

“The Light Shines in the Darkness”
A Service for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day

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A Christmas service to bring light to our hearts, our lives. This service was written by Rev. Dr. Nancy Cocks, a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. She has given the church a gift through her creativity and offered it for the use of others. We give thanks for her generosity and kindness.

As we join together in worship may you experience the hope, peace, joy, and love that is the message of the season. Let us worship and praise God for the saving grace offered in the Christ Child.

The Christmas Story for the Cosmos According to John

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

Then the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen God’s glory, full of grace and truth.

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

This light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath – *If you have an advent wreath, light all of the candles.*

Carol

O Come, all ye Faithful

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1. Oh come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant;
oh come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him,
born the King of angels:

2. God of God,
Light of light,
born unto Mary, the virgin blest,
very God,
begotten, not created:

Refrain

Refrain

Oh come, let us adore him;
oh come, let us adore him;
oh come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

5. Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing:

Refrain

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First Monologue

“The lamp speaks”

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

A lamp shines into the darkness, a pinpoint of light in a dark night.

We know how our eyes will find even the tiniest spark of light when everything else around us is dark.

For light *is* stronger than the darkness.

At night, when a lamp is burning, open the door on the darkness and see what happens.

The lamp light shines out and takes over a bit of the darkness.

Never does a piece of the darkness fall into a lighted room and take away some of the light.

Even a simple lamp enjoys the power of light.

Its flame allows the light to shine where we need it— into the darkest corners of house or stable.

A single lamp can show us the pathway on the darkest night, so no one stumbles while carrying a precious gift.

A lamp shining in the doorway welcomes us in from our wandering.

Its warmth pushes away our worries just like its light pushes away the dark.

The Christmas Story According to Luke begins

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.

Carol

O little town of Bethlehem

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| <p>1. O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.</p> | <p>4. O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
oh come to us, abide with us,
our Lord, Emmanuel.</p> |
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Words: Public Domain

The First Monologue continues ***“The lamp speaks again”***

But what is a lamp without hands to strike the match and light the wick?

A lamp cannot light itself.

What is a lamp without hands to hold it up so its light shines into those dark corners?

A lamp cannot lift itself high.

What is a lamp without hands to open the door
and let the lamplight shine out into the darkness?

A lamp cannot open the door.

A lamp needs a life to look into the darkness
and see who needs light to brighten their path.

A lamp needs a life to light the wick and set the light shining.

A lamp needs a life to open the door and hold it up high,
a life that will welcome a stranger into the light, into the warmth,
into a heart and a hearth.

Prayer

O God, shine your light into our lives on this dark night. Warm our hearts so that we will open our doors to your love. May ours be the lives that shine light into the dark corners of your world. May ours be the lives that welcome you to be born again in our midst this Christmas. Amen.

The Second Monologue ***“The manger speaks”***

What is a manger?

Just a few pieces of wood, nailed together, to serve a good purpose.

That’s all a manger is.

Just a set of wooden arms, strong enough to hold a new bundle of hay each day.

Still, a manger protects its bed of hay, keeps it clean and dry, keeps the mice away.

A manger stands guard to offer its food, its source of life,
to animals who rely on its steady footing.

That manger always stands ready for whoever needs its nourishing cargo.

That manger will open its wooden arms to welcome the hungry lives which gather round it,
lives that trust the manger holds what they need for the future.

The Christmas Story According to Luke Continues - The Birth of Jesus

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.

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a 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.
2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.
3. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Words: Public Domain

The Second Monologue continues “The manger speaks again”

But how can a manger become a cradle for more than a bundle of hay?
Can it be a cradle without hands to prepare the bed and welcome more precious cargo?
Can a manger become a cradle without hands to lay a newborn to rest,
hands which settle and sooth and tend new life?
Can a manger be a cradle without hands, tiny and perfect, reaching up,
reaching out for attention, for warmth, for love?

A cradle needs a life to smooth the bed and smooth the forehead.
A cradle needs a life to rock the baby and sing the soothing lullaby.
A cradle needs a life to shelter, resting its tiny head,
trusting itself to the manger’s wooden arms and the mother’s willing arms.

Prayer

O God, may our lives cradle your love this Christmas as we smile on the baby Jesus. May our love become a shelter for those who turn to us for protection. May our arms offer the welcome every stranger needs, in the name of Jesus who reaches out to us from the manger. Amen.

The Third Monologue “The staff speaks”

Not much goes into a staff.
It’s cut from a tree and carved to be useful out there in the wild.
A staff is just a walking stick, sturdy and dependable,
something to lean on if you’re weary.
A staff gives that extra footing when the path is slippery,
or your knee is stiff and sore, feeling the weather on a cold, damp night.

For a shepherd, a staff offers a bit of support along a rocky path.
 That staff gives an occasional prod to remind a stubborn sheep
 to move along to next green pasture.
 And a staff with a bit of a curve comes in handy
 when a wayward lamb gets stuck in a crevice or a muddy patch in the field.

The Christmas Story According to Luke Continues - The Shepherds and the Angels

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 Saviour, 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 God favours!”
 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.

