

*First Presbyterian Church of Monroe  
Christmas Eve Service  
December 24, 2020*



When the Holy Child is born into our hearts  
There is a rain of stars  
A rushing of angels  
A blaze of candles  
This God born into our lives.  
Love is running through the streets.

*Anne Weems, "Godburst"*

# WE GATHER

## Prelude

## Welcome

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

## Crossing the Threshold

Diane Adams, Liturgist

In this season leading up to this night, we have been hearing the Good News from all the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because we have *needed* good news and that's what "Gospel" actually means. We have heard stories of courage all along our journey—of people who have sung out songs of hope, love, joy, and peace. Our luminaries have been a witness to the light we believe has come, and is coming.

Tonight, we return to the story of Jesus' birth as it is told in the Gospel of Luke. This account is the narrative we read again and again on this holy night, for this author gives us the most beloved detail. We yearn to see the scene play out, to hear the music of the angels, to feel the rush to the manger to see what this star that pierces the night sky has come to proclaim. We so desire to believe the Good News of the messengers that is the culmination of humanity's birth pains: "don't be afraid" for unto us a sign has come that will be to all people... "on earth, peace."

*Pastor:* Over the last four weeks, our theme song, "I Believe", has helped us remember that we can believe that God is with us, even and especially in the midst of hard times.

*Pastor:* Even when the sun is hidden from sight  
*People:* Even when the sun is hidden from sight  
*Pastor:* Even when love feels so remote  
*People:* Even when love feels so remote  
*Pastor:* Even when God is silent  
*People:* Even when God is silent  
*Pastor:* Even then...  
*People :* Even then...  
*Pastor:* We believe  
*People:* We believe

*Pastor:* We believe in the presence of Emmanuel—God with us.  
This is the night we celebrate that the Holy came in human form  
to be light in our lives...to speak to us, touch us, comfort us, and call us.

## Threshold Moment

*"I Believe"*

by Mark A. Miller

**Prayer**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Holy One,  
we thank you for the glimpse of heaven on earth  
In the faces and the light of those around us.  
Even in the midst of fear,  
of challenge, of struggle—  
even when our view is obscured  
by clouds of doubt,  
You have ignited the flame of hope, love, joy, and peace within us.

**People:** **Let us glow with its brilliance from the inside out. Amen.**

**Opening Hymn**

"Joy to the World"

GTG 134

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her 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 Savior reigns! Let all their 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.

**Call to Confession**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

**Prayer of Confession<sup>ii</sup>**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

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

People: **Forgive us, O God, when we fail to believe your Word is active and alive in the world.**

Pastor: In him was life, and the life was the light of all peoples.

People: **Forgive, God of Light, when we limit your light to people who look, think, or act like us. Open our eyes to recognize you in all people.**

Pastor: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.

People: **Forgive us, O God, of all that keeps us from recognizing your glory, and by your forgiveness, show us how to forgive one another.**

*Silent Confession***Declaration of Forgiveness****Passing the Peace**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

# WE PROCLAIM

Children's Time

Ann Lux

Isaiah Reading

Diane Adams, Liturgist

*Isaiah 52: 7-10 (CEB)*

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of a messenger  
who proclaims peace,  
who brings good news,  
who proclaims salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God rules!"

Listen! Your lookouts lift their voice;  
they sing out together!  
Right before their eyes they see the Lord returning to Zion.

Break into song together, you ruins of Jerusalem!  
The Lord has comforted his people and has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has bared his holy arm in view of all the nations;  
all the ends of the earth have seen our God's victory.

## The Witness of Music

Diane Adams, Liturgist

For all of Advent, we have called on the power of music that inspires those who hear it to a brighter tomorrow. It has been a difficult time in this pandemic for singing to be restricted. In its absence, we have been reminded just how important it is to sing together. Indeed, music has often been the soundtrack of hope. We enjoyed a season of music *appreciation*—as well as reflection on the power of music. We watched documentaries that told courageous stories of people singing as witness to light in the midst of poverty, death camps, protests, disasters, and the oppressive bonds of enslavement.

We have also been presented with Carols of Resistance that have been sung as commentary on injustice. Tonight we bring you another. It is a song you will no doubt have heard on other Christmas Eve nights. But this time, listen with a new appreciation. Written in France by Placide Cappeau with melody by Adolphe Adams, the song was banned from church services when Cappeau's theology was deemed heretical (some called him an atheist) and Adams' music was labeled as "Jewish" (the ultimate insult in Christian circles at a time when Gregorian chant was having a resurgence). Further, the song's message of humility and shared humanity went against the late 19th century idea that slaves did not have souls. Even though the church in France tried to kill the song, the American abolitionist and Unitarian minister, John Sullivan Dwight, made it popular in the Civil War era with its third verse proclaiming a radical message:

*“Truly he taught us to love one another;  
his law is love and his gospel is peace.  
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother;  
and in his name all oppression shall cease.”*

Someday, we will once again be able to join our full voices in song in our sanctuary. We will sing as never before. For now we allow this song to be a prayer of hope that we will destroy the inequity that still haunts us.

*“O Holy Night”*

- 1 O holy night! The stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope-the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born! O night, O holy night, O night divine!
- 2 Led by the light of faith serenely beaming, With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand. So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming, Here came the Wise Men from Orient land. The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger, In all our trials born to be our Friend. He knows our need-to our weakness is no stranger. Behold your King, before Him lowly bend! Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!
- 3 Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we; Let all within us praise His holy name. Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever! His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim! His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!

**Gospel Reading**

*Luke 2: 1-20 (CEB)*

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant.

*“O Little Town of Bethlehem”*

*GTG 121*

- 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 of his 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; O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

*“Away in a Manger”*

*GTG 115*

- 1 Away in a manger, no crib for his 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 poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.
- 3 Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

*"Hark the Herald Angels Sing"*

*GTG 119*

- 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!"
- 2 Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord, late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail the incarnate deity, pleased in flesh with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
- 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.

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them.

*"What Child is This?"*

*GTG 145*

- 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!
- 3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, one and all, 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!

Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

*“O Come, All Ye Faithful”*

GTG 133

- 1 O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant; O come ye; O come ye to Bethlehem! Come, and behold him, born the King of angels!  
Refrain  
O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.
- 2 True God from true God, Light from light eternal, born of a virgin, a mortal he comes; very God, begotten, not created!  
Refrain  
O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.
- 3 Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation; sing, all ye citizens of heaven above! Glory to God, all glory in the highest!  
Refrain  
O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.
- 4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be all glory given; Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!  
Refrain  
O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

## **WE GO FORTH**

*Introduction to the Carol*

Diane Adams, Liturgist

We come to the classic moment of every Christmas Eve... the moment to light our candles and sing, “Silent Night.” We have wondered this year how we could possibly recreate a sense of normalcy in this moment. We wondered how we could get through it with the joy we usually feel on this night, having lost so much this year.

No, it is not the same. And we know that because of the people we have lost, the jobs and security we have lost, that it will likely not ever be the same. Surely every year, we will remember this moment when we thought perhaps light and song would elude us. But here we are. We will light our lights and we will have our song. Just like those soldiers in World War I sang across enemy lines. Everything stopped for a short while as the message that all is calm and bright prevailed above the violence and dark night of the world. We have been sorely divided on many things. We are devastated by our losses. We are tired and we are not so calm. But for this moment, this night, let us remember that we are not alone. And that we believe that the music and light of God’s promises come again and again: hope for a better tomorrow, love that works for a more equitable world, joy that wells from a place deep within us, and peace that offers us the assurance we need.

## Witness to the Light

*"Silent Night"*

GTG 122

- 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, "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.

## Benediction

*Pastor:* I invite you to raise your candle high for the Benediction:

We wait for justice  
but we do not wait to work for change;

We wait for restored health  
but we do not wait to work to heal;

We wait for wholeness  
but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace  
but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news  
that Christ is born among us,  
fill the night with light of Christ's love---with messages of hope, love, joy, and peace.  
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that light alive in you  
and that spur you on in your work for justice and reconciliation.  
Raise your voices and repeat after me...  
"do not be afraid!"

**People:** "do not be afraid!" Amen!

**Handbell Benediction**

**Postlude**

---

<sup>i</sup> Weems, Ann. [Kneeling in Bethlehem](#). p.27.

<sup>ii</sup>Prayer of Confession adapted from *Call to Worship, Lectionary Aids for 2020-2021, Year B. Volume 54.1*, p.32.

Art work by John Stuart. [www.stushieart.com](http://www.stushieart.com)

Worship series design © Worship Design Studio by Marcia McFee. Used, adapted, and live-streamed with permission.  
[www.worshipdesignstudio.com](http://www.worshipdesignstudio.com).

## **FPC Monroe Worship Team**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler, Pastor  
Rob Edwards, Minister of Music  
Diane Adams, Liturgist  
Ann Lux, Children's Time  
Dean Tartaglia, Guest Soloist  
Isaac Fankhauser, Sound Team  
Josh McMann, Sound Team  
Randy Stiffler, Sound Team



108 Washington Street  
Monroe, Michigan 48161  
734-242-1545