



CHRIST *the* REDEEMER

Lessons & Carols
December 24, 2023, 4p

O Little Town of Bethlehem

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Call to Worship

John 1.1-14

Leader—

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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Congregation—

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

Leader—

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Congregation—

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

—Lighting of the Christ Candle—

Leader—

Behold the Light of the World has pierced the darkness. He has shined his great light in our hearts and kindled our hearts with Hope, with Peace, with Joy, and with Love. He is the Light from whom we understand and enjoy all that God has done for us through his Beloved Son. As we light the Christ Candle, may each of our hearts be stirred anew by the power of his Spirit.

Opening Prayer

First Lesson

Genesis 3.8–19

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Personal Confession (in silence)

Corporate Confession of Sin

Holy Father, You see us as we are, and know our inmost thoughts. We confess that we are unworthy of your gracious care. We forget that all life comes from you and that to you all life returns. We have not sought to do your will with our whole hearts. We have not lived as grateful children, nor loved as Christ loved us. Apart from you, we are nothing. Only your grace can sustain us. Lord, in your mercy, forgive us, heal us, and make us whole. Set us free from our sin, and restore us to the joy of your salvation now and forever. Amen.

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Song of Response, The First Noel

The first Noel the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds
In fields as they lay
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep

Chorus—

Noel Noel Noel Noel
Born is the King of Israel

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them far
And to the earth it gave great light
And so it continued both day and night
Their gold and myrrh and frankincense

And by the light of that same star
Three wise men came from country far
To seek for a king was their intent
And to follow the star wherever it went

This star drew nigh to the northwest
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest
And there it did both stop and stay
Right over the place where Jesus lay

Then entered in those wise men three
Full rev'rently upon the knee
And offered there in His presence

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Song of the Gospel, O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and
cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and 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 of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Hymn of the Gospel, Go Tell It On The Mountain

Chorus	The shepherds feared and trembled
Go tell it on the mountain	When lo above the earth
Over the hills and ev'rywhere	Rang out the angel chorus
Go tell it on the mountain	That hailed the Savior's birth
That Jesus Christ is born	

While shepherds kept their watching	Down in a lowly manger
O'er silent flocks by night	The humble Christ was born
Behold throughout the heavens	And God sent us salvation
There shone a holy light	That blessed Christmas morn

Fifth Lesson

Luke 1.26–38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Song of Reflection, Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to men a Savior,
When half-spent was the night.

The shepherds heard the story proclaimed by angels bright,
How Christ, the Lord of glory was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped and in the manger found Him,
As angel heralds said.

This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere;
True Man, yet very God, from sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.

O Savior, Child of Mary, who felt our human woe,
O Savior, King of glory, who dost our weakness know;
Bring us at length we pray, to the bright courts of Heaven,
And to the endless day!

Sixth Lesson

Luke 2.1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Song of Response, What Child is This

What Child is this who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping
This this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing
Haste haste to bring Him laud
The Babe the Son of Mary

Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding
Good Christian fear for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading

Nails spear shall pierce Him through
The cross be borne for me for you
Hail hail the Word made flesh
The Babe the Son of Mary

So bring Him incense gold and myrrh
Come peasant king to own Him
The King of kings salvation brings
Let loving hearts enthrone Him
Raise raise the song on high
The Virgin sings her lullaby
Joy joy for Christ is born
The Babe the Son of Mary

Seventh Lesson

Luke 2: 8-16

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths 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 with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

Hymn of Response, Silent Night

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
'round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!"

Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

Silent night! Holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing
"Alleluia" to our King:
"Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born."

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Hymn of Response, Jesus, Joy of the Highest Heaven**Refrain—**

Jesus joy of the highest heaven
Born as a little baby
Under a wondrous star
Like us crying he takes His first breath
Held by His mother helpless
Close to her beating heart
Jesus laid in a lowly manger
Facing a world of dangers
Come to turn me a stranger
Into a child of God

Jesus King of the highest heaven
Learning to take His first steps
That He might bring us life
Like us knowing our smiles and sorrows
He showed the way to follow
A way that is true and right
Jesus take away every darkness
Steady my simple footsteps
That I might in Your goodness
Live as a child of God

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Hymn of Response, Joy to the World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Lessons & Carols was a worship service started after the first World War where many people were disenfranchised and left hopeless. Many questioned the goodness of God and wondered where he was during so many atrocities.

The service was started as a way to meet people where they were in their doubts, fears, and pain. By simply hearing the story of God's promise of salvation and hope in the promise and arrival of his Son, Jesus, many found the solace they were looking for. In the simplicity of listening and being still, their love for the things of God was rekindled.

Our prayer for you is that your love and devotion to God would be warmed. That whatever you're going through. Whatever doubts, pain, and questions, we want you to know that God is nearer than your very breath. If you will simply call out to him.

Not only this, but as a community that believes in and has experienced the healing power of God's Spirit, we want you to know you are always welcome. We do not feign to believe we can solve your problems, but we trust that God is able to bring hope, peace, joy, and love in your life.

