



## Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020

Merry Christmas from your friends and neighbors at Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI. As welcome you to this time of worship, we say

“O come, all ye faithful... no matter who you are  
or where you are on your life’s journey...!”

Please have a candle ready to light tonight and if there is a manger scene at home, please set aside the figures...and let the children or someone in your home put them in their places during the Gospel reading.

Join me in singing vs.1 -2 #182 “O Come, All Ye Faithful” ~Public Domain

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!

1. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest; O come let us adore him,  
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!

We have come together tonight not only because we are marking an event in history,  
but, because we are remembering what God has already accomplished in Jesus Christ.

We proclaim today the birth of Jesus, and the birth of the new creation as **the Christ Candle is lit.** ~Rev.21

**Passing of the Peace** Now, as we celebrate the gift of God-with-us, we offer to one another  
“peace” as a sign of Christ’s love for each of us. Turn to someone nearby. Hug them or shake hands,  
and say, from your heart, “Peace be with you.”

**Let us pray together:** Loving God, you are present with us now and you continue to reveal yourself to us  
when we least expect it. As tonight’s old, old story sheds a new light on our relationship  
with you and with each other, we lift our hopes and dreams in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### The Gospel of Luke 2:1-20, the New English Translation

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire for taxes.

2 This was the first registration, taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 Everyone went to his own town to be registered. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him, and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: 11 Today your Savior is born in the city of David.

He is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 Suddenly a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!”

15 When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, that the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they hurried off and located Mary and Joseph, and found the baby lying in a manger. 17 When they saw him, they related what they had been told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were astonished at what the shepherds said.

19 But Mary treasured up all these words, pondering in her heart what they might mean.  
20 So the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen;  
everything was just as they had been told.

**My message is entitled, “After All These Years...”**

**Please pray with me:** Holy One of many names, we thank you for every hint of hope, when there seems to be none; we thank you for the littlest joys in your world that help ease our burdens; we thank you for your peace, which models for us ways to let go of old grudges; and we thank you for your love which inspires our living and our loving.  
We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

*After all these years*, the message of Christmas is still “hope.” The message of Christmas is still, “peace.” The message of Christmas is still “joy!” The message of Christmas is still and always will be “love.” There is no hidden meaning, no secret underlying text. Its message for us still holds true even though we can’t help but yearn for what “Christmases *past*” have forged into our memories.

**Take a deep breath and savor those memories.  
Breathe out now and be assured that this too, is Christmas!**

When December began, did you decide not to do any decorating, but, then little by little you brought out a few reminders of the season? I did it, too, and I inspected each ornament as though I had never seen it before; the ones made by my children and those that had been gifts from dear friends. *This year*, I thought at first, that I was decorating *just for me* because no one would be stopping by to see the tree or to share a meal. Did you think of that, too? In the church sanctuary, the few of us who enter here decided not put up the large tree because no families would gather and no small children would jiggle and giggle around the manger scene, to identify the little figurines. Still, we put up a small tree. and a manger scene on the altar. The candles in the candelabras and on the Advent wreath are burning brightly now.

However un-decorated your home, however empty the sanctuary, the story of the birth of Jesus has been read and we each have drawn into our hearts the picture of that birth, on that silent, holy night and we have found ourselves together in a strangely further-reaching manner this year, by radio, on the internet and in words written on paper.

After all these years, we are experiencing a Christmas Eve like no other! Yes, there have been some tears remembering loved ones who we are missing. And yes, our brains are muddled up by vague visions of sugarplums, and by the void of the usual sights and sounds of a Christmas Choir and “standing room only” in the church sanctuary; gift unwrapping and game playing, and the fruitcake musings of years gone by.

Even like this, has it occurred to you how much this night, this year, is like the night when Jesus was born? Joseph and Mary had never imagined the circumstances of his birth to be as it was. They probably thought they would have plenty of time to get back the warmth and safety of their home before the baby was born, with neighbors and friends nearby. They could not have envisioned that their baby boy, heaven’s perfect lamb, would one day, step out into his public ministry and cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to leap and the dead to live again! They could not imagine that 2000 years later, ordinary people like you and I would call him Savior, Redeemer and friend.

After all these years of Christmas hustle and bustle and hoping for snow on Christmas Eve, but, safe roads for family travels, *neither had we imagined* this night to be quite like this. God’s plans and ours sometimes do not seem to align, do they? But, what a blessing it is to be in exactly the right place, at exactly the right time to hear the Christmas story and to light our single candles in our own homes and in what we will never forget to be those 2020 “bubbles.”

**Take a deep breath now and breath in the very possibly hap, hap happiest Christmas, since....well, since ever for us! Breathe out anything that you thought was missing.**

In my remembrances of Christmases “past,” there have been a variety of Sunday School Programs. Picture this one which took place in Schofield in 2013. The scripture story of the birth of Jesus was read by the older children and the costumed, younger ones *acted it out*. Mary and Joseph came down the church aisle, looking this way and that and stopped just below the two chancel steps... where Joseph knocked on the pulpit and the innkeeper stepped around from behind it. “There is no room,” he said.

