

CHRISTMAS EVE ON THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM



Serve & Enrich
Zion United Church
of Christ

Christmas Eve – The Stable: A Place of Care

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

While By My Sheep

Gathering: Light for the Journey

A Message from our Guide—All during the last four Sundays—the Season of Advent—we have been traveling to famous places “On the Way to Bethlehem.” We will take time to retrace our steps to remember all that brought us to this moment, right here, right now, but tonight, we are settling in at Bethlehem, finding our way to the stable, a place of care, to see what God is up to!

Advent Wreath Lighting—We’ve traveled to Bethlehem, but our journey is not over. We must look more closely. We must seek out the place inside, or at the back of a house, where the animals were sleeping. “Were” sleeping... until... the labor sounds of a mother, the encouragement of a father, and finally the cry of a baby. And in that messy, unassuming place, the promise of hope, peace, joy, and love combine in one tightly-swaddled infant. This baby needs everything in that moment, just as Jesus calls for our care of each other, of this world, in our moment. Let us ask ourselves this holy night, “will we open our arms to God?”

Advent Wreath Song

O Little Town of Bethlehem/We’re On Our Way

*O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!*

We’re on our way

We’re on our way

*Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.*

Dream of the day

When hope holds sway

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

With all the earth

the everlasting light;

In all our hearts

the hopes and fears of all the years

We’re on our way

are met in thee tonight.

This is the day.

Advent Wreath Reading—The journey of life requires the light of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love shining out into the world. On our way to Bethlehem, we search for the star that lights the path. The road can be difficult, and the search for home can be elusive. We are a people who look for Good News for

all people. There are milestones—signs and markers—that can guide us to a better day. God’s light goes before us, we are not alone.

*We’re on our way
We’re on our way
Dream of the day
When hope holds sway*

*With all the earth
In all our hearts
We’re on our way
This is the day.*

Opening Prayer and Words of Assurance—Holy and Living God, we pray for more hope, peace, joy, and love in our world. Too often we throw up our hands in frustration, thinking there is little we can do. Show us that much can be done in the most unlikely of places, including a small town like Bethlehem. Call us to offer stability in times that feel difficult. Call us to be “stables of care” so that we can show others that you are present with us, Emmanuel. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Center of Our Lives. **Amen.**

Let this be a marker of assurance that we are moving in a faithful direction: God is with us every step of our way. Jesus is being born into our lives even now. The Spirit is transforming us in this place.

****Hymn**

Joy to the World, 179, with Bell Choir

Prayer—God of Hope, we come to you today longing for your presence in our lives and with all those who suffer—in body, mind, or spirit. We pray this day for... *[continue with prayers for those in your community and around the world who are in need of healing and wholeness]*

God of Joy, we come to you today so deeply grateful for celebrations, triumphs, and even small steps toward the lives we seek and the world we desire. We pray this day for... *[continue with prayers of thanksgiving]*

Holy God of Peace and Love, we know you are near. We know that every step along the way to Bethlehem in this Advent season is a step closer to renewed life in Jesus, the Christ. We know that your Spirit resides within us, growing day by day into the fullness of your Kin-dom. In this moment, we pause in silence, marking your presence with awe and asking you to fill us, guide us, along our journey.

The Lord’s Prayer (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Choir Anthem

Christmas Peace

We Hear God's Word—Luke 2:1-7*Paula Prange*

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ 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 in the guest room.

Hymn*Away in a Manger, 203***We Hear God's Word—Luke 2:8-20***Paula Prange*

⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, ^[b] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹ and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Bell Choir Anthem*What Child Is This?***Meditation***The Stable: A Place of Care***Hymn***In the Bleak Midwinter, 196***We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving**

Invitation—After the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger, they returned to their fields, glorifying and praising God. May we too glorify and praise God for all we have seen and received as we collect tonight’s offering.~

December Benevolence—The Christmas Fund

Offering Song of Reflection

Kaylee Gephart, cello

****Doxology**

To the tune of “Away in a Manger”

*Praise God for these gifts that we offer today
and bless them for good in the world, this we pray.
Praise Jesus, the Christ-Child, our Hope and our Stay,
the Spirit, our Keeper, our Guide on the Way.*

****We Give Thanks**— We offer these gifts to you, Holy God, rejoicing that your grace has appeared in Jesus Christ. May your love for all people, and your zeal for justice and peace, transform this offering into Christ’s presence this Christmas season and always. Amen.~

We Share the Light of Christ

I want to invite us to get our candles ready to be lit, remembering that when the light comes to you, the unlit candle bends toward the lit candle for lighting so we don’t spill wax everywhere. I will share the light down the center aisle, while Karie Hon sings “O Holy Night.” When she is finished, you’re invited to stand if you’re comfortably able as we sing “Silent Night” together. We’ll have the words on the screen or you’re welcome to turn in your hymnals to page 186.

A Message from Our Guide—And now one more message from your guide: We have checked the signs and markers to make sure we are moving in a faithful direction. We have arrived at Bethlehem, knowing that the Light of Christ has come to shine in our deepest night. We are not alone.

Special Music

O Holy Night, Karie Main

Hymn

Silent Night, 186

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, heavenly 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.

Benediction—And now as you go forth from this place into the night, know that all the places you encounter in the world will contain signs and markers of God's work among us. So keep your senses alert, your perception wide, and your heart open to new discoveries along the way. For Christ is being born within you and among you.

Postlude

Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow

Service adapted from www.worshipdesignstudio.com/ontheway unless otherwise indicated. ~From The Abingdon Worship Annual 2024. Copyright © 2023 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.