



24 December 2023

WESTMINSTER CHURCH OF PEORIA

A Presbyterian Church, USA in the Presbytery of the Great Rivers
1420 West Moss Avenue +++ Peoria, Illinois 61606

www.westminsterpeoria.org

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1420 W. Moss Avenue | Peoria Illinois 61606 | Rev. Tim Mitchell



Christmas Eve



24 December 2023

Four O'clock

PREPARATION

A Christmas Chime

Eric Thiman

What Child is This

Richard Purvis

Sussex Carol

Russell Schulz-Widmar

Pastorale "Gesù Bambino"

Pietro Yon

WELCOME

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: The grace of God has appeared among us. A child has been born, bringing God's salvation.

All: We have seen anew the light of God's love. How splendid is God's gift to us!

One: Sing to our God a joyous new song. Sing to God, all nations of the earth.

All: Great is our God and greatly to be praised. Ascribe to God the glory that is due.

One: Let the heavens be glad as the earth rejoices. Glory to God in the highest heaven.

All: The Child of Bethlehem will help us know God. We gather this night to contemplate what God has done.

*OPENING PRAYER *(unison)*

All: We tremble before you, holy God, for your ways are far beyond our knowing. You surprise us in unexpected places. You come to us in people who we may overlook. Your light exposes our shallow commitments and misplaced loyalties. Yet we dare to come before you, to bow down at the manger in awe and wonder. This humble scene moves us more than we could have guessed. It shakes all our pretension. We are filled with hope that a new day is dawning. Establish among us your way of righteousness. **Amen.**

*LIGHTING OF THE FOUR ADVENT CANDLE – LOVE

Veni Emmanuel Hymn 9 *(sung together)*

O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; bid envy, strife, and discord cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

(Please be seated.)

One: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and set lights in the sky – sun and moon and stars. By these stars, our ancestors charted their journeys. By these stars, they knew God was with them.

All: Today we now light four candles to bring the fire of the stars down from heaven to earth, to nestle among the greens.

One: *We name this candle Hope. (light the first candle)*

One: *We name this candle Peace. (light the second candle)*

One: *We name this candle Joy. (light the third candle)*

One: *We name this candle Love. (light the fourth candle)*

All: We too are on a journey, and we do not always know the way. But we chart our path by the star of love. Even when sharp words rattle in our ears, and our hearts sit cold and numb, we set our face steadily towards the light.

One: *Listen now to the wisdom of the early Christians:*

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1John 4:7-12)

All: Lord Jesus, as we search for signs of love this week, help us to *become* the signs of love that others are searching for. As these candles are but a glimpse of the light of the heavens, help us to be a glimpse of heaven’s love. – Amen.

Switching of Readers...

***LIGHTING OF THE FIFTH ADVENT CANDLE – CHRIST**

One: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and set lights in the sky – sun and moon and stars. By these stars, our ancestors charted their journeys. By these stars, they knew God was with them.*

In the beginning, too, was the Word. And the Word, too, has come down from heaven to earth. By the Word made flesh, Christ our Savior, we know that God is with us.

All: And now we light the last candle, the fifth candle to bring the fire of the stars down from heaven to earth, to nestle among the greens.

One: *We name this candle Hope. (light the first candle)*

One: *We name this candle Peace. (light the second candle)*

One: *We name this candle Joy. (light the third candle)*

One: *We name this candle Love. (light the fourth candle)*

One: *We name this candle Christ. Light the fifth candle)*

All: Our lives are a journey, and we do not always know the way. But we chart our path by the star of Christ. Even when faith burns low and its promises seem too good to be true, we set our face steadily towards the light.

One: *Listen to the ancient words come true anew this night;*

“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. 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” Isaiah 9:2, 6

All: Lord Jesus, as we search for signs of Christ’s presence this week, help us to *become* the signs of Christ’s presence that others are searching for. As these candles are but a glimpse of the light of the heavens, help us to be a glimpse of the light of the heavens, help us to be a glimpse of heaven on earth. Help us to shine like stars in the world. Amen.

***HYMN**

O Come All Ye Faithful

Adeste Fidelis

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.

O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

3. Child for us sinners,
Poor and in the manger,
Fain we embrace thee with awe and love;
Who would not love thee,
Loving us so dearly?

