

Christmas Eve Service 2011

Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren
Glen Arm, MD

Video

“Little Drummer Boy”

(start at 6:59pm)

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/index.php?ct=store.details&pid=V00147>

Welcome

We may not carry a drum, but we each have come with a gift to share, a hope to bear, hearts with which to care, and a bit of God’s glory to wear. Welcome! Welcome, friends and family. Welcome, neighbors and strangers. Welcome to all you who have traveled from far places, and welcome to you whose journey here took only minutes. This is our home together for the next hour.

I invite you to worship. This is, however, not a production. It is a participation, a celebration in which we all have a part to play. For we have **not** been drawn here by the One who is greater than we are in order to be entertained. I invite you into the work of God’s people, something that does not end when we turn off the lights and exit this place.

Before we leave and return to our own homes, however, I invite you also - after this service - to stay and share some refreshments in the fellowship hall, speaking and living out our “Merry Christmas” with one another. On the table there will be a container in which you might respond to the good news of these moments with a special monetary gift of your own, a Christmas Eve offering. I challenge you to be generous.

This evening, we will read scriptures, sing songs, enjoy a little play, light candles, and experience once again the drama of the incarnation. Speaking of candles, I trust you picked up yours as you entered. If not, you may wish to go back during a hymn and pick one up. Parents of little ones, please be vigilant during the candle-lighting. This time is exciting enough without involving the volunteer firefighters up the hill.

Now, to begin this worship, let us read together in unison the words of the prophet Isaiah as they are projected upon the screen.

Unison Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

[as we read, 4 persons process down the center aisle, carrying lit candles. They stand 2 on either side of the worship center, not obscuring the view of the Advent wreath. They wait until the scripture reaches verse 6. Then, they take turns lighting the four outer candles as we read - pausing over each title, one per .ppt slide overhead - Wonderful Counselor (front candle), Mighty God (left candle), Everlasting Father (right candle), Prince of Peace (back candle). They back away to the sides as we finish the reading.]

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to

us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

(the 4 candlelighters remain on either side of the advent wreath through the prayer)

Opening Prayer

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, we open ourselves to you this hour. In the stillness of this moment, we listen for your message on the wings of your messengers, be they angel or human. Speak through the tradition with which we have surrounded this night, gathering here before or amid our personal and family celebrations. Speak beyond our traditions as well, that we may leave hungering and thirsting for more, even as we go our way well nourished.

The story around which we gather this evening is familiar – perhaps too familiar. Therefore, surprise each of us with something we may not have heard before, or to which we may not have paid much attention. Encourage us to listen deeply, for your word so often comes to us in fragile moments and unexpected ways.

Bless all who are gathered here – the child who struggles to keep still, as well as the parent who tries to make that happen. Bless those who wonder if they forgot some important Christmas chore, as well as those who anticipate what will happen later tonight or tomorrow. Bless those who are skeptical of all this Christmas cheer, as well as those for whom this is the most central moment of all.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, we “hearken,” we listen to hear your herald angels sing. Amen.

(after the prayer, 1 of the 4 candlelighters lights the center Christ candle in the wreath as the congregation sings (below), “Glory to the newborn King!” The 4 then return to their seats.)

Hymn (vs. 1 & 3) “Hark! The herald angels sing” 201

1. Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies,
with the angelic host proclaim "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Refrain: Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

3. Hail, the heaven-born Prince of peace! Hail, the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth. ...*(Refrain)*

A Christmas play (by Tessa Haynes)

(<http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/orders/2011/christmasplay.pdf>)

Hymn (vs. 1) “Angels we have heard on high” 197

1. Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Scripture Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Hymn (vs. 1-2) “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming” 211

1. Lo, how a Rose ever blooming from tender stem has sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming as saints of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
when half-spent was the night.
2. Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind.
With Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a savior,
when half-spent was the night.

Scripture Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

1. Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing, little knowing, Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
Swiftly winging angels singing, bells are ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the Babe is Lord of all, Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
2. Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new,
saw the glory, heard the story - tidings of a Gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the Babe was born for you, Christ the Babe was born for you.

Scripture

Luke 2:1-7

(as we read, 2 children, dressed as Joseph and Mary, process down the center aisle. Mary carries a baby doll – we not trying to enact pregnancy and birth, and Joseph the lit candle lighter. When they reach the worship center, Joseph lights the Christ candle in the Advent wreath, while Mary places the baby in the manger, which is located on the left (piano) side of the raised area up front. Joseph and Mary then sit on either side of the manger. Both pulpit and lectern are gone for this service)

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. 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.

