

## Home Service for Christmas Eve

### Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

*Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness flees as the light grows in power and beauty.*

### Call to Worship:

He's coming! He's coming! The Savior of the World is coming!  
Let us prepare our hearts to greet him! He comes to each one of us, healing and restoring our lives! Praise be to God for God's mighty gift to us.  
O Come, Prince of Peace, bring your light to us!  
We are ready to receive you in our lives! AMEN.

### Opening Prayer:

Holy God, come into this holy night with stars to light our way to the cradle of peace. Come with angels to sing us to a deep joy. Come to this moment and open our hearts so we may hear the familiar story new and fresh. Surprise us and remind us that the child in the manger is Immanuel -- God with us, now and always.  
Amen.

### Prayer of Confession:

Lord, we are so excited. Christmas Eve is here. We are impatient to hear the whole story. Slow us down again, Lord. As we hear Mary say "Yes!" to God's good news, help us to remember that God continually calls us to be those who will bear the good news to those in need. Forgive us when we forget to do that. Heal our wounds and bind up our spirits. Enable us to go into your world offering our lives, our gifts, our talents, for your glory. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

### Words of Assurance

*God's love and faithfulness have been at work in you. You are healed and forgiven. Rejoice in God's love. AMEN.*

## **Lighting the Advent Candles:**

Throughout this season we have lived, waited, and remembered the hope, peace, joy, and love of God found in Christ. (Light Candles) Tonight we gather together and light candles 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. (light the Christ Candle in the middle)

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

Read Psalm 96:

- <sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.
- <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.
- <sup>6</sup> Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- <sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering and come into his courts.
- <sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in the splendor of his<sup>[a]</sup> holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.
- <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.
- <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
- <sup>12</sup> Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

<sup>13</sup> Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,  
he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Prayers of the People:

Lord, we can't quite imagine what it must have been like for Mary, to hear God's request and to respond, unconditionally with "Yes!" We have a tendency to put conditions on everything. We want to know what we have to do, how long this will take, what's in it for us, what are the projected outcomes. Forgive us for our faithlessness, Lord. Slow us down, and cause us to take time to really consider the wonderful ways you have always worked in our lives. As we have come before you with concerns on our hearts for our families, friends, and world, remind us that your presence is with us and your healing love comforts and restores us. Open our hearts and our ears to the cries of those in need. Let us use our talents and resources to help others. Give us courage, energy, and enthusiasm as we work for you in this world. We ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

## Lord's Prayer

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 forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

<sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

<sup>5</sup> Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while <sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. <sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." <sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## Message

It is Christmas Eve, but it doesn't feel like the normal Christmas Eve for instead of rounding everyone up from our family gathering and heading to the church for services, we are watching or reading the service in our homes with very few if any people around us. Every family has Christmas customs they follow every year and for many feel that Christmas will not be the same without them. But we are living in the year of 2020 which will be remembered as the year of the pandemic. The year that people had to wear masks when in proximity of other human beings. The year when so many grandparents have not been able to hold their grandchildren. The year when as many people as died on 9-11 have been dying every day. The year when students had to go to school online. The year when we worshiped from home, because it was dangerous to worship in the sanctuary. And when we were able to worship in church we had to wear masks, are not able to sing and kept social distance from each other. No coffee an's or sharing fellowship that included hugs. Some had to visit their love ones in the nursing home through a window. It is also a time when every day kind of seems the same. Those are the days we are still living in, with hope and prayers that things will return to normal in the near future.

The one thing that has not changed is the fact today is Christmas Eve and it is time for us to worship our ever present Lord and Savior. Maybe it is time to set aside the customs for hopefully just this year and get back to the basics. Getting back to the Christmas basics is simple. Celebrate your Christmas as the shepherds did; just listen.

The night of that first Christmas must have seemed like any other night to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem. All the sheep had been gathered in and there was nothing left to do except to keep watch, visit with one another, and stay warm. That quiet routine was shattered when an angel of the Lord burst onto the scene with the bright light of God's glory. Unmasked and unexpected, that's how the angel arrived, just as God continues to enter into hearts today.

The shepherds were terrified! The shepherds must have feared the worst when they saw God's messenger standing before them. Had he come to announce that it was Judgment Day? If so, were they ready to be judged by the righteous God?

But that was not the reason for the angel. "Do not be afraid." The angel said. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11).

Just by listening to this message the attitude of the shepherds changed. Their fear was replaced with joy. The Savior had been born in Bethlehem just as the Old Testament prophets said he would be. By listening and taking to heart this message the shepherds learned that the Bible could be trusted. They also learned that this child was not just human; he was God as he was called "the Lord." But most of all the shepherds were overjoyed because this Savior had not just come to save a select group of people. The angel said that this news was for "all people." No, there had been no tree, no treats, and no turkey but the shepherds were happy. What made that first Christmas such a merry one? Listening to the angel's message.

In the same way our Christmas will be merry if we celebrate as the shepherds did – by listening and taking to heart the angel's message. Jesus has come to bring peace to all. He did that by dying on the cross and forgiving all of our sins; sins of unfaithfulness, selfishness, laziness, anything we do, think, or say to show that we care about ourselves more than we care about God and others.

God's forgiveness plan is like no other. God does not forgive only after we have reformed ourselves. Unasked and unexpected God intervened in history to forgive us and give us the promise of eternal life in heaven through faith in Jesus: God's forgiveness gives us the reason to change our life.

But the shepherds weren't just content to hear the message were they? They wanted to learn more about this Savior and so without delay they went to Bethlehem. By the time that night was over, Luke chapter two tells us that they "returned to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." The shepherds were filled with joy. Do you realize that you don't need to be at a Christmas party to experience Christmas joy?

We should not be content just to hear about the Savior but we should want to hurry to Bethlehem and see the Christ-child. Don't be satisfied just to make note of Jesus once a year in the Christmas carols or in the Christmas Eve service but come and

learn about him daily through God's word. God's plan of salvation is awesome and has many facets to it. The more you listen to it and learn about it the more joy it brings into your life and will prepare you to face any kind of difficulty you may have to face.

While there is nothing wrong with looking forward to our Christmas customs of opening presents or sharing Christmas dinner with loved ones hopefully next year, remember those customs can never replace the real reason for our joy at Christmas; the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin. Don't let the loss of customs this year crowd out the basics. This year celebrate like the shepherds by listening to the angel's message. Amen.

Benediction:

*May the light that surrounds our Lord's birthplace illumine your spirit and warm your heart. May you be spared, at least for a few hours, the static of the world and enjoy a clear reception of the angelic song. And may the love of God revealed in the holy Child move you to feel and show love for others, especially for any you may find difficult to love. Amen.*