2. God of God,
Light of Light
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God,
Begotten, not created

4. Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God
In the highest.

5. Yea, Lord we greet thee
Born this happy morning,
Jesu, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION** (*unison*)

God of light, we are frightened by what you might expect of us if we get too close to the manger. Many enticements draw our attention away from this holy place. Our worldly passions have led us into comfortable ruts. We admit that some are mere time-killers but others seem to have real value to us. What more can a baby offer us? O what use is a Messiah who ends up on a cross? O God, teach us what salvation is all about. Heal the emptiness that gives rise to our misplaced loyalties and distorted dreams. We want to be whole people, experiencing wholesome relationships, giving ourselves to worthy causes. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

***TIME FOR SILENCE AND PERSONAL CONFESSION**

Please take a moment of silence for personal reflection and confession.

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** (*responsive*)

One: The Child of Bethlehem becomes for us the Wonderful Counselor whose life pants us to new priorities. Away from our frantic busyness, we find true peace on our knees. The truth is dawning in us and among us. Good news of great joy fills us with hope. Glory to God in the highest heaven. **All: Alleluia and Amen!**

***GLORIA** (*sing together*)

vs. 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!**

vs. 2 Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing; Come adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King. **Gloria..**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION (*unison*)

Come, Holy Spirit, giver of life; breathe into us that we may hear a word of truth this day. Draw us into communion, enable us to love, conspire to make us one with You. For the world You so deeply love. Amen.

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 9:2-7

The Word of the Lord ... **Thanks be to God.****ANTHEM**Lo How a Rose
*See Hymn 48 for text**Praetorius***SECOND LESSON**

Titus 2:11-14

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.****ANTHEM**

In the Bleak Midwinter

Harold Darke

1. In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter Long ago.
2. Our God, Heav'n cannot hold him nor earth sustain; Heav'n and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign; In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God ; Almighty Jesus Christ.
3. Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day, a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay; Enough for him, whom angels fall down before, the ox and ass and camel which adore.
4. What can I give him, Poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb, if I were a Wise Man I would do my part, yet what I can I give him, Give my heart, give my heart.

GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.****SERMON*****HYMN 24**

Away in a manger

*Cradle Song****AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (*unison*)*from a Declaration of Faith*

Jesus, the long-expected Savior, came into the world as a child, descended from David, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, a virgin. He lived as a Jew among Jews. He announced to his people the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace on earth. We affirm that Jesus was born of woman as is every child, yet born of God's power as was no other child. In the person and work of Jesus, God and a human life are united but not confused, distinguished but not separated. The coming of Jesus was itself the coming of God's promised rule. Through his birth, life, death, and resurrection, he brings about the relationship between God and humanity that God always intended. Alleluia. Amen.

PASSING OF THE PEACEOne: May the peace of Christ be with you.***ALL: And also with you****THE GIFT OF MUSIC**

Sussex Carol

traditional/David Willcocks

1. On Christmas night all Christians sing, to hear the news the angels bring, on Christmas night all Christians sing, to hear the news the angels ring. News of great joy, news of great mirth, News of our merciful King's birth.
2. Then why should men on earth be so sad, since our redeemer made us glad, then why should ... When from our sin he set us free, All for to gain our liberty?

3. When sin departs before his grace, then life and health come in its place... Angels and men with joy may sing, All for to see the new-born King.
4. All out of darkness we have light, wmade the angels sing this night... Glory to God and peace to men, Now and for evermore. Amen.

COMMUNION

At the time of the Distribution of the Eucharist, worshipers may use the bread and wine given out as you entered church this morning or come forward to the steps of the Chancel to receive the Sacrament by Intinction. Those worshipping at home via the live stream may use whatever bread and wine are at hand as the food of the Supper. Jesus himself used the leftover bread and wine from the Passover Feast to institute the first Eucharist. So, we, too, may use those things closest at hand for this celebration. Christians of any age or church affiliation are welcome at Christ's table, where Christ himself is the host.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE *(responsive)*

One: The invitation is simple: come, and eat of the feast. Not a meal to nourish the body, but to feed the soul.

**All: We receive the bread and the fruit of the vine connected to the ages:
to the saint of old who felt unworthy,
to the seeker eager to know God,
to the teenager who wonders what it's all about,
to the child who eats with unburdened faith.**

*One: Woven into this time, the hopes and tears of generations. There is great joy here.
No one is turned away for God is the host!*

COMMUNION PRAYER *(responsive)*

One: God is in this place.

