

What We've Been Waiting For?

A Christmas Eve worship service

Prelude

Welcome

Good evening. Welcome to everyone, the regulars, the guests, the curious, the impatient for tomorrow.

Through Advent we have been reminded to pay attention to what we are waiting for. We need to pay attention because we may discover that the things we are waiting for often come to us in unexpected ways. And the whole story we tell at Christmas is a story of God answering the waiting hopes of humanity in very unexpected ways.

So keep paying attention through our worship this evening, as we hear the waiting of the prophets and the surprising good news of what God has done and is doing and will yet do through the coming of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

**God of creation,
It is dark now, and it is still,
This night when the light has just begun to return to the earth.
Show us glimmers of your presence in the stillness
Fan the embers of our waiting hopes in you
Until the glow of your love is uncontainable
And it shines for all people,
Giving warmth,
Bringing comfort,
And lighting a path for us and our neighbours to walk together.
We pray and trust in the darkness as we anticipate the light of Christ.
Amen.**

Light first Advent candle

Waiting for hope

Song **O Come, all ye faithful** **HWB 212**

Scripture **Micah 5:2-5a**

Reflection: Not where we expected

By Lori Guenther Reesor

**Welcome to Bethlehem
The sign on the way into town says
Hometown of King David
All those many years ago
Nothing much has happened since
Bethlehem is too little
Too little to be among the clans of Judah
The town's not big enough to have a decent sports team
No championship banners fly here
A good place to raise a family
Although, as it turned out, that wasn't true at all
Small-town life can be complicated
The wise men came seeking a newborn King
Not here, not at first
They started in Jerusalem
They started at the top
King Herod's advisers knew the prophecy about Bethlehem
Bethlehem of all places
How could a mighty king in his palace worry
Worry about what happens in a backwater town like this?
Put Herod into a murderous rage
Sent Mary, Joseph and their baby
Running for dear life**

And leaving Rachel weeping for her children
Micah says
He will shepherd his flock
A ruler like David, that's what I imagine
Before Herod's goon squad came to town
There were shepherds making noise about this baby
the great unwashed making wild claims
Isolation, lack of education and way too much time to gossip
It is strange though that King Herod's story and the shepherds' story line up
Micah says
They will live in safety, because at that time he will be great
Well, Joseph and Mary did clear out of town in the nick of time
I'm still here.
I'm waiting.
Micah says This One will be our peace
That'll be the day. From Bethlehem of all places.

Song **O Little Town of Bethlehem** **HWB 191**

Light second Advent candle

Waiting for peace

Scripture **Micah 4:1-4**

Song **It came upon a midnight clear** **HWB 195**

Reflection: Not when we expected

By Alissa Bender

We sing that you came on a silent night
A midnight clear
A happy morning
But we know you also came
When your people were held under a Roman boot.
When taxes were high and spirits were low
You came when the snap of a tyrant's fingers
 sent families rushing for their ancestral lands,
 lands their children had never seen,
 lands that were only ever backdrops for stories.
You were born under occupation.
The land, occupied
The people, occupied
Hopes, dreams, hearts, occupied. Colonized.

You came when you had no kingship to inherit,
 no throne from which to make world-changing edicts.
You came when you had no wealth to buy influence,
 no family name but "the carpenter's son".
You came when you had no army to command,
 when soldiers heeded only your oppressor.
You came when "peace" meant merely the absence of dissent
When "freedom" involved toeing the party line
And deliverance was found only in generations of prayers:
"How long, O Lord? Will you forget us forever?"
"Restore us, O God, let your face shine, that we may be saved."
You came.
You came when things were bleakest
When world powers were most imbalanced
When the hopes and fears of all the years met
When we hardly knew we were still watching for you,
You came
On a silent night (under forced migration)

