

Call to Worship - Hush

Sssh.
Can you hear it?
An expectant silence,
a hushed anticipation,
as if the very galaxy
is holding its breath.
There are some truths
even the stars know,
like darkness,
like loneliness
and how the night
can be a living thing.
And how , long ago,
the night waited in wonder
along with the darkness
and the loneliness,
for the sound of a baby's cry,
for the miraculous
to come down
to the earth mundane.

— written by Lucinda Hynett, in *Alive Now*. Posted on the Liturgylink website.
[re:Worship: Christmas \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re:Worship: Christmas (re-worship.blogspot.com))

Lighting the Candle Love

Hymn

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> | |

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of mystery and mercy,
you stir in our hearts and bring us joy.
You stir in our minds and bring us wisdom.
You stir in the world and bring hope for the future.
You came as a little child, stirring up praise.
So we come to adore you with the angels;
to bow with the shepherds; to kneel in wonder with the magi;
to ponder your mystery with Joseph; to love and cherish you with Mary;
We come with humble hearts full of joy because you came to us first In Jesus,
whom we hold on our hearts this night.

**God of grace and truth,
In Christ you offer us the gift of yourself,
but we are attracted to presents under the tree.
You came to us in flesh and blood,
but we fail to see you in the humans right beside us.
You shine in the world, but we dwell on the darkness in the daily news.
Forgive us. Renew our hope and our trust in you.**

**God of mystery and manger, as we listen to the story of your love born for us
in a child of flesh and blood, help us grasp that love with the trust of a baby
grasping a parent's finger, the trust that all will be well. Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Christmas Eve/Christmas Day. December 24/25, 2023. Year B.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news of Christmas.
Today God reveals to us the wonders of divine love.

**For unto us a Child is born;
unto us a Son is given.
His name shall be called Wonderful,
Counselor,
the Mighty God,
the Everlasting Father,
the Prince of Peace.**

— Rev. Nancy J, on her blog, [wonderings through life and other such nonsense](http://wonderings-through-life-and-other-such-nonsense.re-worship.blogspot.com).
[re:Worship: Christmas \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re-worship.blogspot.com)

Scripture Readings

❖ Luke 2:1-20

The Birth of Jesus

¹⁻⁵ About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As

a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

⁶⁻⁷ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

An Event for Everyone

⁸⁻¹² There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

¹³⁻¹⁴ At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

❖ **Matthew 2:1-12**

Scholars from the East

¹⁻² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

³⁻⁴ When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

⁵⁻⁶ They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

⁷⁻⁸ Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in your worship.”

⁹⁻¹⁰ Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

¹² In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message The Sights of Christmas

When I was a child, my little community in Northern Alberta was a place of lights at Christmas time. It seemed to me that nearly every house in the town had some sort of light display. As I recall it, every Christmas Eve after church Mom and Dad would take a longer route back home as we drove up and down the streets of town to see the Christmas light displays. It was something I always looked forward to.

Though through the years not as many homes seemed to be decorated like it may have once been. However, you can still find websites and Facebook pages to help find the best decorated homes in the area. We also have the Parade of Lights in Thunder Bay as well as the Christmas Train which comes all lit up as it makes a stop here. We are drawn to light.

In biblical times light was scarce. While now we have street lights to guide us and light our paths, there was no electricity at that time. In fact, light bulbs are a pretty new invention when looking through the lens of time. It was not until 1879 that Thomas Edison filed his patent for an electric lamp with a carbon filament. That was only 144 years ago. Of course, there were lamps of different kinds that helped people light up the darkness, but nothing compares to what we now know and take for granted each day.

But when one thinks about the sight of angels lighting up a night sky or a star bright enough to capture the attention of those who are attentive to these things in a time when street lights didn’t obscure or already light up the darkness, then one can begin to understand why the angels and the star were images that have significance. Though there is much more to it than that. So, let’s step back a little to the beginning and look at the many scenes and images that play through the Christmas story.

To begin, there was the sight of the travelers. The trek Mary and Joseph made was about 68 miles, so about 109km. There they are, a young woman and a man making their way to Bethlehem. Mary, full term in her pregnancy. I can't begin to imagine how difficult a journey that would have been for her and then Joseph trying to care for her needs. On top of all this, both knowing that the child Mary carried had a special significance for God and the world. The weight of not only the child, but the emotional weight of the responsibility that have been given to them would both have felt heavy.

Once they finally got to Bethlehem, they were looking for a place to stay, but with so many other travelers already having arrived in the town, it seems that there simply was no place for them. Yet, someone takes pity on them and says, here, stay in the stable. At least it is some protection from the elements.

After the long journey, even a stable must have been a welcome sight. Even more welcome may have been the sight of animals as it meant the body heat from the large and older animals would have provided some warmth, along with hay that would keep Mary and Joseph from laying directly on the ground, creating some insulation as well.

Then the event happens, Mary goes into labour. The sight of this must have been frightening and exhilarating all at the same time. A young woman in labour, protected and surrounded by animals. Think of the reaction of the animals. They may have sensed that something was going on. Would they be stirring or quiet, somehow sensing that calm was needed? And of course, birthing itself is not a picture-perfect image. It certainly is not the image of calm that we seem to only relate to Christmas story. There is a bodily messiness that comes with giving birth to a child.

