

A Celebration of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace

A Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Words of Welcome

Voice 1: Welcome one and all to the birth of our Lord and Savior, come, join the celebration!

Voice 2: Welcome one and all to the birth of our Lord and Savior, come, join the celebration!

Voice 1: Throughout our advent season this year, God has been revealed to us through the promise of Christ's complete in-breaking into the world. Into a world in need of salvation and grace. We have met a God who is overflowing with love. We have experienced God unveiling the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Voice 2: God has revealed to us hope, joy, peace, and love.

Voice 1: We have experienced God's hope, joy, peace, and love throughout advent. Tonight we encounter its source.

Voice 2: This evening we encounter God revealing the source of that hope, joy, peace, and love through the birth of a small child. Through the celebration of life. Through the result of a long awaited relief and salvation for many. We have waiting long in our stress, in violence, in health struggles, in broken relationships and other unnamed burdens.

Voice 1: Tonight we celebrate the in-breaking of a God to offer hope to hopeless world.

Voice 2: The one who comes bearing joy to those who are grieving.

Voice 1: A child sent in peace to a world at war.

Voice 2: A source of love which cannot be ignored.

Voice 1: We are no longer waiting.

Voice 2: We are celebrating!

Voice 1: We are celebrating!

Voice 2: Christ is here!

Voice 1: Jesus is here!

Voice 2: Praise God.

Light the Christ Candle

This evening we welcome the presence of God here among us. We light the Christ candle declaring that Jesus is here, and offering the light to the darkness which surrounds it.

Read fifth verse of Sing the Journey 15 - "Hope is a Candle" while lighting the candle.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

Today, O God,
The soles of your feet
Have touched the earth.
Today,
The back street, the forgotten place
Has been lit up with significance.
Today,
The households of earth
Welcome the King of heaven
For you have come among us,
You are one of us
So may our songs rise to surround your throne
As our knees bend to salute your cradle.
Welcome Lord Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: Hymnal: A Worship Book 191 O Little town of Bethlehem

Reading: Hope for Change to Come (Isaiah 42:1-10)

Voice 1: Long before the birth of Jesus, the world was longing for change.

Voice 2: God heard the need.

Voice 3: And hope was promised.

(Pause)

Voice 1: But here is my servant, the one I uphold;

Voice 3: my chosen, who brings me delight.

Voice 2: I've put my spirit upon him;

Voice 3: he will bring justice to the nations.

Voice 1: He won't cry out or shout aloud
or make his voice heard in public.

Voice 2: He won't break a bruised reed;
he won't extinguish a faint wick,

Voice 3: but he will surely bring justice.

Voice 1: He won't be extinguished or broken

Voice 3: until he has established justice in the land.

Voice 2: The coast-lands await his teaching.

Voice 1: God the Lord says—

Voice 2: the one who created the heavens,

Voice 1: the one who stretched them out,

Voice 2: the one who spread out the earth and its offspring,

Voice 1: the one who gave breath to its people

Voice 2: and life to those who walk on it—

Voice 3: I, the Lord, have called you for a good reason.

Voice 1: I will grasp your hand and guard you,

Voice 2: and give you as a covenant to the people,

Voice 1: as a light to the nations,

Voice 2: to open blind eyes,

Voice 1: to lead the prisoners from prison,

Voice 2: and those who sit in darkness from the dungeon.

Voice 3: I am the Lord;

Voice 1: that is my name;

Voice 2: I don't hand out my glory to others

Voice 1: or my praise to idols.

Voice 2: The things announced in the past

Voice 3: —look—

Voice 1: they've already happened,

Voice 2: but I'm declaring new things.

Voice 1: Before they even appear,

Voice 2: I tell you about them.

Voice 3: Sing to the Lord a new song!

Voice 2: Sing his praise from the ends of the earth!

Voice 1: You who sail the sea and all that fills it,

Voice 2: the coast-lands and their residents.

Voice 3: The Lord is coming

Voice 1: The Lord is coming

Voice 2: The Lord is coming

Prayer and Candle

We welcome the in-breaking of Jesus. Hope for God's justice. Hope drawing us to sing a new song.

Light the candle

As this candle burns,
we celebrate the hope
seen in the continued presence of your church, Lord.

Hope experienced
when we are able to find a place to call home.

Your hope discovered
when immigration documents come through,
and resident status is approved.

The hope experienced
when we see the signs of your coming.

As this candle burns,
we pray for hope.

Hope for your justice.

Hope for more than 50 million refugees
and displaced people worldwide.

We live in hope
that we may all have meaningful work and feeling of purpose.

We live in hope
that as a community we are able to foster a space of welcome and acceptance.

We continue in hope
because we know, Lord, that you are coming. Amen.

Hymn: Hymnal: A Worship Book 178 Come thou long expectant Jesus

Reading: Love for each other along the way (Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-24)

Voice 3: After this particular night, it was all going to change. Hope was coming. Peace was promised. Joy was expected. And love would hold it all together.
God sent his angel Gabriel to a meek home of young girl, named Mary. Mary had found favor in God's eyes, and so she was chosen to receive this assignment.
Gabriel appeared to her and said:

Voice 2: Mary, rejoice, for the Lord is with you. Rejoice, Mary, for you are favored.

Voice 3: Mary had not anticipated this unexpected visitor, and she was confused by his words. What could he want?

Voice 2: Do not be afraid Mary, the Lord is with you. God is honoring you. Do not be afraid Mary. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to this kingdom.

Voice 3: Mary listened to his words ... (*pause*) and then she replied:

Voice 1: How is this possible? I am still a virgin, I am only engaged to Joseph.

Voice 2: The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's son. For nothing is impossible for God.