- Reader 1:** Don't interrupt, this is the part of the Christmas story that always gets neglected! "And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah..."
- Reader 2:** You forgot Ahaziah.
- Reader 1:** Excuse me?
- Reader 2:** You forgot Ahaziah. After Joram. You missed about 3 generations.
- Reader 1:** (*frustrated*) That's not the point!
- Reader 2:** What is the point? We don't understand these genealogies. To us, they're just an old list of names.
- Reader 1:** Just a list of names?! This is so much more than that!
- Reader 2:** Well then, what are you trying to tell us?
- Reader 1:** If you would let me finish, you would see that there are 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the deportation to Babylon, and 14 from Babylon to Jesus.
- Reader 2:** aaannnd... what does that mean?
- Reader 1:** Fourteen! The number that symbolizes the name of King David! So Jesus is clearly the one who is David's successor on the throne of Israel.
- Reader 2:** If I'm honest, though, I would not have expected the Messiah at the end of that pedigree. There are a few family skeletons in that closet.
- Reader 1:** Well, of course! This list of names isn't just about David. It's also about the promises that God gave to Abraham and Sarah for their descendants. God promised them a blessing that would go far beyond them, a blessing that their family would share with all people.
- Reader 2:** So, this genealogy doesn't make Jesus' birth a closed family gathering?
- Reader 1:** No! There are some surprising people in this list, people who might be called outsiders to the family line, outsiders like us. There are Canaanite and Moabite women, Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth... and Bathsheba was married to a Hittite. If God was at work in these unexpected stories, than surely God was at work in the birth of Jesus. Jesus wasn't who was expected, but he is everything our world is waiting for!
- Reader 2:** Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?

Song

Solemn Stillness, Weary Streets

Voices Together

Light 4th Advent candle

Waiting for love

Scripture Isaiah 9:2-7

Song What child is this & Helpless and Hungry StS 26/HWB 215

Reflection: Not how we expected

By Jeremy Koop

We've been waiting for generations. We've listened to the words of the prophets – “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”.

We've had so many questions about the Messiah; now it seems we're getting answers. The light is shining; we're the generation that gets to see the promises fulfilled. We finally have news. Sure, it comes from shepherds, but still. They heard it directly from angels: the Saviour has come. The Messiah. The Lord.

This is what we've been waiting for, the “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. And more than that, “His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom”. Never-ending rule and deliverance from our oppressors, the end to occupation – finally.

But there is one thing I'm hung up about. The angels apparently didn't exactly say the Messiah had arrived; they said the Saviour had been born. And the shepherds said they saw a baby. So when the prophet said “a child has been born for us,” that was literal? It's an actual baby? But how is a baby going to break the rod of our oppressor?

Great. So now we have to wait. Fine. We'll wait. What's another 30-odd years? I guess that will be enough time for him to grow up and raise an army.

There is going to be an army, right?

If he is going to sit on the throne of David, he is going to conquer like David, right? How else is he going to break the yoke of our burden? How else can you bring freedom?

Wait a minute.

The prophet also called him “a man of sorrows,” “wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities”. So he’s going to suffer, but also be our deliverer?

Just who is this Prince of Peace?

Song	Unexpected and Mysterious	Voices Together
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Light Christ candle

Waiting for Christ

Scripture	Luke 2:1-7
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Song	To us a child of hope is born	HWB 189
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Scripture	Luke 2:8-20
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Song	Joy to the World	HWB 318
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Nothing we expected, Everything we hoped

At Hamilton Mennonite Church, Christmas Eve worship ends with a time of candle lighting. Feel free to adapt some of these words we used, if desired, for your own traditions.

Christ has come!

Even where we least expect it.

Even when we haven't got it all together

Even to us in all of our glories and foibles

Even into our human vulnerability, Christ comes as a light that shines in the darkness, so that even the darkness cannot overcome it.

Come now and celebrate the birth of Jesus, long ago, and now, within us. From the spark of creation to the light of incarnation to the glory of resurrection, we celebrate the coming of the light this night, not always quite as we expected, perhaps, but everything we hope and all that we need.

This is what we've been waiting for. The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Candle Lighting (*singing during candle lighting*)

While Shepherds Watched	HWB 196
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	HWB 201
Away in a manger	HWB 194

Prayer

**Holy One,
Precious child,
Jesus Christ,**

**Tonight you sleep in a manger,
With no language yet but love
We, too, find ourselves speechless
in the glow of your love for us**

Silence

At your feet, Jesus, we wait.

We are ready.

You are with us.

Amen.

Song

Silent Night

HWB 193

Blessing

The songs of angels guide your way,

The tunes of shepherds persuade you of good news,

And the lullaby of a mothering God hold you close

This Christmas, and always.

Amen.

Postlude

Alissa Bender, Lori Guenther Reesor, Jeremy Koop, 2019. Hamilton Mennonite Church
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