preferring a Saviour that doesn’t talk;

a Saviour that has no words of judgement

for our callousness to the suffering of others,

whose arms aren’t tossing over tables,

whose feet aren’t leading us to Jerusalem.

In this advent season,

where the world around us

is convulsing with violence and bigotry,

give us ears to hear

the unspoken message from the manger.

A Middle Eastern baby with dark skin

is threatened with violence

and becomes a refugee.

God with us,

now and forevermore.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Hymn – **What Child Is This?** (HWB 215)

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**SARAH:** A reading from *Luke chapter 2 (v. 8-20 – Shepherds {SLIDE})*

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
     and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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**PATRICK:** A reading by Dorothee Soelle:

“Whoever wants to proclaim something about [the light of Christmas] has to free the stifled longing of people. An interpretation that takes seriously concrete, everyday human cares and does not make light of the [suffering] of children from hunger and neglect is helpful in this regard. By showing the incomparable power of violence in our world today, it deepens our yearning for true peace.

Our text refers to the praxis of transmission and proclamation. The frightened shepherds become God’s messengers. They organize, make haste, find others, and speak with them. Do we not all want to become shepherds and catch sight of the angel? I think so. Without the perspective of the poor, we see nothing, not even an angel. When we approach the poor, our values and goals change. The child appears in many other children. Mary also seeks sanctuary among us. Because the angels sing, the shepherds rise, leave their fears behind, and set out for Bethlehem, wherever it is situated these days.”

[[7]](#footnote-7)

Hymn – **Joy to the World** (HWB 318)

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**SUSANNE:** A reading by Dorothy Day:

“It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.

But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that he speaks, with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that he gives. It is with the feet of …tramps that he walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that he longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

[Candle Lighting]

Hymn – **Silent Night** (HWB 193) [accompanist plays through once, we sing 1st verse in German, then 4 verses in English, accompanist plays it through once more]

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**SARAH:**

**Receive the Benediction:**

When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full on the planet earth,  
And by a comet the sky is torn-  
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

AMEN

[Blow out candles, Lights on]

1. https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-11/redeeming-darkness [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From her book, *A Cry Like a Bell*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Alice Connor, *Fierce: Women of the Bible and their Stories of Violence, Mercy, Bravery, Wisdom, Sex, and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kathleen Norris, “Fourth Friday of Advent,” ,” in *God with Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas*, ed. Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolfe(Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 115-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Frances Croake Frank [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Carol Penner, http://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/advent/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Dorothee Soelle, “The Christmas Gospel,” in *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004),242-243. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dorothy Day, “Room for Christ,” in *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Madeleine L’Engle, “The Risk of Birth: An Advent Poem,” 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)