Somewhat sadly, Joseph and Mary walked up the steps and took their places near a wooden manger. It was then that they realized that they had forgotten to get the “baby Jesus” out from behind the Christmas tree... so, Mary, looking horrified, scurried back there and grabbed the Cabbage patch doll and came back and plunked it in the manger. The shepherds came forward one by one as the story continued and three timid kings journeyed down the aisle with their gifts.

All the while, the smallest child, dressed as an angel, who had been sitting with his mother in the front pew, somehow, and unannounced, crept up the steps... got up and stood quietly by the manger. Perfect!

By the time the story was finished being read, the little angel, who now was getting a little bored with the whole arrangement, inched his way closer to the chancel steps. All eyes were on him!

When the play was over, in that moment of silence, as the congregation was about to applaud, the little angel looked around and asked, loud enough for all to hear: “What’s next?” And he took a hop off the top step. The congregation was breathless...it was one of those God-moments, spoken by a child... and then, came the clapping.

After all these years, “what’s next?” is our question, too. We are reminded today that Christmas is not just the celebration of the birth of a baby; it is the beginning of a chain of events that has transformed human existence. We do not have to be in a crowded room to hear the story. This day was like no other for Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the innkeeper. Their lives would never be the same. “What was next” for them was as unforeseen as it is for us.

After all these years, let’s not leave Jesus in the manger of hay. Let’s follow the living Jesus as we reach out into the community to help our neighbors, knowing that difficult times are made easier when we work together, when we help those who are struggling and when lift up the heroes who protect us. Let’s continue to feed the hungry and give warm coats and mittens to those who have none. Let’s work together to find affordable housing for those who have no place to call “home.” It is up to us to let the kindness and compassion and out-reach of Christmas never end.

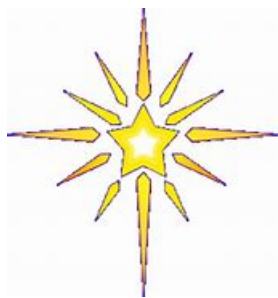
Even the news media has announced it: *“2020 has taught that the best way through the darkness is to look for the light -- and if there is none, to make it ourselves.”* ~CNN Christmas Message

Before our very eyes, there are signs that there is and always will be “light.” The “Star of Bethlehem” is shining again this week after 400 years! And after 9 months of dealing with a dangerous virus that has made us all shut-ins and has taken away our loved ones, a vaccine has been “born!” Looking out our windows, there is just enough snow to make a white Christmas and it is never too late to be decking the halls.

I believe that this night brings us just enough hope, peace, joy and love to last us until this day next year!

**My friends,** God so loved the world that he sent his only Son.

Be assured of the good news that God is with us and always has been... after all these years!



**Let us pray:** Holy God we have encountered you here tonight in word and candle glow. Help us to recognize you in every moment of love and grace, that comes our way.                      Breath in peace. Breathe out pent-up sighs.

We thank you for the wondrous gift you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, the treasure of forgiveness and mercy, and the whisper of your still-speaking voice. We lift to you those caught up in racism and injustice; leaders of nations and those who hold fast to the reasons for war. We lift to you the refugees, and all those who do not know where they will lay their heads tonight. Hear our prayers for those with health concerns and those who are

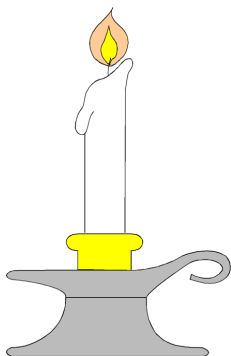
grieving the loss of loved ones. We lift to you the joys and concerns of our hearts, as we place our hope in you, child of the manger, child of the cross...and as we pray together in your words:

**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 sins*, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but, deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**This is our time of intention and thanks:** We have journeyed through the days of Advent and now, as we enter the 12 days of Christmas, let the message of Christmas challenge us to choose a way of giving that will benefit someone or some charitable organization. Let our gifts be for them, gifts of love.

Let us pray: Ever giving God, we ask that, as we have received, we will know better the art of giving; as we have prospered, we will make better attempts to model your gracious sharing. We dedicate our intent to give of our time and talents, as well as sharing our treasures in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Dim your lights now and light a candle as we sing together, **“Silent Night” v. 1&2, 186** ~Public Domain



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! 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.

**Benediction:**

Go now and carry the glow of these candles and the love of this night in your hearts.

This great story does not end here after all these years...and it will not end with us

The blessings of God our Creator, Jesus the Christ,  
and Holy Spirit, the Comforter... is with us always. Amen. **Go now in peace.**

**Let’s sing: “Joy to the World” vs. 1 & 2, 179** ~Public Domain

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.

**You are invited to listen to our recorded Christmas Eve Worship Service  
on Medford Radio, WKEB 99.3 Dec. 24, 6-6:30 pm.**

**The radio ministry is sponsored by the Candlelight Guild of Community United Church of Christ**

**A video recording of our services are posted on our webpage each week: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org)**

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