Then a small manger, the place for feeding the animals, becomes a place for the baby to sleep. This truly may have been when that scene of calm and reassurance became a reality. Mother and child are safe, resting, healthy. In a time when birthing didn't have the sterility and safe guards that we have with our medical care, to come through that process was itself a feat.

Then somewhere outside of town, shepherds, the lowest on the rank of importance in society, are out bedding down sheep, making sure that the animals in their care are also safe from harm. Well, they get the fright of their lives! Out in that darkness, likely with only a fire to keep them warm, the sky is filled with a choir of angels. The sight was more than they could take in. How would any one of us react to such a thing? Fear, wondering if one was out of their mind? But they heard what they heard and they saw what they saw.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

The angels...we imagine them in their bright yet terrifying light. Angels that brought news of a cosmic shift in how God was going to operate in the world, coming to those least likely to expect to hear such things and yet just the people to do so. Once the shepherds get past all the fear and amazement, they decide to check it out. They don't analyze it, they experience it. They see angels, and then go to see if what they have been told has any kernel of truth.

Upon their arrival, they found the family, they see all of it, the place of the birth, the mother, the father, the child. The news has been confirmed and they celebrate. They are filled with joy. For the shepherds, seeing was believing.

Then they told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed. The shepherds became the first witnesses to God come in the flesh to live as a human being. Throughout Jesus' ministry it was the poor, sick, lonely, and hurting that had his ear. He had time for them. Jesus came for everyone, but for those who suffered and are suffering, Jesus is present in a particular way. God came to earth and so knows our struggles, lived the human struggle, understands what it means to feel physical, emotional, and mental pain.

The story of sightings continues to be the story of Jesus birth as the Magi, wise men, scholars, however you want to name them, see a star so bright that it piques their interest. So much so that they travel, following it to a far-off place. They, like the shepherds are unlikely witnesses to the birth of a Messiah, born to a Jewish couple. They were outsiders, yet God in this story shows us that all are included in this saving event. It was not for a chosen few, it was for the world.

The men bring gifts. Gold symbolized that they were in the presence of one who was a king. An odd thing given the circumstances. The gift of incense symbolized Jesus' presence as God, and the myrrh symbolized the future suffering that would come upon Jesus. Somehow these men understood something that others could not, just as Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds understood the significance of what was taking place that dark night.

As we go out into the night of this evening, may we too pay attention to the light that is Christ that comes into a dark world. One cannot help but think that today in those very places that Jesus spent time, there is a great darkness, there is crying out in terror and fear. So much uncertainty, so much pain and loss. The lights do not shine brightly in Bethlehem today, nor in the Gaza strip. As much as we are able to go from here to places of warmth and safety, that was not the story of Christmas then and it is not the story for millions around the world this night.

The Christmas story is a scene of uncertainty and of hope. It is a story of light and life. Everything about this Christmas story revolves around the baby Jesus. Jesus brought light and life into the world. It was bundled up in the story of an infant and since the death of Jesus we have been trusted with God's message of hope, peace, joy, and love. We are the ones called to live in the world each day, with the light of Christ within us, healing

from our own wounds, being transformed into people who bring healing and wholeness to others through our words and our actions. And we do this in the power and light of the Holy Spirit working within us.

God did not give up on the world, but sent his only Son that we might know the great love God has for us. Let us not give up on the world or each other. May the strings of Christmas lights outside homes, and on Christmas trees be reminders of the light within you and others that is Christ. May the sight of tree toppers that are angels and stars remind you of the journey of faith each of us has the opportunity to take, just as the shepherds and magi did so long ago.

This story of the birth of Christ, continues to be celebrated because it is a story of lives transformed, of a world that needs to be saved from itself and God's provision. May the sights of Christmas then and now remind us of God's deep love and concern for you and me and for the world. Amen.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Invitation to the offering

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 of new life.

Should you wish to support this ministry and/or 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>

Closing Prayer

Child of light, Saviour of all,
We thank you that you come to us,
seeking to enter our lives.
Child of Mary, help us to welcome you.

We thank you that you come to us,
bringing love into our aching world.
Child of Joseph, may we love you as you love us
and share that love with those in our lives.

We thank you that you come to us
no matter who we are, where we are or what we do.
Child of the Shepherds, help us to realize you are always near.

We thank you that you come to us,
showing us a different way of living.

Child of the magi, may we follow you
no matter how hard or narrow the way becomes.

God of all mercy and tenderness,
bless our gatherings this Christmastide
and fill each heart with love and joy.

Child of the angels,
may we sing your praise this night/day
and live to honour you in the year ahead,
knowing you are always near.
Amen.

Hymn

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.

Words: public domain

Benediction

Tonight we celebrate the birth of Jesus.
the most precious of Christmas gifts.
Through the power of the Holy Spirit may you keep the hope,
peace, joy and love of this season in your heart,
now and throughout the coming year.
Praise be to Emmanuel – God is with us, now and forevermore.