

**ZOOM Worship for December 24, 2021
Christmas Eve**

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music: "In the Bleak Mid Winter/Silent Night" *duet*

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: This is the night

Two: *when God touches the earth.*

One: This is the time

Two: *when we can encounter Holy Mystery.*

One: This is the virtual space

Two: *where we can share our joy and our awe.*

One: It is a Holy Night,

Two: *it is a reverent night,*

One: it is a night for worship and song

Two: *for story and prayer:*

All: Tonight, O God,

**the soles of your feet
have touched the earth.**

**Tonight,
the back street, the forgotten place
have been lit up with significance
far beyond our wildest dreams.**

**Tonight,
the households of earth
welcome the Child of heaven.**

**For you have come among us,
you are one of us.**

**So may our songs rise to surround your awesome mystery
as our knees bend to approach your cradle. Amen.**

Opening Hymn: "O Come, All Ye Faithful" VU 60 verses 1, 3, 4

O come, all ye faithful,

Joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.

Come and behold Him,

Born the King of angels;

Refrain

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation;
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God,
Glory in the highest; R

See how the shepherds,
Summoned to His cradle,
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;
We too will thither
Bend our joyful footsteps; R

Lighting the Christ Candle

One: Tonight we light Christ's candle.
The centre Candle is set alight

Two: It shines with hope in our world –
a hope that gives us courage to act.

One: It glows for peace in our world –
a peace that gives us freedom to change.

Two: It twinkles with joy in our world –
a joy that gives us energy to embrace the new.

One: It illuminates God's love in the world –
a love that embraces all creation.

Two: This is the Light that helps us to see clearly
despite the darkness of pandemic, of separations,
of injustices and inequities.

One: This is the Light that can remove our shadows of fear,
or of anxiety, shadows that can be oppressive.

Two: May this light give us the courage to be Christ-light for others and
bear Christ-light in the world as we welcome love-made-known,
God-with-us, Emmanuel.

All: God's hope, peace, joy and love light up the world.

Sung Response: "A Candle is Burning" VU 6 verse 5

We honour Messiah with Christ-candle's flame,
our Christmas Eve candles glad tidings proclaim.
O come, all you faithful, rejoice in this night,
as God comes among us, the Christian's true light.

Scripture Readings with Carols:

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.

Carol: “Still, Still, Still” VU 47

Still, still, still: the night is calm and still.
The Christchild in his crib lies sleeping,
angels round him watch are keeping.
Still, still, still: the night is calm and still.

Sleep, sleep, sleep: sweet Jesus, softly sleep,
while Mary sings and gently holds you,
safely in her arms enfolds you.
Sleep, sleep, sleep: sweet Jesus softly sleep.

Joy, joy, joy; glad tidings of great joy!
For through God's holy incarnation
Christ is born for our salvation.
Joy, joy, joy; glad tidings of great joy!

Scripture: 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 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” VU 38 verses 1, 2, 3

Angels we have heard on high
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heavenly song? R

Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King. R
See him in a manger laid,

whom the choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
while our hearts in love we raise. R

Scripture: Luke 2:15-20

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.

Choir: "Bring a Torch Jeanette Isabella"

Reflection Time: "All About Shepherds"

Special Music: "Go, Tell it on the Mountain"

Hymn: "See Amid the Winter's Snow" VU 76

See amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see, the tender Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.
 Hail, thou ever-blessed morn;
 hail, redemption's happy dawn;
 sing through all Jerusalem,
 Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Lo, within a manger lies
God who built the starry skies,
who enthroned in height sublime
sits amid the cherubim. R

Say, ye holy shepherds, say
what your joyful news today;
wherefore have ye left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep? R

'As we watched at dead of night,
lo, we saw a wondrous light;
angels singing 'Peace on earth'
told us of the Saviour's birth.' R

Sacred infant, all divine,
what a mighty love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss
down to such a world as this! R

Virtual Offering:

One: May all our gifts open others
to the blessings you give this Christmas, O God:

Two: *the gift of childlike wonder;
the gift of radiant hope;*

One: the gift of peace
which passes all understanding;

Two: *the gift of joy
which knows no bounds;*

One: the gift of gathering virtually,
and remembering the needs of the vulnerable.