Carol *While shepherds watched their flocks* 138

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| <p>1. While shepherds watched
 their flocks by night,
 all seated on the ground,
 the angel of the Lord came down,
 and glory shone around.</p> <p>3. 'To you, in David's town, this day
 is born of David's line
 a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
 and this shall be the sign:</p> | <p>2. 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
 had seized their troubled mind;
 'Glad tidings of great joy I bring
 to you, all human kind.</p> <p>4. 'The heavenly babe you there shall find
 to human view displayed,
 all meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
 and in a manger laid.'</p> <p>5. Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
 appeared a shining throng
 of angels praising God, who thus
 addressed their joyful song:</p> |
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Words: Public Domain

The Third Monologue continues* *“The staff speaks again”

But what is a staff without hands to grip it firmly?
 What is a staff without hands to place it wisely for sure support?
 What is a staff without hands to prod that sheep gently through the winding valley?
 Hands to hook the crook around the silly lamb that got stuck and pull it to safety?

A staff needs a life to test its strength.
A staff needs a life to lean on its dependability.
A staff needs a life who knows the sheep and sees how they go astray.
A staff needs a life unafraid of the danger,
a life to kneel down and rescue the lamb, pulling it free, guiding it on the way.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we have come to find you this Christmas. Be our staff to lean on when we lose our footing. Be our guide when we cannot find our way. Pull us free from danger. Saviour, rescue us with the light of your love. Be our strength now and in the year ahead, so that we may walk with your courage and compassion, come what may. Amen.

Acknowledgment of the Offering

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. Often the very best gifts are given quietly, even anonymously, and yet such gifts have the power to change lives. God's gift in the Christ child arrived in a small town, a humble stable, to a couple no one invited in—and still that gift changes lives. Our gifts to God this Christmas share in that miracle.

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The Fourth Monologue* *"A gift speaks"

Christmas is a time of gift giving.
Think of all the gifts wrapped up and waiting under your tree.
Each gift is a piece of love chosen for someone special.
Each gift is a piece of hope waiting to change someone's life.
A gift is that little piece of joy given to make someone smile.

The Christmas Story According to Matthew

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

1. What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary.
2. Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary.
5. So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high;
the virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
the babe, the son of Mary.

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The Fourth Monologue continues "A gift speaks again"

Yet what is a gift without hands to present it?

What is a gift without hands to unwrap it?

What is a gift without hands to hold it up in wonder, to cherish it, to play with it,
to touch the love it bears and make that love your own?

A gift needs a life to give it.

A gift needs a life to receive it.

A gift needs a life to unwrap the love inside and share that love outside,
with all who wonder how love can give so much.

The Christ Child is a life born for us, born with us, to offer us God's gift.

The Christ Child is a gift, with love for each one of us so wonderful
that we can share that love with others and never have the love run out.

Christ is the gift God gives tonight.

Christ is the gift we receive tonight.

Unwrap this gift for yourself and share this gift of love with everyone whose life touches yours.

(If you wish dim the lights and sing with only the candles glowing as you sing Silent Night)

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| <p>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.</p> | <p>2. Silent night! holy night!
 Shepherds quake at the sight:
 glories stream from heaven afar,
 heavenly hosts sing 'Hallelujah,
 Christ, the Saviour is born!
 Christ, the Saviour is born!'</p> |
| <p>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.</p> | |

Words: Public Domain

Prayers of Thanks and Request

God of the starry heavens and the good old earth,
 Eternal God, God with us,
 You have come among us in the figure of a baby, a newborn reaching out to us,
 to bring a smile to our lips and hope to our hearts.

Thank you for your tenderness with which you touch our lives.

This Christmas as we remember the baby lying in a manger, we pray for peace...
 Peace in all the places where there is anger or war or fear...
 Peace in all the hearts that know sorrow or stress...
 We pray for people who will not sleep safely tonight because of conflict in their lives...

Cradle all these people and places in your love
 so the world may sleep in heavenly peace this night.

This Christmas as we remember the mother Mary rocking her baby,
 we pray for all children born this Christmas season...
 Watch over mothers and fathers and grandparents,
 hoping for the best for their newborns...

Help us create communities where every child is valued and every family has enough...
 May families rejoice because Christ the Saviour is born for us,
 for each of us and for all of us.

This Christmas as we remember the father Joseph protecting his little one,
 we pray for all those watching over the helpless and the hopeless this season.
 Be with all those who must work this holiday
 to keep the world safe and to care for those in need...
 Be with those who are sick or sad or lonely

So that each one will know your tender touch.

God of the starry heavens and the good old earth,
Eternal God, God with us,

This Christmas as we remember the shepherds coming in haste
and the wise men coming in wonder,
open our hearts to reach out to the Christ Child,
to receive the gift you offer us in Jesus,
even as we offer our love to you in his name.

Bless us in the year ahead so we can share your love with all the lives that touch ours.

May our hearts sing with the Christmas angels,
Glory to you, O God, and on earth, peace for all who wonder at your love. Amen

Carol

Joy to the World

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1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
let earth receive its King;
let every heart prepare him room
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.
2. Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns:
let us our songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.
4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

Words: Public Domain

Blessing

To you is born this day a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.
May the love of the Christ Child embrace you.
The joy of the Christ Child fill your heart.
May the peace of the Christ Child give you rest,
and the hope of the Christ Child guide you into the year ahead. Amen