

God Is with Us

On this holy and hushed day, we stop and remember the story of Jesus' birth—so old and yet new every year. We may recall with fond nostalgia our childhood image of the manger scene: simple, clean, and serene with animals peacefully standing guard.

Yet, we recognize that the manger scene was anything but serene. There were few peaceful moments for Mary and Joseph, with the long journey to Bethlehem for the mandatory census, no room at the inn, the labor pains and all the discomfort of pregnancy, and such an unfamiliar setting for giving birth.

As we embrace the traditional moments of this holy season, we acknowledge that *our* world is not serene. We journey through a worldwide pandemic, social unrest, racial disharmony, and cultural dissension. Phrases such as “uncertain times” and “social distancing” are commonplace in our speech. These experiences have rocked our sense of security and well-being. We grieve the death of loved ones, are saddened by broken relationships, and wonder how much more disruption we will experience.

Let us wholeheartedly embrace the words of the angel on that holy night so long ago: “Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord” (vv. 10-11, *CEB*).

Jesus is Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.” No matter what disruptions we experience, no matter what fears hold us back, God is faithfully with us every step of the way.

Let us sing with the angels: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (v. 14).

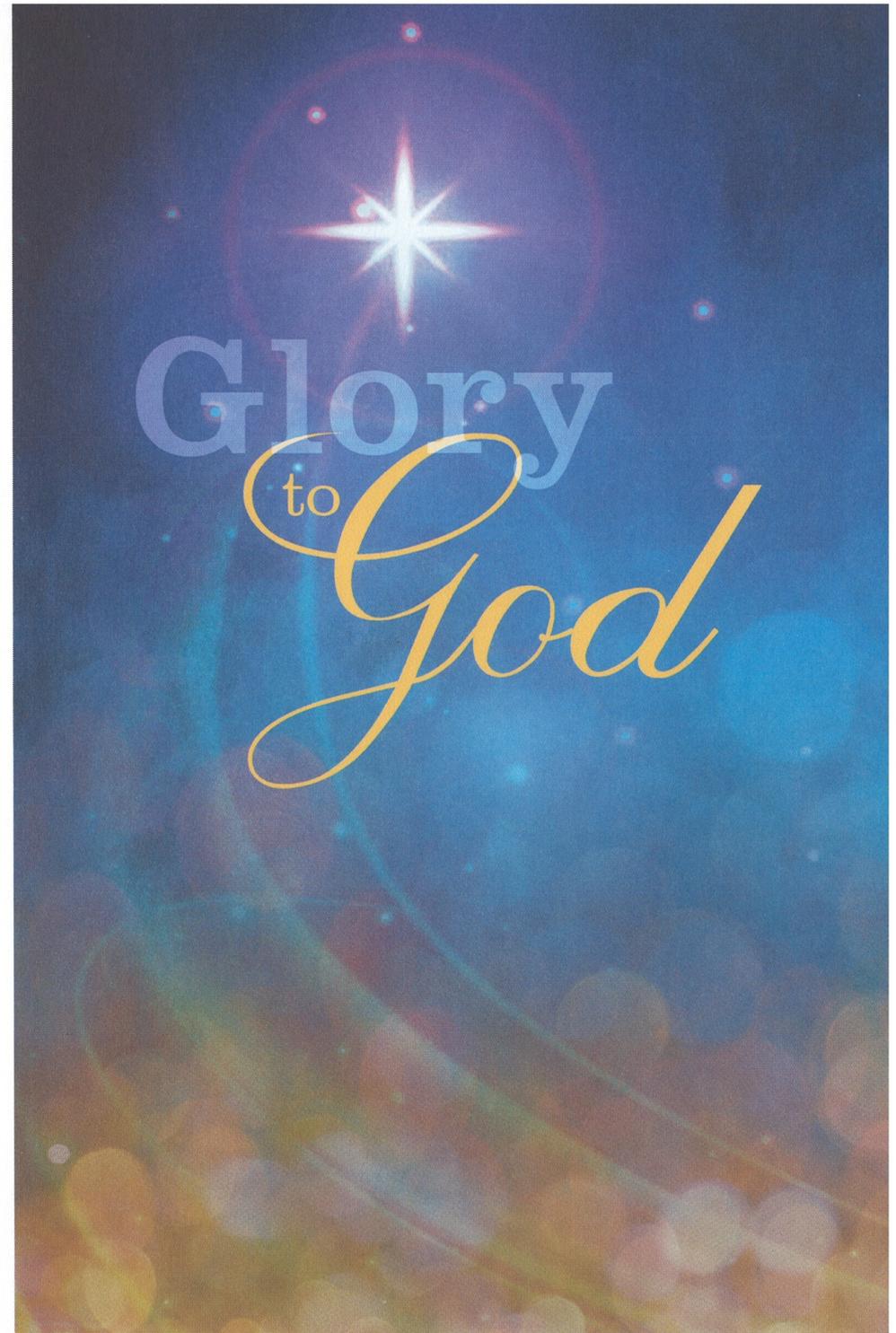
—Donna McKee Rhodes
Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

