

Worship at Home for December 24 2020

This service contains some prayers from our live ZOOM Christmas Eve Worship Service, but the reflection from our Christmas Eve 'A Bite from the Apple' podcast.

Centering Prayer

This holy night, God, open us to your possibilities in
stars shining, angels singing, love born anew.
Help us to welcome you once again into our hearts and lives.
Amen

Opening Music "O Come, All Ye Faithful"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjl-KIGrOWA>

Opening Prayer

Tonight, O God, your love is shown in story, in song –
in the tender care of Joseph,
in the birthing cries of Mary,
in the baby gurgles of infant Jesus,
in the angel's song and the shepherd's declaration,
in mystery and wonder.
Surprise us once again with wonder and light,
gather us together in the Spirit to be filled with joy,
lead us to celebrate and welcome
your Word become flesh,
your Child of Love,
our Emmanuel.
Amen

Scripture Luke 2:1-14

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.

Carol: "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXLYm3v7RWc>

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 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.' 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!'

Carol: "Angels we Have Heard on High"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n543eKldbUI>

When 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.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyPMDD8fGeA>

Reflection

What is your 'picture' of the nativity? Do you have a favourite image that you keep close to your heart? Usually we set the story under a starry sky, with just Mary, Joseph and babe, animals and shepherds in attendance. For those of us who experience the winter season at Christmas, we imagine some snow. Sometimes we add those wise ones, who actually arrived some time later according to Matthew's gospel.

In these pandemic times, and in this Christmas season where many remain isolated, that picture serves us well, and can bring us comfort. A family alone and secluded bears witness to God's love born in Jesus, and shepherds who were often alone on the hillsides outside the towns and villages were the first ones to bear the Good News and bear witness to this birth and this holy baby.

But what if we have the picture wrong? What if our imaginations have created a picture that is slightly askew? What if Mary and Joseph were actually welcomed in by their extended family – as would certainly have been the case in the first century. There was certainly no room in the *kataluma* – the Greek word that has usually been translated as 'inn', but that word really means 'guest room'. What if Jesus was born not in the isolation of a separate cave or stable (which the bible does not mention), but in the busy and crowded household of his extended family, with the older woman acting as midwives, with fresh straw gathered in floor depressions for the animals (who also shared the lower quarters of a typical Palestinian home) for his bed?

It makes the shepherd's arrival and their witness even more remarkable, as they usually weren't seen inside the towns. They lived with the animals they cared for, and were 'unclean' by their community's standards. Yet somehow they were welcomed in to share their story of angels and greet the family. It makes God-come-to-us-in-a tiny-child somehow more spectacular, because it occurs not far away and separated, but in the midst of daily living. Their appearance at this home would bring the mysterious and glorious closer to us all.

That is where God comes to us, and where God's love needs to be born – right in the middle of the crowded and messy aspects of our lives, in the busy and frantic moments, in the shelters and in the shopping malls (when they were open) in our hearts and in our spirits.

Like Joseph, we are called to care gently for each other, as we all can bear God's love and bring it to life. Like the angels, we are called to sing with joy. Like the shepherds, we are called to witness to Love's birth, and like Mary, we are called to ponder all these words of faith and awe and celebration.

This different Christmas, may you find Jesus where you need him – in a stable nestled in hay, in a busy household, in your own separated and isolated space, but especially in your hearts.
Amen

Carol "See Amid the Winter's Snow"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPgo-UfyJgc>

Prayers of the People with Silent Night

(you may wish to have Silent Night playing in the background as you read this prayer, and have a candle to light later in the prayer) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRZOv31n1sY>

Loving God, we bring our prayers to you this Silent Night, this Holy Night ...

prayers of thanks for the birth of your Chosen One that we celebrate, prayers of gratitude for all that can be born in us through your love.

We thank you for the love we share in families, no matter how distant. We thank you for our faith community, Applewood United Church.

We thank you, God, for the child-like wonder and mystery that can fill us on Christmas Eve.

Sing verse 1

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

Compassionate God, this Silent Night can also be a lonely night ...
many in our community, many in our neighbourhoods, our cities – and right across this country
people know a lonesomeness that is more acute, deeper than they have known before.
We pray for those who will spend this holiday time alone, that they feel the presence of your
spirit and especially the presence of your love.
We pray for families separated by distance but also separated by the pandemic and restrictions
that keep us safe, we pray for residents in long term care homes and retirement homes, and
patients in hospitals who will spend Christmas without company. We pray for front-line health
care workers still staying isolated from their families this Christmas, and for those who will
spend this night on the streets or in shelters.

Sing verse 2

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Restoring God, may this Silent Night also be healing night ...
and we offer our prayers for those who are ill in body, mind or spirit,
for those who are living with violence, abuse, racism, homophobia
for those who are experiencing grief and loss – of employment,
of security, of someone that they love.
Show us how to bring your healing love to those we encounter,
and open us to the miraculous power of your love shared in prayer and action.

Sing verse 3

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, oh, 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

Creating God, we pray that this Silent Night may also become a hopeful night ...
and with that hope we light a candle to shine in the darkness. (pause)
May its warmth bring hope to those who are worried and fearful,
may its glimmer spread a measure of faith and optimism.
Hear our prayers, God of stable and baby, God of shepherds and angels,
and let the light of Christmas shine through us and in us. Amen

Closing Music: "Joy to the World"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDmIddF7DfQ>

Blessing

As we go from our worship time, back to our kitchens or living rooms,
some of us back to being alone, awaiting a time when we can gather safely again:
May the joy of the angels sing in our voices over the phone or in ZOOM calls or face time;
may the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds as we contemplate this different Christmas;
may the strong faith of Mary strengthen our spirits to carry us through this time;
and may the love of the Baby shine in our hearts.
God's blessing be upon us all, this holy night and forever.
Amen