

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

December 24, 2021 – Christmas Eve

Words of Welcome

It's Christmas Eve and our waiting is almost over.

A few more hours and the celebration of the birth of Jesus arrives with Christmas Day.

Love is born in the flesh. God with us.

Welcome to worship. May the peace of Christ be with you.

Waiting and Longing

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
and will call him Immanuel

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

“I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”

—Isaiah 7:14; 11:1–3; 22:22

Hymn

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel

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| 1. Oh come, Oh come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lowly exile here,
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel. | 2. Oh come, Oh come, thou Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height,
in ancient times didst give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel. |
| 3. Oh come, thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel. | 4. Oh come, Oh Branch of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel. |

5. Oh come, thou Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

6. Oh come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and deaths dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

7. Oh come, desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart, one mind;
bid envy, strife and discord cease
and be thyself our source of peace.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

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Opening Prayer – Lighting of the Advent Candles

In anticipation we gather.

With expectation we wait.

We wait with Advent hope. *[The first candle is lit.]*

We gather to watch for the coming of the good news
into our world and into our lives.

We wait to see the fullness of God's vision.

We wait in Advent peace. *[The second candle is lit.]*

O God, open the doors to our hearts,
that this year we may have room for the birth of Jesus.

**O God, as we marvel over all that you are doing,
overwhelm us with so much wonder
that words of praise spring forth from our lips!**

We wait with Advent joy! *[The third candle is lit].*

In this time of waiting, let true worship begin in our hearts.

Let our praises rise up to the heavens!

Let our celebrations spread new hope over a tired world!

**Let us gather together all our dreams and lives
to worship our God!**

We wait in Advent love. Amen. *[The fourth candle is lit.]*

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1. It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold;
"To all the earth good-will and peace,
from heaven's all-gracious King";
the world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.
2. Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.
3. But with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong,
but we, through din of war, hear not
the love-song which they bring.
Oh hush the noise, oh still the strife
and hear the angels sing.
4. And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
Oh rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing.
5. For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when, with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold;
when peace shall over all the earth,
God's promised splendours fling,
and all the world take up the song,
which now the angels sing.

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Scripture Reading and Lighting of the Christ Candle

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register. 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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.

—adapted from John 1:1, 4–5, 9, 14; Luke 2:1–7; Matthew 1:22–23; 1 Timothy 1:15

The Christ candle is lit.

Hymn

What child is this

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| <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>3. 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.</p> | |

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Scripture Reading

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

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.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in

the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

—Luke 2:8–20

Message Love's Arrival

Love is born in the flesh.

The Word of God incarnate.

God with us.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

These are all phrases you have heard said in this service already. They seem like code, but each is saying that in Jesus, God has come to us, as one of us. And why in the world would God feel the need to become human? What God goes to that length for a mere mortal? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – pillars of the Jewish faith, people of God. The God of our faith. The Christian faith is one where God's love for those he has created is so overflowing that God chose to become human flesh and blood that we might be able to recognize God. That in word, deed, and story, we could know how God walks in the world and trust that God knows our pain, trouble, frail love and commitment, our longing and desire, through Christ Jesus' eyes and lived experience.

The Gospels are full with accounts of Jesus, and throughout the over 2000 years since Jesus' death, these words continue to speak truth in love to those who would take the time to read them, hear them, learn, and seek out God. God sent Jesus so that the chasm between God and people, God and each of us, would be bridged. Jesus, come as a tiny babe into a family of little means, was love's arrival. God's love arrived in the world in a new way through the birth of Jesus. This love would grow, learn, and teach...heal, experience betrayal and harm, grief and friendship, as well as supply the need of many and change the world.

In a time when the Christian faith is under attack or deemed irrelevant, we forget the changes that have come about in the world because of the faith of Christians who have fought to bring about justice and equity for all. Are Christians notorious for also bringing hurt into the world, there is no doubt, but Jesus' example was one of provision not of domination. Jesus spent his time with a ragtag group of people who did not have power or prestige and yet their lives were forever changed as they carried their lived experience and understanding of the man into new places and situations.

Jesus healed the children of the powerless and the powerful as love does not differentiate, love sees people as people, vulnerable and hurting. Love sees the hungry and the destitute, the sick and the heart-broken, the angry and the lost, and says, "You are worthy, you are valuable, you are mine." This love incarnate, born in flesh, born to a young mom, away from her home and the safety of the women who she had known would care for her in this time of giving birth, and born to a man who desired to provide for his family, this love is God's love come to us in Jesus.

This is what we celebrate when we speak about Christmas. We celebrate love's arrival into the human condition. God's presence and example. God's peace, hope, joy and love all wrapped up in a baby, Jesus.

As you unwrap presents may you ponder how each gift represents love...God's love for us. Again this year, this is Christmas, Love has arrived!

Hymn

O little town of Bethlehem

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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.
2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.
3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings born of heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.
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.

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Prayers of the People

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

Tonight, 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.

Tonight, 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 each of us and for all of us.

Tonight, as we remember the father Joseph protecting his little one,
we pray for all those watching over the helpless and the hopeless...
Be with all those who must work tonight
to keep the world safe and to care for those in need....
Be with those who are sick or sad or lonely
so each one will know your comforting presence...

God of the starry heavens and the good old earth, Eternal God, God with us,
Tonight, 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 him, 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.
And now in one voice we pray the prayer that Jesus taught.

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. 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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As we are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Candle Lighting

Hymn

Silent Night

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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.

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!"

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.

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Benediction

Go into the night, *Luke 2:20*
glorifying and praising God for all you have seen
and heard.

May Christ be your light,
this night and forevermore.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Volume 1 © 2012 Westminster John Knox Press. P23.

Response

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, and wonders of his love.

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Postlude