Hymn

(vs. 1 & 3) “O little town of Bethlehem”

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.
3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of the heavens.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.

Scripture

Luke 2:8-14

(as we read, children dressed as shepherds gather on the right (organ) side of the raised area, the spotlight shines on them when we read, "the glory of the Lord shone around them..." Look terrified. Spotlight is turned off when the reading ends.)

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 Savior, 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 he favors!"

Hymn

(vs. 1-2) "It came upon a midnight clear"

195

1. It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heaven's 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 heav'nly music floats o'er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hov'ring wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.

Scripture

Luke 2:15-19

(as we read, the shepherds go over and stand behind Joseph and Mary and the baby)

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. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Hymn

(vs. 1-2) "What child is this"

215

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 Christian, 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.

- Scripture Psalm 96 (for 2 voices)
- 1 - O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 - **Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.**
- 1 - Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.
- 2 - **For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.**
- 1 - For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
- 2 - **Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.**
- 1 - Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
- 2 - **ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.**
- 1 - Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- 2 - **Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.**
- 1 - Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity."
- 2 - **Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;**
- 1 - let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- 2 - **let the field exult, and everything in it.**
- 1 - Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming,
- 2 - **for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.**

Trio "O come, O come, Immanuel"

Invitation to Lightshine John 1:1-5
(While this is read, 4 persons coming forward with their unlit candles and stand 2 on each side of the advent wreath, not obscuring it from the congregation)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Lighting our Candles

As we sing, "Silent night," you are invited into this light which shines in the darkness. When the light comes to you, let your unlit candle be the one that bends toward the light. This better prevents wax from dripping. It also reminds of humility and that, as we sang earlier, "where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in." Please be careful with your candle. May we be set on fire spiritually, not physically. Let your light shine.

(the 4 candlelighter begin lighting their own candles off the Christ candle as the words, "where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in," (above) are spoken. As the music starts, they proceed down the center aisle. Two start on either side of the first pew that has people sitting in it and light the candle of the persons closest to the center, who then pass it down the pew. The second 2 candlelighters head halfway back the center aisle and do the same thing there. At some point, we begin singing the next song).

Hymn

“Silent night, holy night”

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, heav’nly hosts sing, “Alleluia!”
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior 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.
4. Silent night, holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light.
With the angels let us sing, “Alleluia” to our King,
“Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!”

Scripture

Isaiah 60:1-7

(as reader reads, s/he raises up her/his candle, encouraging everyone else to do the same. Pause after verse 3. At this point the lights of the sanctuary come on and we blow out our candles, following the lead of the reader, who continues with the rest of the scripture.)

“¹Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ²For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. ⁵Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. ⁷All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house.”

Hymn

(vs. 2 & 3) “While by the sheep”

Hymnal Supplement 1043

2. Born is the child, in manger small, whom God has sent to save us all.
How great our joy! Great our joy! Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heaven on high! Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!
3. Go you this night, and you shall find the Savior born for humankind.
How great our joy! Great our joy! Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heaven on high! Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

Invitation to fellowship

If you can stay a bit, you are invited to connect over refreshments with some of the other folks gathered here. The food is in the fellowship hall, where there is more space to spread out and greet one another. As I said earlier, on the table there is a container in which you might respond to the good news you have received with a special monetary gift of your own, a Christmas Eve offering... Please rise in body or spirit for the Benediction.

Benediction

Go now, and join your voices
with the song of joy in all creation.
Announce peace.
Herald salvation.
Let the earth know that God reigns.

And may God sustain you with his powerful Word.
May Christ Jesus be born as Saviour within you.
And may the Spirit reveal to you the glory
of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

Postlude

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“Hark! The herald angels sing” by Charles Wesley & others, 1739
“Angels we have heard on high,” author unknown, altered by Earl Marlatt, 1937
“Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,” author unknown, trans. by Theodore Baker 1894
“Infant holy, infant lowly” a Polish carol, translated by Edith M.G. Reed, 1925
“O little town of Bethlehem” by Phillips Brooks, 1874
“It came upon a midnight clear” by Edmund H. Sears, 1849, alt
“What child is this” by William C. Dix, 1865
“Silent night, holy night” by Joseph Mohr, 1818, transl. by John F. Young, 1863
“While by the sheep,” a traditional German carol

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