

2022 Christmas Eve

(Nutana Park Mennonite Church; Dec. 24, 2022)

Hymn: O come, all ye faithful #241 VT (standing)

LIGHTS OUT (foyer lights stay on)—all texts of hymns projected on the screen

Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle: (*Susanne*)

- Welcome to those present in person and through the livestream; introduction of we two; thanks to those assisting with the service
- Treaty acknowledgement
- Advent Litany (projected)

Leader: We light a candle for Christ,
Christ in our hearts,
Christ in our homes,
Christ in our world.

People: May the light of Christ shine through our lives.

(*Patrick*) How different [the biblical story] is from the typical greeting-card idea of Christmas, with a perpetually smiling infant so tender and mild, sleeping in heavenly peace. I do not mean to be churlish or snide about our loveliest traditions in the West...but the exaggerated, bucolic sweetness of the seasonal images [of Christmas] unfortunately masks the strong message of the Gospels. A romantic emphasis on treasures offered to the babe in the manger has so long drenched a rank commercialism that the deeper, richer significance of Matthew and Luke has been all but drowned.

These Gospels state that God has embraced humanity and entered into its suffering with unimaginable love. His Christ is the one who arrives not in royal purple but in silence and simplicity, far from the cheers that attend Augustus and Herod. A king he surely is...but a new sort of king who makes no claim to worldly authority. In infancy as during his life on earth, he arouses antipathy and even...provokes outright hostility from those who covet earthly supremacy. He comes to the shepherds, to the dissolute, to impolite society—thus, from the start, identifying himself with outcasts, the poor and the humble...With tenderness...he shines on the world an infinite compassion. Despite all the greed, political chaos, social dissension, great deceptions and local hostilities that characterized life then and continue to infect it now, mercy arrives like the stillness of night.

Nor is our suffering, our selfishness, our perversity...trivialized by Him. God comes in silence, shrouded in darkness, to a world sunk in enmities whose sources it scarcely remembers. He claims us for His own and promises a final triumph...He does not accompany the world alongside it, much less "above" it: from creation to the present, God acts within history, and within the most intimate points of our lives and activities

That is the meaning of the incarnation, the enfleshment of God in the human dimension...God makes, he takes what She has made for His own, She loves what He has made and saves it forever.

(Donald Spoto, *The Hidden Jesus*, pp. 12-13)

Hymn: From the Parent's Heart, the Firstborn #418 VT

(*Susanne*) Isaiah 9:2-7

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...

[T]he yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken...

For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments
rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His 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 onwards and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

(*Patrick*) Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,

the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,

or decide by what his ears hear;

but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,

and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,

and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,

and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Hymn: It Came upon a Midnight Clear #248 VT

(*Susanne*) Luke 1:26-35, 38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The 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. Then 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.

(*Patrick*) Every time we say "Let it be with me according to your word" we relinquish control, we surrender to the Mystery, we entrust ourselves to the Unknowing, and we open our womb to God's presence... Meister Eckhart, the Dominican monk of 14th century Germany says,

We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I also do not give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time—when the Son of God is begotten in us....

How will we give birth to the Son of God in our time and in our culture? In our local communities, in our schools and workplaces, in our families, in our churches, in meeting the needs of the poor, in speaking for justice, in our relationships, in our brokenness and pain, in our joys and celebrations? Or maybe the better question is, Will we? Will we let it be?

“Birthing God—The Feast of the Annunciation” posted by marshmk

(Susanne) Matthew 1:18-21

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, "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."

(Patrick) Mary [and Joseph] are not asked to arrange for the salvation of the world all by themselves, or to create the perfect environment for the Saviour's birth. It is God who has the ideas, and they look pretty unpromising by the world's standards...God came into the world as a baby. God's coming into our lives is like a baby's coming: it is never exactly what we expected, and it is certain to involve complications and trouble and hard work. And quite possibly, sooner or later, [it will bring] terrible anguish. We are not called to wrestle out of the chaos of our lives the perfect family Christmas, or the perfect spiritual moment, or even the perfect contemplative emptiness in which to welcome the Saviour. Our calling is more like [Joseph and] Mary's: to wonder what God could possibly have in mind, and then to say "Yes" and take what comes.

