

WELCOME: Welcome to the Hagerstown Church of the Brethren Christmas Eve Service. I am Pastor Twyla Rowe and on behalf of the Hagerstown Congregation I want to welcome our guests tonight who have come to the church and those of you who are joining us through Facebook live.

Those who are assisting me in worship tonight are Burton Young, our pianist and organist, our temple choir, Chris Stockslager, Jared Kees, Ed Beachley, Ann Paltou and her grandson, Caleb and Loyal Vanderveer as our scripture readers; Andrew, Jennifer and Sam Ripple lighting the Advent candle; Children from our Wednesday night Youth Club who will be singing for us, and my husband Don, whom I will join to sing two numbers tonight. Thank you to everyone for helping lead us in worship.

We gather tonight in the quiet of this space to worship Almighty God as we celebrate the birth of His one and only Son, a gift to us. Through the hearing of the story we find in God's word and singing the lovely Christmas carols, we draw close to the manger where Jesus lay, and gaze upon the face of the one who brings to us God's love, hope, peace, grace and joy.

Come, and listen, as though it is the first time, and allow the mysterious loving presence of God, bring new life to your soul.

PRELUDE

***SCRIPTURE READING:** Isaiah 9:2-7 (Chris Stockslager)

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. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

***HYMN#172:** "O Come, O Come, Immanuel" (verses 1,3,6)

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Throughout this season we have lived, waited, and remembered the hope, peace, joy, and love of God found in Christ. Tonight, we gather together and light the candle in honor of the Christ Child. With the birth of Christ, salvation has drawn near. The God who ordered the chaos of the universe has come down into the chaos of our world. The Word which was with God at the beginning came down and lived with us. While we were yet living in the valley of the shadow of death, the light of new life burst forth. We light this candle for Christ.

All: On this night, we remember God has come in the Christ Child.

DUET: "When Love Was Born"

OPENING PRAYER: 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 salvation. Bring us into the wonder of your presence. Fill us with that light and carry it out with us into our lives. Amen.

HYMN# 212: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-38 (Jared Kees)

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 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.

ANTHEM: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 1:18-25 (Ed Beachley)

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.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

YOUTH CLUB CHILDREN: “Away in a Manger” & “The First Noel”

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:1-7 (Ann Platou)

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.

HYMN#191: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:8-14 (Caleb)

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!”

***HYMN#197:** “Angels We Have Heard on High”

CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING

Invitation to the Offering: Come now and kneel before the Christ child. Bring all that you are and all that you have. Offer your gifts in wonder and surprise and awe. Offer your gifts in joy and delight. (The ushers will now receive our offerings.)

Offertory

Offering Prayer: There are so many things to be thankful for tonight, God. Receive these tokens of our gratitude for your love incarnate in the babe of Bethlehem. May they become God-with-us for all the world. May they breathe magic back into a world that needs a sense of wonder and joy. Amen.

(This offering will go towards the Good Samaritan fund which is used to help people in need.)

HYMN#201: *“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”*

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:15-20 (Loyal Vanderveer)

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.

DUET: *“A Christmas Hallelujah”*

STORY AND MEDITATION: *“The Gold Wrapping Paper”* (Pastor Twyla0)

THE GOLD WRAPPING PAPER - An Inspiring Christmas Story

Once upon a time, there was a man who worked very hard just to keep food on the table for his family. This particular year a few days before Christmas, he punished his little five-year-old daughter after learning that she had used up the family's only roll of expensive gold wrapping paper.

As money was tight, he became even more upset when on Christmas Eve he saw that the child had used all of the expensive gold paper to decorate one shoebox she had put under the Christmas tree. He also was concerned about where she had gotten the money to buy what was in the shoebox.

Nevertheless, the next morning the little girl, filled with excitement, brought the gift box to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy!"

As he opened the box, the father was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, now regretting how he had punished her.

But when he opened the shoebox, he found it was empty and again his anger flared. "Don't you know, young lady," he said harshly, "when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside the package!"

The little girl looked up at him with sad tears rolling from her eyes and whispered: "Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into it until it was all full."

The father was crushed. He fell on his knees and put his arms around his precious little girl. He begged her to forgive him for his unnecessary anger.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later. It is told that the father kept this little gold box by his bed for all the years of his life. Whenever he was discouraged or faced difficult problems, he would open the box, take out an imaginary kiss, and remember the love of this beautiful child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us has been given an invisible golden box filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, family, friends and God. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.

The love we long for and cherish when it is found comes from God. It's not manufactured in some factory. You can't buy it. It can't be faked. Because the love we need most in our lives is God. Yes, God is love, the bible tells us this in 1 John 4:8. So we don't know love, we don't experience love, if we don't know God. And this little babe, whose birth we remember and celebrate tonight, shows us God, and shows us how much God loves us.

Even after all these years since his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus pours out his love on us. If you need a reminder about his amazing love, open your golden box, your bible and read the promises he made to love us and to be with us always. Look into the box, the box of your life and see the wonders of his love in creation around you, experience his love as people love on you through words, silence, hugs and other actions. This is God's love, all for you, not just at Christmas, but every day, with every breath you take, during the good times, and the bad times of life. There is no more precious gift than this. Come to the manger, and know God's love. Amen.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Eternal God, Ruler of all worlds and Shepherd of the stars, your glory is revealed in vastness and in power, yet your greatest name is Love.

This is the time we remember your gentleness, hidden in a mother's hope. This is the time we believe again that love is stronger than fear, that peace is stronger than hate, that darkness will never conquer the light.

In this season of God-with-Us, we offer our gratitude and we make bold promises to believe that we are graced with your presence, for we are gathered in the name of love. Amen.

***HYMN#193:** *"Silent Night, Holy Night"*

***BENEDICTION**

One: We rejoice in God's steadfast presence in our lives and in God's unique presence in the life of Jesus of Nazareth—born of Mary, growing through childhood into an adult ministry, in all his life manifesting the peace, love, and justice of God; his voice undimmed by the centuries with his call and his promise as clear to us as it was to his disciples so long ago.

All: Come to us, Lord Jesus, be born in us this night, in our hearts, our minds, our lives. May the light of your life be kindled in us, and lead us to the shining truth, of God with us, God for us, God in us. Amen.

POSTLUDE