Two: *The gift of connections within community
and with you, God.*

One: With these gifts, we bring ourselves to you God,
in response to the greatest gift of all —
the Babe of Bethlehem. Amen

Sung Response: "O Holy Night"

Prayers of the People (with Silent Night)

One: Loving God, tonight we pray our thanks to you –
for communities that support us and nurture us
throughout the shifting sands of pandemic times,
for acceptance and belonging in our church and our families,
for all the reasons we have to celebrate at Christmas time.
And we offer our prayers for others:

Two: *Tonight, we offer our prayers for all those who wander –
those who have not found a physical or spiritual home,
those who live on our streets and need shelter,
those who struggle to be accepted just as they are,
those who live in or continue to experience isolation.
And we pray as we sing:*

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

One: Parent God, we pray our thanks for our children, no matter what their age may be, and we thank you for the perfume of a new-born baby, the exuberance of a toddler, the curiosity of teens, the blooming independence of young adults, the energy of those in their middle years and the wisdom of our elders. We thank you for families of all sizes and descriptions, and we offer our prayers for others:

Two: *Tonight we pray for children and families:
large families and small families,
hearty families and broken families,*

*ones with many children, those who yearn for children.
We pray for Christina and Peter as they prepare to welcome
their child into their lives, and all those who wait for a child to be born
into their families.
We pray for children and families in distress,
and all those who need peace in hearts, minds or bodies.
And we pray as we sing:*

***Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born***

*One: Creator of all, we give you thanks for all the good of your earth – the stars in the sky, the snow
and the rain, for people who care for us and for those for whom we can care. We thank you for mystery
and for wonder, for your own presence in a tiny child, and your Spirit who walks with each one of us, and
we offer our prayers for others:*

*Two: Tonight we pray for all those who live with fear –
those who live with violent surroundings and situations,
and fear they will never know peace and security,
those who are hungry and afraid they will not have enough to eat,
those who are cold and afraid they will not find shelter,
those who are ill and afraid they will never be well again.
And we pray as we sing:*

***Silent night, holy night!
Son of God love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth***

*One: Tonight we pray for those who feel they live in darkness –
the darkness of worry and despair, the darkness of loneliness,
the darkness of illness in body mind or spirit.*

*Two: May the light we share become a beacon of God's love and acceptance.
We light our candles and pray as we sing.*

***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.***

Closing Carol: “Joy to the World” VU 59 verses 1, 2, 4

Joy to the world, the Lord has come.
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns.
Let all their songs employ.
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

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.

Commissioning /Blessing

One: As we sign off from our worship tonight:
May the joy of the angels sing in our voices;
Two: *may the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds;
may the strong faith of Mary strengthen our spirits;
and may the love of the Baby shine in our hearts.*
One: God’s blessing be upon us all, this holy night and forever. Amen.

Musical Benediction: “Dream a Dream” MV 158 duet

Dream a dream, a hopeful dream,
as children do on Christmas Eve,
imaginings, surprising things
to hold and to believe.

Dream a time, this Christmas time,
when no one's hungry or afraid;
that weapons go and harvests grow,
that friends are met and made.

Dream a peace, our planet's peace,
the greening of the earth at play,
the holy ground where life is found,
where god has touched the clay.

Dream a gift, the Christmas gift
that changes every thing we see:
the shimmering of angel wing,
the Child, the Mystery.

Reflection "All About Shepherds"

Rev. Joanne's reflections for our ZOOM service are based on a series of photographs that will be shared during worship. The reflection here is a short piece related to the themes she will use on ZOOM.

Our Christmas story, retold through scripture and song, acted out in plays and pageants, always includes the shepherds - those ones "keeping watch over their flock by night." In the hierarchy of starring characters in our nativity plays, shepherds are not often high on the list. Mary and Joseph were coveted roles, I think, likely followed by wise ones, and angels, or even the imagined inn keeper. Shepherds were often the last positions filled, and yet they are truly at the centre of all the action in this story.

Shepherding is one of the world's oldest occupations, and in ancient times shepherds often worked for others. They did not own the flocks they tended, and the nature of their work, moving herds from one grazing spot to another, meant that they were often separate from their communities, and often alone. Sometimes a family would choose one of their younger sons to shepherd for them, or a child or elder who could not do much other work. They slept and ate and lived with the animals they tended, and while their work was absolutely essential to the economy of their time, they were not valued nor often welcomed into homes or into community.

Yet in this story of God's love – God's own essence – being born into the world, it is shepherds who receive the news, who witness to the babe, and who share the story. Once again God chose those we would least expect to hear good news. God chose not the powerful but the lowly to witness to the awe-inspiring and glorious song of angels, to run to the birthing place, and to spread the news far and wide. Simple, straight-forward shepherds, ordinary folk doing their ordinary work and into whose lives God's glory bursts in.

How are we like those ancient shepherds in our lives today? How would we respond if we were to experience God's presence in a profound way? Could we run to see? Could we share the news?

We might take a lesson or two from those sheep-tenders:

- Be open to experiencing God's light and love.
- Listen to angels, however they may appear.
- Have faith that God's good news is for you.
- Bear witness to God's goodness wherever you find it.

Perhaps, in our future Christmas plays, the shepherds could become the starring action roles! They energetically overcome their fears to be able to hear God's word, they run across the dark and hilly country to find the Truth of God's presence in a tiny infant, and they share their story with all who will listen. God chose shepherds, God chooses us to see God's Love and Light, and proclaim it. May we all carry a little part of those shepherds in our hearts this Christmas, and always.