- "Expecting" in *The Christian Century* (Dec 8, 1993)
by Gretchen Wolff Pritchard

Hymn: The Angel Gabriel #221 VT

(Susanne) Luke 2:1-7

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.

(*Patrick*) Matthew 2:1-11

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, '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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him...

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

(*Susanne*) "A Child in Starlight"

by Elmer Diktonium in *Divine Inspiration* (p.23)

There is a child
A new-born child—
A rosy, new-born child.

The child whimpers—
All children do.
And the mother takes the child to her breast.
Then it is quiet.
So is every child.

The roof is not over tight—
Not all roofs are.
And the star puts
Its silver muzzle through the chink,
And steals up to the little one's head.
Stars like children.

And the mother looks up at the star
And understands—
All mothers understand.
And presses her frightened baby
To her breast—
But the child sucks quietly in starlight:
All children suck in starlight.

It knows nothing yet about the cross:
No child does

Hymn: What child is this #267 VT

(*Patrick*) Luke 2:8-14

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, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of a great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, 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." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

(*Susanne*) "This Year" by Ann Weems, in *Knelling at Bethlehem*

I wonder if God comes to the edge of heaven each Advent
and flings the Star into the December sky,
laughing with joy as it lights the darkness of the earth;
and the angels, hearing the laughter of God,
begin to congregate in some celestial chamber
to practice their alleluias.
I wonder if there's some ordering of rank among the angels
as they move into procession,
the seraphim bumping the cherubim from top spot,
the new inhabitants of heaven standing in the back
until they get the knack of it.
(After all, treading air over a stable and announcing at the
same time can't be all that easy!)

Or is everybody—that is, every "soul"—free to fly
wherever the spirit moves?
Or do they even think about it?
Perhaps when God calls, perhaps they just come,
this multitude of heavenly hosts.
Perhaps they come,
winging through the winds of time
full of expectancy
full of hope that this year
perhaps this year
(perhaps)
the earth will fall to its knees
in a whisper of "Peace."

(Patrick) Today [Mary] is on her way to the [stable] where she will give birth in a manner beyond understanding to the Word who is, in all eternity. Rejoice, therefore, universe, when you hear it heralded: with the angels and the shepherds, glorify him who chose to be seen as a new-born babe, while remaining God in all eternity.

(“Preparation of the Nativity Orthodox Liturgy” in *A Christmas Sourcebook*, p.23)

Hymn: Angels we have heard on high #249 VT

(Susanne) Luke 2:25-38

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

(Patrick) Commitment to Christlikeness will involve trials and unhappiness, as Simeon points out. This call to live in full expression and obedience to the Father’s will means inevitable conflict. Our lives will encounter resistance, turmoil, and heartache, because we live in a tragically fallen world. We live in a **real** world, and we live in a **dark** world. Being the light means dealing with the dark.

- Tony Maan, *Rembrandt’s Jesus: Meditations on the life of Christ*

(Susanne) There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

(*Patrick*) Christmas calls a community back to its origins by remembering Jesus' own beginnings as a human child, a prophet of God's reign, a judgment on the world and its projects. What the [church] celebrates during this season is not primarily a birthday, but the beginning of a decisive new phase in the tempestuous history of God's hunger for human companions. The social concerns of the season are thus rooted in Jesus' proclamation of God's reign: the renunciation of patterns that oppress others...and the formation of a new human community that voluntarily embraces those renunciations. It is an adult Christ that the community encounters during the Advent and Christmas cycles...a Risen Lord who invites sinful people to become church. Christmas does not ask us to pretend we were back in Bethlehem, kneeling before a crib; it asks us to recognize that the wood of the crib became the wood of the cross.

(Nathan Mitchell in *A Christmas Sourcebook* edited by Mary Ann Simcoe, p. 31)

Hymn: Joy to the World #240 VT

(*Susanne*) John 1: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of humans, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Candle lighting & Hymn: Silent Night #244 VT

(*Patrick*) Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word; Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(“Collect of the First Sunday after Christmas”, *Book of Common Prayer*)

After 5-10 second put on the house lights