Text for today: “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 Savior, 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 favors!’” (Luke 2:8-14, *NRSV*). **Bible readings for today:** Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20) (14).

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
Hagerstown, Maryland

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

7:00 PM

December 24, 2020
Christmas Eve

WELCOME Pastor Twyla Rowe

PRELUDE Come and Adore Him" (McDonald)

CALL TO WORSHIP Eunice Plank

O come let us worship and lift our hearts . . . Not because the world is good and last week was awesome, but because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the God of the whole Earth.

O come let us worship and raise our hands . . . Not because our lives are all sweetness and light, but because even those who walk in darkness can see a great light, the Bright and Morning Star

O come let us worship and bow down . . . Not because God gives us what we want, but because God gives us what we need – the holy child Jesus, God's Unspeakable Gift.

HYMN #212 "O come, all ye faithful"

[Verse 1]

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. O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,

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

[Verse 2]

True God of true God, Light of light eternal, our lowly nature he hath not
abhorred; Son of the Father begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,

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

[Verse 3]

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
glory to God, glory in the highest. O come, let us adore him, O come, let us
adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

[Verse 4]

Yea, Lord we greet Thee, born this happy morning; Jesus to thee be all glory
giv'n, Word of the Father now in flesh appearing; O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

OPENING PRAYER

Eunice Plank

O God of love, you have brought us together tonight and
blessed us with your very self. Open our eyes to the light of Christ
which glows in the darkness of a world engulfed in apathy, pain
and loss; a world separated from you.

Speak to us now that we may hear the good news of your salva-
tion. bring us into the wonder of your presence. Fill us with that
light and carry it out with us into our lives. Amen.

HYMN #197

"Angels we have heard on high"

[Verse 1]

Angels we have on heard high,
singing sweetly through the night,
and the mountains in reply echoing their brave delight.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.

[Verse 2]

Shepherds, why this Jubilee? Why these songs of happy cheer?

What great brightness did you see?

What glad tidings did you hear?

Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.

[Verse 3]

Come to Bethlehem to see him whose birth the angels sing.

Come, adore on bended knee,

Christ the Lord the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.

[Verse 4]

See him in a manger laid whom the angels praise above.

Mary, Joseph, lend your aid while we raise our hearts in love.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria, in excelsis Deo.

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LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Kees Family

Tonight is the night for which we have all been waiting. Our Advent wreath will now be completed by the lighting of our Christ candle. "For unto us a child is given, unto us a Savior is born, and the order of the world will be upon his shoulders." With the birth of Jesus, our lives will be forever changed. We will be transformed by his model and message. We light this candle to represent that Christ is truly the center of our lives.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" (Wiltse)
The Brethren Bells

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

Eunice Plank

We, who have known God's gracious hospitality, are invited to share together in ministry to the homeless, the forgotten, the weary, the lost of our world. Our offerings of gratitude remind us of God's claim on us and on all that we possess. Let us make a generous response, in thanksgiving for all we have received.

