

Christmas Eve: Our Longing for God's Incarnational Love



December 24, 2020

The ministers, staff and board of Kenilworth Union Church miss you dearly. We are grateful for the many ways we have been able to gather in person and virtually these many many months, and we long to be with you shoulder to shoulder as a gathered congregation. We trust that day draws near. We hope that wherever you are this Christmas, these candles and brief prayer service can bring your family close to God. Maybe you'll use it around the Christmas dinner table, or by your Christmas tree, or even via video conference with your loved ones across the miles.

To lead this at-home candlelight service, look through the script and decide ahead of time who will read which parts, and who will help start the singing of the hymns (and sing boldly!). Begin with a lit pillar candle, if you have one, but improvise as your situation dictates. **We encourage you to worship with us on Christmas Eve at 4 p.m. during our live-stream service.** www.kuc.org

(Begin with one pillar candle lit)

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Silent night, holy night,

All: Behold the wonder, born in light.

One: Born a child, yet a king,

All: A promise fulfilled, the angels sing.

One: Sing of love, sing of grace,

All: God's presence has entered this holy place.

READ LUKE 2 (READ CONFIDENTLY BY ONE PERSON OR SPLIT BETWEEN A FEW PEOPLE)

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. 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,

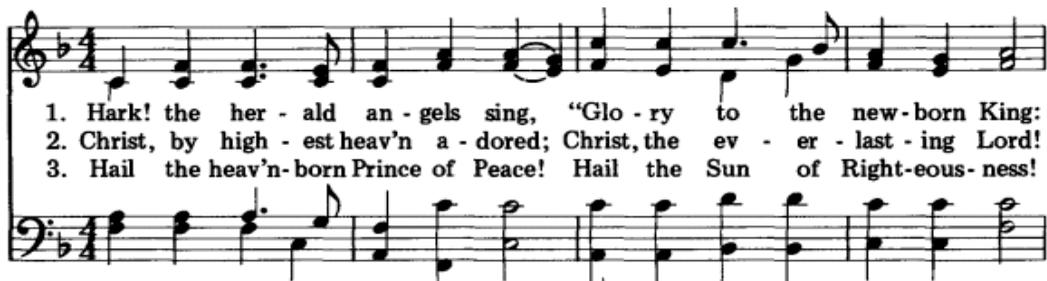
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

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.

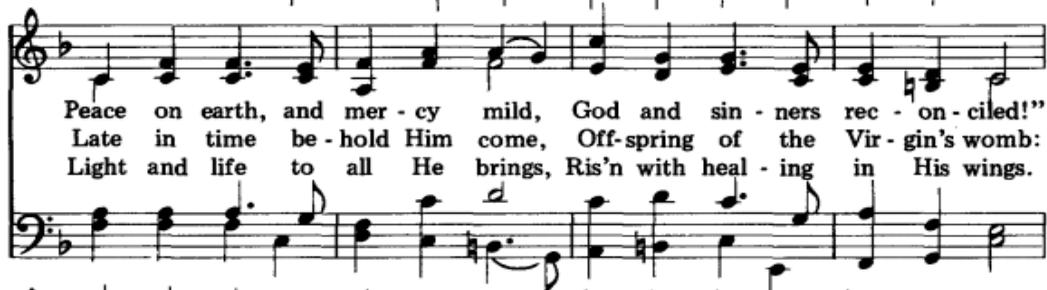
When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

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.

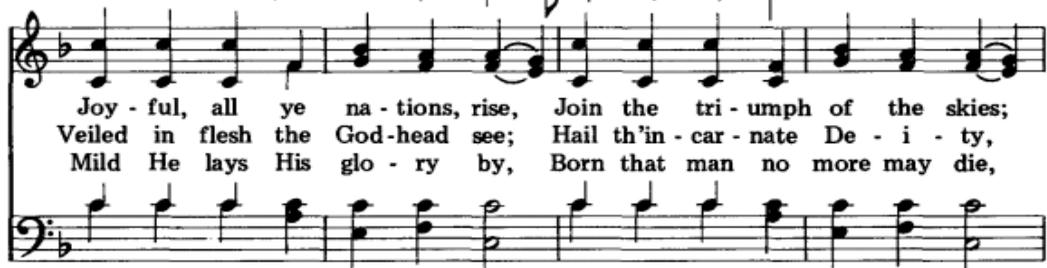
ALL SING HARK THE HAROLD ANGELS SING



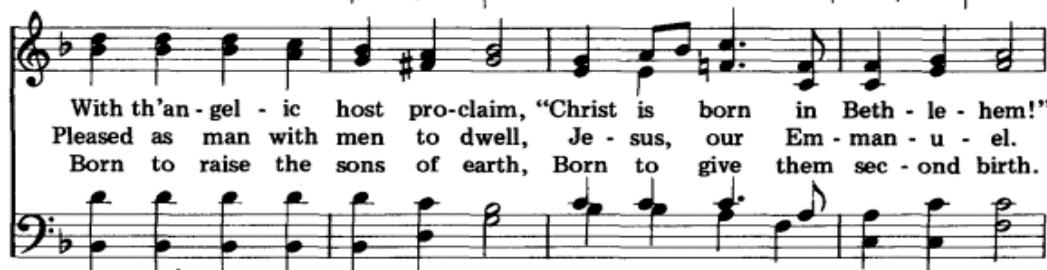
1. Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new-born King:
2. Christ, by high - est heav'n a - dored; Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord!
3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Right-eous-ness!



Peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
Late in time be - hold Him come, Off-spring of the Vir - gin's womb:
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with heal - ing in His wings.



Joy - ful, all ye na - tions, rise, Join the tri - umph of the skies;
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; Hail th'in - car - nate De - i - ty,
Mild He lays His glo - ry by, Born that man no more may die,



With th'an - gel - ic host pro-claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el.
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them sec - ond birth.



Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new-born King." A-men.

PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS (READ BY ONE PERSON)

Let us pray:

God of light in the darkness,
God of shepherds in their flocks by night,
God of angels we have heard on high,
God of silent nights and holy nights,
God of this, our Christmas Eve, gather us in your light.

God, for Jesus – there was no room in the inn.
For Mary, she worried about her baby born in a manger.
For Joseph, he did not know what the future would bring.

Help us to remember the joy and the struggle of Christmas,
so that we might truly know the power of your light that shines in the darkness.

Your breath and voice brought order to the chaos,
and so the holy mess of the manger was
no match for your calming presence.

It was in a stable that you joined us in the flesh,
bringing peace on earth and mercy mild.

And now, we long for that same peace
to pause at the threshold of our hearts
and the doorsteps of our home.

May it be so, O God, on this, our Holy Night.
In your holy name we pray, Amen.

READ MATTHEW 2 (READ CONFIDENTLY BY ONE PERSON OR SPLIT BETWEEN A FEW PEOPLE)

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying,

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.”

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him,

“In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, ‘And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.’”

Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said,

“Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

READ JOHN, CHAPTER 1 (WITH ONE PERSON LEADING, AND ALL JOINING IN THE MIDDLE)

One: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Word was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

**All: The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.**

One: And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

(before singing Silent Night *Light Your Candles off the pillar candle*)

ALL SING SILENT NIGHT



1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All is calm,
2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Shep - herds quake
3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God,



all is bright Round yon Vir - gin Moth - er and Child,
at the sight; Glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
love's pure light Ra - diant beams from thy ho - ly face,



Ho - ly In - fant so ten - der and mild, Sleep in heav - en - ly
Heav'n - ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia; Christ, the Sav - ior, is
With the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at thy



peace, Sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
birth, Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth.

A PRAYER FOR US AND THE WORLD ON CHRISTMAS EVE, BY KATIE SNIPES LANCASTER

(READ BY ONE PERSON OR SPLIT BETWEEN A FEW PEOPLE, *remember to slow down and allow this prayer to resonate with that something-sacred beyond and within us that we encounter so poignantly on Christmas Eve*)

Let us pray: Holy God, enter in. For tonight is the meeting place of heaven and earth - an entryway into your presence. Your love has come down, and here in the midst of such, such tremendous hope we must either collapse under the sheer weight of your presence, or simply surrender to the mystery of your unbounded mercy directed toward us.

For you unveil again the searing truth that you do not seek what the world seeks, but instead, in the depths of human experience, you humbly meet us in out of the way places, where no one thought to look. Look upon us now, O God. Let us never get our fill of this miracle - this manger scene - this place of incarnational hope.

Steal into our hearts, O Christ Child. Let your peace dwell here. For peace unfurls from within each of us, a small light shining in the darkness. Let such light shine within our families, whether in joy or in sorrow, whether in sickness or in health, whether in riches or in poverty, whether in chaos or in peace. As we recognize all that is challenging and impossibly hard this year, hear our prayers of hope, for a way through.

Let forgiveness hang between us like a merciful web of love. And be with those who we love - whether here beside us, or far away. Hold us, too, O God, as we remember those whose lives have passed before our eyes, those long loves who we have - with great longing - handed over to your tender care.

Let your presence spread across the nations, O Christ Child. Let healing begin across the globe. Let tender care for one another be our guiding light. Let there be a way out of no way.

Let peace begin in every place across this world where illness and sorrow takes hold.

Give peace-makers strength

Give courage to those who have the power to abandon the world's unending violence,

Give leaders wisdom to broker a way forward toward lasting true healing.

Protect the most vulnerable, O God,

Be with them as you were with Mary, the lowly one lifted up, blessed and beloved.

On this silent night, let us gather our voices praying,

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and always. Amen.

JOY TO THE WORLD (SING THIS ONE WITH JOY!)

1 Joy to the world! the Lord is come: let earth re - ceive her
 2 Joy to the earth! the Sav - ior reigns: let all their songs em -
 3 No more let sin and sor - row grow nor thorns in - fest the
 4 He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the na - tions

King, Let ev - ery heart pre - pare him room, and
 ploy, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains re -
 ground; he comes to make his bless - ings flow far
 prove the glo - ries of his right - eous - ness and

heaven and na - ture sing, and heaven and na - ture
 peat the sound - ing joy, re - peat the sound - ing
 as the curse is found, far as the curse is
 won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his
 and heaven and na - ture sing,

sing, and heaven, and heaven and na - ture sing.
 joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 found, far as, far as the curse is found.
 love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.

heaven and na - ture sing,

A CHRISTMAS BLESSING (READ BY ONE PERSON)

This Christmas I wish for you - *light* to crumple up the darkness.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *love* to pull us closer to one another.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *peace* the same the angels sang.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *starlight* to follow on your way home.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *promise* to keep hope alive for you.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *God* newly born and in the flesh.
 This Christmas I wish for you - *Jesus Christ* born this night, light of the world.
 Amen.