

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH



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Ministers: The people of St. Andrew's

Pastor: Rev.Cheryl Bolton

Ministry of Music: Brian and Lynn Sloan/Merna Edison

December 24th, 2022

Please consider wearing a mask while singing

Christmas Eve Service*

**Please feel free to remain seated throughout the service.*

Proclamation

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Special Music - O Holy Night - Lindsay IpYam

Lighting of the Christ Candle - Hatch Family

Voice 1: "Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." (*Luke 2:10*)

Voice 2: What gifts does Jesus bring to the new world?

**All: Jesus brings hope for the future,
peace like a river,
joy everlasting, and
love for all.**

Voice 2:

Christmas is the beginning of this new world, a better world,
that we are boldly invited to create together
as followers of the Christ child.

(Christ candle is lit.)

Amen.

Hymn - Hope is a Star - 7 VU

Opening Prayer

O Christ, alive in the world,
alive in our hearts – hear our prayer!
May this moment be the moment that changes everything
May your birth be the birth that turns our lives upside down,
that calls us to hope,
that baptizes us with love.
Holy child of Bethlehem,
Holy Child of our hearts,
This is our prayer.
In Your name, we pray.
Amen

The First Noel

Luke 1: 26-56

A Gift for the Christ Child, From Mary and Joseph

I can only imagine what Mary and Joseph must have been feeling when they were told they were going to have a baby. The joy, the confusion, the fear.

I think expectant parents feel those things every time a new baby is going to be born, but with Jesus even more so. Mary and Joseph were not married when Mary got pregnant and they lived in a time when that sort of thing was frowned upon even more than it is now and yet they went through with the marriage and with having the baby anyway because God told them to, a great act of faith.

Our scriptures don't tell us much about either of Jesus' parents. Of Joseph we hear that he was a righteous man and of Mary we hear that she is favoured by God. But that is about all. We know little of their life stories, who they were and what they may have been like. But we know of their faith. And this is the gift that they most gave to their son on the night of his birth.

And tonight, we represent the faith of these two people with a prayer shawl. During the knitting of a prayer shawl the person making it focuses his or her thoughts and hearts on prayers for the one who will receive the gift. The prayers may be general if it is not known who it will be given to, or specific but either way the very fabric of the shawl is infused with prayers of hope, of peace, of joy, of love, and of faith. And as the person who receives it wraps it around their shoulders, they know that they are wrapped also in God's love and in the prayers of their faith community, their church family.

Surely Mary and Joseph must have prayed for their new son. Surely they must have sought solace in their faith for the hard times that came to them. And so tonight, we remember the gift of faith and of prayer that Joseph and Mary offered the Christ Child as he lay sleeping in the manger, as he grew in wisdom and in stature, as he died and rose again.

Thank God for the gifts of faith and prayer.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Read Luke 2: 1-20

A Gift for the Christ Child, From the Angels and the Shepherds

Can you imagine hearing all of those angels? Can you imagine seeing the shepherds running down the road as they left the stable, so eager to tell everyone they met about this wonderful little baby? It paints quite the picture for the imagination, doesn't it?

And that was their greatest gift for the Christ Child, the gift they gave the night of his birth. And so our gift from the Shepherds and the Angels today is a microphone. Though their voices were probably loud enough that they did not need one, this gift represents their gifts of excitement and proclamation.

The angels were God's messengers and they brought the good news to the shepherds. It was the angels that calmed the shepherd's fears and told them the good tidings of great joy. With voices ringing and light streaming all around them to banish all darkness, the angels proclaimed the good news that Jesus Christ is born.

And then the shepherds followed suit. When the angels left them, they went to Bethlehem to find the Baby Jesus because of the great joy in the good news that the angels had shared. And when they had found him, they quickly left again so that they could go and tell everyone they met about this special baby, this gift from God.

In their joy and excitement, we see again the hope and joy this child brings. In their glad announcements, we hear again of the peace and love that can be found in Christ Jesus, in a stable in Bethlehem, and in our own hearts here and around the world.

Thank God for the gifts of excitement and proclamation!

Hymn - Hark the Herald Angels Sing VU48

Matthew 2: 1-12

A Gift for the Christ Child, From the Wisemen

What strange gifts to give a baby. I'm not so sure these wise men were very wise. Didn't they know that a toy or diapers would have been

better? Certainly, they would have been more kid friendly! But instead they gave gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And they did it for a reason. These men who came from so far away to bow down at the cradle of a newborn king, brought gifts that represented who Jesus was and would be, even when others could not yet see it. They gave the gift of recognition.

They brought gold, for Jesus was a newborn king. Then, as now, gold was a precious commodity and often adorned those of royal blood. In presenting this child with the gold they brought, the magi proclaimed him King.

They brought frankincense, for Jesus was God incarnate, God come to earth as a human being. Frankincense was the spice used in the Temple, burned by the priests as an aroma pleasing to God as they were told to do in the Law of Moses. In presenting this child with frankincense, the magi proclaimed that he was divine.