This year's Christmas Eve offering is designated to be given to the REACH homeless shelter. You can give your offering by mailing it or dropping it off at the church or by using PayPal on the HCOB webpage. If you want your offering to go to REACH... PLEASE write, "REACH" on the memo line of your check or on the PayPal form; otherwise your offering will go into the general fund.

Let us pray. Thank you, God, for all the gifts you have given us. Most of all, we are grateful for the human child who became the embodiment of your Love. With our offerings, we worship the babe of Bethlehem and recommit ourselves as disciples of the man of Nazareth whom he grew up to be. We also pray for the recipients of this offering being ministered to at REACH. May the ministry and mission of this church be true to our crucified and risen Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE CHORUS " On the Road to Bethlehem"

(Audrey Snyder)

continued

A MOMENT TO BECOME LIKE CHILDREN

HYMN #194

"Away in a Manger"

[Verse 1]

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head. The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

[Verse 2]

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes. I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

[Verse 3]

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Eunice Plank

Luke 1: 26-38: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and

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this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Matthew 1:18-21: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

SKIT

"Love Letters"

Actors: Mallory and Adam Rudy

MEDITATION

CHRISTMAS EVE CHORUS "Star-Child" (Murray & Young)

PRAYER REFLECTION "The Season for Miracles"

If we were to list the miracles of Christmas, we'd probably talk about virgin births angels, perhaps and stars that light the sky but perhaps there's another miracle: one of Mary saying 'yes' when God asked her to believe and Joseph saying 'yes' when God asked him to trust. They had to change everything about their lives and the birth of the Christ-child wasn't possible until they did. What does it mean for you to say 'yes' to this story? To believe that it might be possible for the darkness to be transformed to light and for peace to come in the world?

Those who know the darkest of the world know the fragility

of light; we hold our breath as the candles flicker we know they don't always last. the birth of Jesus doesn't make everything right, but it shows us that the only way the darkness can be beaten is to say 'yes' to the birth of light. In the silence, we pray for those we love and miss today, and we pray for a broken world... (Let us pray.)

Leader: God, this is the season for miracles, and we pray for one today. Where there is sorrow,

People: we pray for your grace to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is despair,

People: we pray for your hope to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is hatred,

People: we pray for your forgiveness to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is war,

People: we pray for your love to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is confusion,

People: we pray for your peace to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is injustice,

People: we pray for your courage to light the darkness.

Leader: Where there is fear

People: we pray for your joy to light the darkness.

Leader: It is the season for miracles and we pray for one today: Come, Lord Jesus, may your light come into our world. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC "When Love was Born" (Chris Tomlin)
Don Rowe

READING THE CHRISTMAS STORY John Graber

Luke 2:1-20: 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

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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.

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 Savior, 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 favors!"

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.

HYMN #193

"Silent Night"

Live Nativity: Tori, Ryan and Dalton Beachley

[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!*

[Verse 2]

*Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from Heaven afar' heav'nly Hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born, Christ, the Savior, is born.*

[Verse 3]

*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.*

[Verse 4]

*Silent Night, Holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light.
With the angels let us sing "Alleluia" to our King.
"Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.*

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *"Jesus, Jesus, Rest Your Head"* (Moklebust)
Brethren Bells

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\*Please rise — in body or spirit — as an act of worship  
Thank you for joining us in worship today.

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*"Love Letters" written by Joanne Miller
Prayer Reflection, "The Season for Miracles" written by Cheryl Lawrie.*

*Our thanks to Eunice Plank, the Kees family, the Brethren Bells,
Mallory & Adam Rudy, John Graber, the Christmas Eve Chorus, and
Tori, Ryan and Dalton Beachley for enhancing our worship tonight.*

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