If during this worship service your heart has been kindled anew, we would welcome you to worship with us next Sunday. We'd love to buy you a coffee and talk and hear your story and how we might serve you.

If you would like to know more about us, please find someone to talk to after the service and visit our website where we have more information about us and sermons that will teach you more about Jesus and encourage you in your journey of faith. Even if you don't join us, we want you to know that we want to serve you in whatever way you need.

Christmas Eve Vigil

Kathleen Norris

A woman I know, whose family owns a retail business in a small town, once commented, "Christmas is not a pleasant time at our house." I found this a sad commentary on what Christmas has become for so many of us: a time of increased anxiety and stress and discord. We lash out at loved ones because we're spending money we can't afford to spend, or, as with this woman, because Christmas is what makes or breaks our family's livelihood for the year.

What a mess we have made of God's greatest gift to us! We scurry for weeks, baking, shopping, working extra hours, rehearsing and presenting Christmas pageants. Then, on the eve of the Nativity, we force our frantic, over-stimulated children into their "best," most uncomfortable clothes, and we all rush off to church where we collapse into a pew. If we're lucky, we think, we can nod off listening to the lengthy recitation of Jesus' genealogy that opens the Gospel of Matthew. After that, it's playing Santa, and confronting those maddening "some assembly required" directions until the wee hours.

By Christmas Eve, most of us find ourselves very far from our true reasons for celebrating, reasons that are so eloquently expressed in the processional of the Christmas Vigil in the Byzantine rite: "Rejoice, Jerusalem! All you lovers of Sion, share our festivities! On this day the age-old bonds of Adam's condemnation were broken, paradise was opened for us, the serpent was crushed, and the woman, whom he once deceived, lives now as mother of the creator."

Here, in just a few simple words, is the essence of Christmas. It is not merely the birth of Jesus we celebrate tonight, although we recall it joyfully, in song and story. The feast of the Incarnation invites us to celebrate also Jesus' death, resurrection, and coming again in glory. It is our salvation story, and all of creation is invited to dance, sing, and feast. But we are so exhausted. How is it possible to bridge the gap between our sorry reality and the glad, grateful recognition Norris of the Incarnation as the mainstay of our faith? We might begin by acknowledging that if we have neglected the spiritual call of Advent for yet another year, and have allowed ourselves to become thoroughly frazzled by December 24, all is not lost. We are, in fact, in very good shape for Christmas.

It is precisely because we are weary, and poor in spirit, that God can touch us with hope. This is not an easy truth. It means that we accept our common lot, and take up our share of the cross. It means that we do not gloss over the evils we confront every day, both within ourselves and without. Our sacrifices may be great. But as the martyred archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero, once said, it is only the poor and hungry, those who know they need someone to come on their behalf, who can celebrate Christmas.

Tonight we are asked to acknowledge that the world we have made is in darkness. We are asked to be attentive, and keep vigil for the light of Christ. The readings are not particularly comforting. Psalm 88, a lament which is also commonly read on Good Friday, is stark in its appraisal: "For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol," the underworld of the dead. The passage from Acts asks us to consider that, just as Israel needed God to lead them out of Egypt, so we need Christ to lead us out of our present slavery to sin. We, and our world, are broken. Even our homes have become places of physical and psychological violence. It is only God, through Jesus Christ, who can make us whole again.

The prophecy of Isaiah allows us to imagine a time when God's promise will be fulfilled, and we will no longer be desolate, or forsaken, but found, and beloved of God. We find a note of hope also in the Gospel of Matthew. In the long list of Jesus' forbears, we find the whole range of humanity: not only God's faithful, but adulterers, murderers, rebels, conspirators, transgressors of all sorts, both the fearful and the bold. And yet God's purpose is not thwarted. In Jesus Christ, God turns even human dysfunction to the good.

The genealogy of Jesus reveals that God chooses to work with us as we are, using our weaknesses, even more than our strengths, to fulfill the divine purpose. At tonight's vigil, in a world as cold and cruel and unjust as it was at the time of Jesus' birth in a stable, we desire something better. And in desiring it, we come to believe that it is possible. We await its coming in hope.

—Prayer —

O God, who spoke all creation into being:

When you created human flesh, we betrayed you by our disobedience.

When you led us out of slavery in Egypt, we doubted and defied you.

Yet you chose to come among us through your Son, Jesus Christ,

who suffered death on our behalf, putting an end to the power of sin and death.

For this great gift of your steadfast hope, we give you thanks.

Help us, O Lord, to keep vigil this night.

Help us to watch for the signs of your coming into our midst,

not in the splendid palaces of power, but in hearts humbled by need.

*Help us to believe that the darkness of cruelty and sin will never overcome the light,
and the mercy, of Christ.*

*Help us to endure, knowing that the evil and injustice of this world cannot
prevail against your Word.*

We ask this in the name of your Word made flesh, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



CHRIST *the* REDEEMER

We are united by our Core Values

Community | Discipleship | Liturgy | Mercy + Mission | Simplicity

—Church Leadership—

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