Voice 3: Mary listened to his words ... (*pause*) and then she replied:

Voice 1: I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.

Voice 3: It did not take long for the unwed mother to begin showing that she was pregnant. When Joseph saw that Mary was pregnant, he did not want to bring shame to her, and so he decided to call off their engagement quietly. He thought for many days about how he would do this. While he was thinking, God sent his angel to Joseph.

Voice 2: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and your role is to name him Jesus. He will save his people from their sins.

Voice 1: Joseph awoke, knowing that his dream was from God. He did not call off their engagement. Instead, he took Mary to be his wife. Both he and Mary knew that nothing was going to be the same again. Hope was coming. Peace was promised. Joy was expected. And love would hold it all together.

Prayer and Candle

We welcome the in-breaking of Jesus. Love which hold our relationships together. Love which holds the world together.

Light the Candle

As this candle burns,
we celebrate the love among our families and friends.
The love experienced
by having a second family away from home.
We live in your love, God,
knowing that we are all in this life together.
We celebrate the places
where we have been accepted
and welcomed for who we are.

As this candle burns,
we pray for love for those who are longing for a home.
Love for those
who are lonely and afraid.
We pray for love
for those who are grieving,
who have been abandoned or betrayed
by those they thought loved them.
We know that your love will hold us all together. Amen.

Choir/Hymn

Reading: Joy fulfilled (Luke 2:1-20)

Voice 2: The time had come.

Voice 3: God had arrived.

Voice 1: About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and went up to Bethlehem.

Voice 2: While they were there, the time came for Mary to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

Voice 3: There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said,

Voice 2: "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

Voice 1: At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Voice 2: Glory to God in the heavenly heights. Peace to all men and women on earth.

Voice 1: As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over.

Voice 3: "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us."

Voice 1: They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

Voice 2: Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Voice 3: The time had come.

Voice 1: God had arrived.

Prayer and Candle

We welcome the in-breaking of Jesus. Joy found in new life. Joy over God's work throughout the world.

Light the Candle

As this candle burns,
 we celebrate the joy seen in new birth.
The birth of Jesus,
 the birth of new family members, new friends.
We rejoice in the reunification of families.
We find joy in having a place to call home.
Joy in you, God, who overcomes the barriers
 of language, ethnicity, and class.

As this candle burns,
 we pray for joy for those who find Christmas to be a hard time.
We pray for joy alongside the burden and pains of life.
May we experience your joy
 when we are sad, afraid, and lonely.
We celebrate you, Jesus.
The time has come, you have arrived. Amen.

Choir/Hymn

Reading: Peace for Jealousy and Rage of the world (Matthew 2:1-5, 7-18)

Voice 2: The world is in need of you, God.

Voice 1: The world is afraid.

Voice 3: We seek your peace, Lord.

Voice 2: We seek your peace.

Voice 3: News about Jesus spread beyond Israel, Magi came from the east in search of the newborn king of the Jews. They saw a star burning in the east and followed it all the way to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they went to the king in Jerusalem, who was Herod.

Voice 1: When Herod heard they were seeking a new king, he was troubled. When Herod was angry, everyone in Jerusalem was troubled as well. He gathered all the chief priests

and advisors and asked them where this Christ child was born. They informed him that the babe was born in Bethlehem.

Voice 3: Herod sent the magi on their way after learning when the child was born. He asked them to come back to him once he is found so that Herod himself could go meet the new king.

Voice 1: The magi followed the star until it came to rest where Jesus was. They were filled with joy. They entered the house and fell to their knees. They opened their treasure chests and presented Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Voice 3: The magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they returned home by another route.

Voice 1: Once they had left, God sent an angel again to Joseph telling them:

Voice 2: Get up! Take the child and Mary and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child. He will try and kill him.

Voice 3: Joseph got up during the night, and fled with Jesus and Mary. They stayed in Egypt until Herod died.

Voice 1: Herod was furious that the magi fooled him. In his anger he sent soldiers out to kill all the children in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger. This fulfilled the word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

Voice 2: A voice was heard in Ramah
Weeping and much grieving
Rachel weeping for her children
And she did not want to be comforted
Because they were no more.

(Long pause)

Voice 3: The world is in need of you, God.

Voice 2: The world is afraid.

Voice 1: We seek your peace, Lord.

Voice 3: We seek your peace.

Prayer and candle

We welcome the in-breaking of Jesus. Peace to war torn communities. Peace within our own hearts.

Light the Candle

As this candle burns,
 we celebrate the peace seen in the work of Mennonite Central Committee
 and other relief and peace organizations.
We celebrate the peace found in stability. In safety.
Thank you for the peace we experience
 in being able to take a breath
 during this busy season of life.

As this candle burns,
 we pray for peace for those who are displaced as Jesus was.
We pray for peace over our homelands.
Peace especially for the increasingly dangerous situation in

We long for peace in
May your peace, Lord, grow,
 and not but stunted or be still born.
We beg for peace
 to ease the fear of terrorism and fear of our neighbors.

We need you, Jesus.
We seek your peace. Amen.

Hymn: Hymnal: A Worship Book 200 Where is this stupendous stranger

Offering:

God of Christmas,
We have found your hope, joy, peace, and love
 as we light these candles tonight.
We are reminded
 that you are the light of the world.
We are reminded

that we still need your light here on earth.
We thank you
for all that we have.
And we offer to you a portion of that.
May this simple act of giving fill empty stomachs,
enrich relationships,
heal the broken,
and bring your peace,
your joy,
your hope,
and your love
to many others this season.
In the name of Jesus,
God who is among us, we pray. Amen.

Meditation

Choir/Hymn

Closing Prayer and Benediction

Sending Hymn: Hymnal: A Worship Book 318 Joy to the world

Postlude

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