All: And in our hearts.

One: Open yourself to the nudging God.

All: We feel the breath of the Spirit.

One: Remember God mad flesh.

All: Jesus, who taught us a new way.

(Allow silence to speak for a few moments.)

One: Tender, transforming God, you have invited us to gather at this table, to taste the feast, the same abundant promises offered to our ancestors in faith.

Time and time again you have offered your grace, even as we have stepped away, You continue to call us to be your people.

**All: You have never left us. We praise you for second, third, and fourth chances.
You are ever-patient, always faithful.**

HYMN 22 *(sing together)*

Angels, From the Realm of Glory

Regent Square

**1. Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth
You who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
Come and worship, Come and worship
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

**2. Saints before God's presence bending
Watching long in hope and fear
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In his temple shall appear.
Come and worship, come and worship
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

COMMUNION PRAYER *(responsive)*

*One: We give thanks for this time of celebration. For the One this meal remembers.
For the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

**All: With those who have gone before us, whose hands touched the bread,
whose lips embraced the cup. We worship you. We glorify you.**

One: This is the mystery of our faith:

All: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

*One: Bless them and your people all around the world. As we eat of these common elements,
unite our spirits in love for you and our hearts in love for one another. In the name of
the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer.*

MEMORIAL ACCLAMATIONS *(sing together)*

**Vs. 1 Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart, and soul and voice; Give ye heed to what
we say: Jesus Christ is born today: Ox and ass before Him bow, and He is in the manger
now. Christ is born today! Christ is born today!**

**Vs. 2 Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart, and soul, and voice: Now ye need not fear
the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save! Calls you one and calls you all to gain the
everlasting hall. Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!**

INTERCESSIONS AND SUPPLICATIONS

Lord, in your mercy.... **Hear our prayer.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER *[praying together]*

OUR FATHER, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

*BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE POURING OF THE CUP *(responsive)*

One: Gathered with his friends, Jesus took bread, broke it and said:

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam hamotzi Hamotzi lehem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

"This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat."

And pouring the fruit of the vine into the cup, he blessed it saying:

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ja'olam borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

"This is my blood, spilled out for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

*Holy Spirit, send power upon these gifts, your bread and your cup. God of all, send you Spirit
to this place so that those gathered here, in this sacred moment, may know your presence.*

*As we eat the bread and drink of the cup, make us one with the saints, and with our sisters,
siblings, and brothers in faith around the world.*

Be with us God, not only here but in every moment of our lives. Help us to...

All: To know you. To be guided by the Holy Spirit. And to live Christ. Now and forever.

*CALL TO THE FEAST

One: This is the feast prepared for you. Come and share for all is ready.

All: Let us keep the feast. Alleluia!

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTS

The Body of Christ broken for you. The Blood of Christ shed for you.

*COMMUNION ANTHEM

O Holy Night
Karen Stewart, soprano

Adolph Adam

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

*One: Creative, connecting God, you have sent your Spirit and made us the body of Christ;
From child-like faith to youthful energy, from middle-aged mindfulness, to elder's wisdom...*

All: We thank you for this time, this remembrance. Alleluia! Amen.

*LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES *(sing together)*

(When receiving the light, tilt your unlighted candle into the lit flame. Do the same as you pass it along the pew.)

CAROL

Silent Night, Holy Night

Stille Nacht

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.
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.

SCRIPTURE READING

John 1:1-14

*HYMN 40

Joy to the World

Antioch

*BENEDICTION AND BLESSING *(responsive)*

One: In the quiet beauty of Christmas, the hardness of our hearts is melted.

All: We have sensed truths too deep for words and been in touch with realities beyond our reach.

One: Love is especially real at Christmas, lifting us above our indifferences and hatreds.

All: We want the joy and goodness to continue; we long to be generous, caring people.

One: Old selfishness and rivalries cannot survive when people kneel together at the manger.

All: We would glorify and praise God through new attitudes and greater appreciation of all our brothers and sisters.

POSTLUDE

Toccata on Antioch

Craig Phillips

The Westminster Choir is supported in part by a grant from the Gretchen R. Iben Fund for Music and the Arts.

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OPEN HANDS, OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS