

4 A candle is burning, a candle of love, a candle to point us to heaven above.
A baby for Christmas, a wonderful birth, for Jesus is bringing God's love to our earth.

5 We honour Messiah with Christ-candle's flame, our Christmas Eve candles glad tidings proclaim. O come, all you faithful, rejoice in this night, as God comes among us, the Christian's true light.

SPECIAL MUSIC: BY Ron Smail

LET US PRAY: Led by Philip Francis

... Holy and loving God,
you stir in the night and bring about joy in the morning,
you stir in our hearts and bring joy to our lives,
you stir in our minds and bring wisdom.
You stir in the world and put on flesh and came as the Christ child, born a baby in a cattle stall, so that we might have true, full and everlasting life.
We come to sing praises with the angels
We come to bow with the shepherds
We come to kneel in wonder with the wise men
We come to adore you with Joseph
We come to ponder your mystery with Mary
We come to you this night, because you first came to us.
We come to love you because you first loved us.
We come to serve you, because you first served us.
We come like the shepherds to adore you.
We come to praise you as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN

2nd LESSON: Luke 2: 1-7 'The Birth Story' **Read by Tiana Kirkegaard**
(*Mary and Joseph placed at the manger scene*)

CAROL: "The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy" VU 73

1 The virgin Mary had a baby boy, the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy, and they say that his name is Jesus.

He come from the glory, (clap, clap) he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap) he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer! He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.

2 The angels sang when the baby was born, the angels sang when the baby was born,
the angels sang when the baby was born, and they say that his name is Jesus. R

3 The shepherds came where the baby was born, the shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born, and they say that his name is Jesus. R

3rd LESSON: Luke 2: 8 – 14 'The Shepherds and the Angels' **Read by George**
(*The Angels placed at the manger scene*)

SPECIAL MUSIC : By Joshua Kirkegaard

4th LESSON: Luke 2: 15 - 18 'The Visit of the Shepherds' **Read by Philip**
(*Shepherds placed at the manger scene*)

CAROL: "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" VU 41

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 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 Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long; beneath the angel strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong; and warring humankind hears not the love song which they bring. O hush the noise, and cease your strife, to hear the angels sing.

4 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 its ancient splendours fling, and the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.

5th LESSON: Matthew 2: 1, 2, 9-11 **Read by Rev Dan**
(*Kings placed at the manger scene*)

SPECIAL MUSIC: "O Holy Night" Sung by Debbie Mortimer-Lamb

GOSPEL MESSAGE: Rev. Daniel Kirkegaard

(*I draw on portions of a short reflection by Teer Hardy from the 'Advent Calendar of Devotions 2019'*)

Christ Jesus is here. Tonight, we gather... to remember the gift of divine love to our world. We will recall the holy family moving from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted by their foreign occupiers. We will recall the family finding nowhere to rest from their travels and seeking refuge in an unconventional place. We will recall the birth of a child who will

change the course of human history.

The scripture passages being read tonight encompass what is perhaps the most famous story in all the world. We are called to this story.

Jesus, you invite us to the manger, but the world asks 'Why'? What possible reasons does the world stir up about this annual gathering?

* Is it a stinky shed that needs cleaning? A dirty job no one else will do?

No, it can't be that unless you're a farmhand who didn't do the job earlier in the day.

*Perhaps it's some kind of sentimental campfire experience to remind us of childhood pleasures? We are singing a lot of familiar songs.

*Or could it be a secret whispered code phrase 'come to the manger tonight', for some clandestine, counter-cultural, nefarious purpose? There certainly seem to be some strange happenings identified in the story.

I can assure you it is for none of these reasons that we are invited to the manger this night. Whether we worship in church weekly or attend once a year, tonight's story is one that calls to us, and we go. We sit. We listen. We pray.

The beauty of the story is that within it is a place for everyone. While we are not the child who is born, there is a place for each of us at the manger.

The reason for the invitation to the manger this night is because we all belong here.

God's grace, wrapped in bands of cloth, invites each of us to come and sit, to learn, and to pray. We may come from the east, travelling a great distance, (though tonight that distance is covered online), and come to seek the manger and the one promise from generations past. We can be off in the distance, tending what has been placed in our care (like the shepherds), and rejoice with the angels, but we all belong.

We come tonight because you, Jesus, search after the lost, and its time to stop running and come to celebrate the full depth and breadth of love and light breaking into our darkness.

And this is a landmark in our faith, and 'Anchor Stone' in our life journey with Jesus being the light for our path.

Recently, I have been watching a show called 'The Curse of Oak Island' a show about treasure hunters searching out the mysteries of lost, ancient treasure. It partly caught my attention because Oak Island is off the coast of Nova Scotia, in eastern Canada. I'm grew up in Eastern Canada but had never heard of Oak Island or the supposed curse. But as I was completing this Christmas reflection, I couldn't help but see an interesting link.

As we gather here tonight, we are not treasure hunters searching out some mystery or curse, but we do already hold the most amazing treasure that we could ever desire. We also are not trying to piece together theories. We don't need to, because we have 2000 years of eye witnesses of the manger and faithful followers testimony of the impact of this one birth on the whole world.

This story we read tonight is the story of God's grace extending into the world, to all peoples in the most unpredictable and dramatic fashion. This story we hear and live again, tonight, is an invitation from God extended to all creation to experience divine love in a manner we can all understand.

Christ Jesus has put on human flesh to dwell among us. To weep among us. To experience the joys and concerns of this world among us. Christ Jesus has come to call us back to the will of our Creator, deepening the story of God's relationship with his most beloved creation. Jesus, Immanuel, God is with us. AMEN!

CHRISTMAS PRAYER / BLESSING

Lord, you have come in dramatic fashion and invite each of us to meet you at the manger. Tonight we come to kneel, worship, and celebrate. As we gather, reveal your grace to us. Through the greatest story ever told, weave our stories into yours. Thank you, Lord, that you are Immanuel, God with us. May the light shining from the manger shine brightly in each of us. Let today be a day in which we step out of the darkness of our own lives and into the light of your grace. AMEN!

CAROL: "Silent Night"

VU 67

(While we sing, let us Virtually pass the Light of Christ to each other)

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.

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.

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.

*May the presence of Christ Jesus among us sustain you
in Faith this Blessed Night and in each day of the New Year.*