They brought myrrh, for Jesus was also human. Myrrh is a bitter spice often used in anointing and preparing someone for burial. Even as they celebrated his birth, this gift was given so that those gathered would know that Jesus would live a human life, he would grow up and he would die and be buried as will we all. He would know our joys and our sorrows. He would be fully human. In presenting this child with myrrh, the magi proclaimed his humanity.

And so in these gifts, the magi offered precious commodities with a far greater meaning than many would know. They offered the gift of recognition as they saw the Christ Child for who he was and who he would become.

Thank God for the gift of recognition.

Hymn - What Child is This? VU74

Matthew 22: 34-41

A Gift for the Christ Child, From Us

The last line of our offering hymn always makes me think. After naming all the things we would give if we were someone else, the writer comes to the conclusion that all we have to give is our own hearts. And so tonight, that is the final gift for the Christ Child that we will open. The gift of our hearts.

This gift is asked for and given again and again throughout the Bible. In many ways, it is what the whole Bible is about, God reaches out to humanity and humanity in return gives our whole beings, our hearts, minds, souls to the God who created us, redeems us and sustains us.

And so tonight, as we have heard again the story of Jesus 'birth, as we have gathered 'round the Holy Babe and seen the gifts given him, the gifts of faith and prayer, the gifts of excitement and proclamation, the gift of recognition, we add to them ourselves.

Tonight, as we witness again the miracle of God come as a child, of a child born a king, of the coming of our Saviour we commit ourselves to him again. We wonder what it is that we must do to follow his commands, and we find that he has already answered.

Jesus said, love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and your neighbour as yourself. In the giving of love, to God and others, we give Jesus the only thing he asks for. When we can offer nothing else, we hear his words again reminding us that he does not ask for gifts of earthly value, nor even the offerings due him as God, he asks only that we would love with our whole beings.

Thank God for the gift of our hearts, which we might offer to the Christ Child.

Hymn - Joy to the World VU59

John 1: 1-14

A Gift for Humanity, From the Christ Child

All evening we've been talking about the gifts that were given to the Christ Child through the Christmas story. We've had the gifts of faith and prayers, of excitement and proclamation, the gift of recognition as the Magi offered gifts representing Jesus' kingship, divinity and humanity and we've even had the gift of offering all of ourselves to God.

But even with all these great gifts, Jesus was the one who gave the greatest gift of all!

But what do these candles have to do with it? Surely Jesus could have come up with a better gift idea, right? Maybe a new video game or a new car?

But these candles represent something much better. This is our Advent wreath and through it we remember the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that Jesus gave to humanity. These are not always easy things to find, but in Christ they have been given to us.

The candles also connect us to the last scripture that was read for us. The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the light of the world. When Isaiah speaks of the Messiah he says that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. And so tonight these candles represent that light which shines in the darkness and is not overcome or put out by that darkness. This is the gift that the Christ Child gave to humanity, light to make the darkness bright.

There will always be times of trial and tribulation, time when it seems that all around us is darkness and there is no hope, but if we put our faith in God who created light at the beginning of time, who manifested light in the birth of a child at Christmas, who walks with us still, holding a candle to guide our way, that darkness will seem a little brighter. This is the good news of Christmas, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son to it that all people might walk in the light, the hope, the peace, the joy and the love of God.

Thank God for the gift of Jesus Christ.

Hymn - Go Tell it on the Mountain VU43

Pastoral Prayer

We have waited for a long time
for your hope, your joy, your love
to shine in the darkness of this world, Almighty God.
Even now, in our gathering here, we await you.
In our hearts, we still hope that your light will blaze forth,
banishing the shadows of this world
and guiding all the people back to you.

Yet you did not come into this world
in a show of power and glory.
You did not shine forth for all of creation to behold.
A tiny spark –
a newborn baby,
visible to parents and curious animals.
A host of angels –
away from the populated areas,
singing to migrant workers.
A sparkling star –
guiding foreigners to see what neighbours could not.

Open our hearts, merciful God,
to the sparks of your presence still in this world.
Open our eyes,
that we might behold your presence in the least likely of places,
and among the least likely of people.

God with us,
kindle your spark within us,
that together we may shine forth your light,
we might banish the shadows of this world,
we might be the continuation of the Christmas miracle:
Emmanuel is in this world,
God is with us, now and evermore.

Illumine our hearts, gracious God,
that we might speak anew the words your Son will teach us...
Let us sing together the Lord's Prayer

Lord's Prayer (sung) - 959 VU

Benediction

The child is born!
Our God has come among us!
Let the whole earth rejoice!
Let us leave the manger knowing that we have seen the Lord,
and glorifying and praising God
for all that we have heard and seen.

Go forth, with full confidence and joy
that you have seen the Messiah!

Closing Hymn - Silent Night (Turn your candles on but please stay in your seats) VU67



Upcoming Events

December 25-No Service today

December 26,27-Office Closed

December 28,29,30-Office Open

January 1st-New Years Day service