

Christmas Eve 7:00 pm 2020

Worship Notes

Christmas Eve: The Dreamer

A Christmas Eve (or Christmas Day) service



Nancy Cocks

We gather here mindful of the many who, for millennia, have called this valley home or depended on its trails for safe passage. We know this community as Fernie; it is also the unceded territory of the Ktunaxa people. May we be good and gracious guests of this corner of Creation.

Words of Welcome

Leader: Thank you for joining with us this night. We are used to hearing the Christmas Story from the perspective of the angels, the shepherds and, of course Mary. Tonight we hear the story from Joseph.

Leader: We light the Christ Candle

Reader 1: Behold, I bring you good news of great joy:
For to you is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is
Christ the Lord!

Reader 2: Jesus has arrived in grace and mystery,
renewing our hopes,
announcing peace to a weary world.

Reader 1: Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those who find favour with God.

Reader 2: Jesus comes among us in power and glory
to inspire fresh Christmas joy and
call us to lives that are full of God's love.

All: Jesus, the light of the world is born.
Let Christ's light shine in the darkest corners of our lives.
Let Christ's light shine in the darkest corners of our world.

The Christ Candle is lit.

Unison prayer:

God of mystery and manger,
as we celebrate Christmas,
open our hearts to your love
so that your Good News
is not just an old familiar story
but a fresh truth lived out in our lives every day,
through the grace of Jesus our Christ. Amen

Leader: Listen first to how Luke tells the Christmas story:

Reader 1: Luke 2.1-7
The Birth of Jesus

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.

Carol: O Come All Ye Faithful (VU60 v.3)

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
lo he abhors, not the virgin's womb;
glory to God, in the highest
O Come, let us adore him, O Come, let us adore him
O Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Leader: The inspiration for this service comes from a poem by the American writer Ann Weems, entitled 'Getting to the front of the stable'.
Listen to the first stanza:

Poem: 'Getting to the front of the stable', by Ann Weems

Who put Joseph in the back of the stable?
Who dressed him in brown, put a staff in his hand, and told him
to stand in the back of the crèche, background for the
magnificent light of the Madonna?

Leader: This poem helps us realise how rarely we listen to Joseph, even on Christmas Eve. We seldom hear from him in our Christmas pageants and carols. He's just there in his brown bathrobe. But Matthew makes Joseph out to be a man of dreams. In this service we'll bring Joseph out from the back of the stable and listen to the dreamer. Consider just how important he was to God's unfolding purposes.

First, young Joseph speaks:

Monologue

Young Joseph:

My mother calls me a dreamer!
And I suppose it's true.
I do have a dream.

Ever since I joined my father Jacob in the family business,
I've dreamed that I could be the best carpenter in Judea!
I wouldn't just make tables for my neighbours,
build a door here or fix a chair there.
No, I want to build furniture fit for a king!
I can see the finest banquet table ever made,
its fine grain running the length of the room,
sanded lovingly by my hands, smooth as a glassy sea,
oiled till it glistens in the lamplight,
sturdy legs carved to curve like the cheek of the moon.
Not just ordinary kitchen tables,
my tables will bear the weight of the finest feasts and
host meetings of the world's greatest minds.
And cabinets!
My cabinets will display treasures from distant lands.
Imagine golden trinkets sparkling on my shelves;
the finest pottery from the kilns of eastern lands
held up high so you can wonder at the secret contents.
Yes, I have a dream – to be the greatest carpenter in the land.
The wealthy will seek me out for my clear eye, my steady hands,
my craftsmanship to turn your neighbour green with envy.
And maybe one day I'll build a fine home, too,
start a family with a beautiful wife who has
curves like the cheek of the moon!
Raise a son who shares my clear eye and my steady hand.
He can become the most famous carpenter in the whole world!
That's my dream – to be the carpenter for ruling monarchs and raise up a
son who can be more famous than I!
Yes, I am a dreamer.
It's true.

Carol: 'Away in the manger' (VU69)

Away in a manger, no crib for a 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.

Leader: Notice there's no Joseph pictured in such a beloved carol.
It's Matthew who brings Joseph into view.
Listen to how he tells the Christmas story:

Reader 2: Matthew 1.18-25

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',
which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Monologue

Now Joseph speaks from experience:

What a dream! ... Or rather ... What a nightmare!
Mary is pregnant and I can promise you I am not the father!
I don't know what to do.
People will scoff and scold if they think it's my child.
The same people will laugh behind my back if they know it's not my child.
And you know what will happen to Mary if this news gets out.
She'll be humiliated, shunned for sure, maybe even punished.
But we can't go on with our wedding
... Well, I can't go on with the wedding, knowing what's happened.
At least I thought I couldn't go on.
I thought perhaps Mary could just go away quietly,
visit her cousin in the hill country, and then ... never come back.
It would be so much simpler – for me.
But then I saw that angel. It had to be a dream, right?
My mother always said I was a dreamer!
Still the angel's message cut me right to the heart.

'Joseph, son of David' ... The angel called on our most famous ancestor, David, so I had to pay attention.
'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.'
Was I afraid? Afraid of the gossip? ... Maybe a little.
Afraid for Mary, more like it. Her life would never be the same, to have a child on her own. But that angel didn't stop.
'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'
Whoever heard of such a thing? A child conceived of God?
In the womb of the one I love? How can such a thing be?
Yet the angel has promised Mary a son.
'You are to name him Jesus,' said the angel.
Jesus. Yeshua.
'The one who will save people from their sins.'
What a dream! Could this son save my family from disgrace?
If this baby can save Mary from our neighbours' spite,
I would love him just for that.
Could this son become the most famous carpenter in the world?
I would love him for that, too.
Maybe if love has its way with us, this dream can come true.
And something beautiful will be born for us all in Jesus.
Now there's a dream!

Poem: 'Getting to the front of the stable'

God-chosen, this man Joseph was faithful
in spite of the gossip in Nazareth,
in spite of the danger from Herod.
This man, Joseph, listened to angels
and it was he who named the Child Emmanuel.
Is this a man to be stuck for centuries in the back of the stable?
Actually, Joseph probably stood in the doorway
guarding the mother and child or
greeting shepherds and kings.

When he wasn't in the doorway,
he was probably urging Mary to get some rest,
gently covering her with his cloak,
assuring her that he would watch the Child.
Actually, he probably picked the Child
up in his arms and walked him in the night,
patting him lovingly until he closed his eyes.

Carol: **What Child Is This**

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!

Reader 1: **Matthew 2.1-11**

The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Offering

Leader: We may not have gold and incense to offer,
but the gifts we offer to God are part of God's dream to spread
the love of the Christ Child to our generation.

Carol: 'The first Nowell' VU91 v.6

Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,
and with his blood our life hath bought.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
born is the King of Israel.

Unison Prayer:

O God, we don't have gold and frankincense in our pockets
but we offer to you what we have to share.
Bless the gifts we give this season so that they may bring the
love of the Christ Child into the cold and dark places
in the world.

And bless our lives, too.

May we become the gift that others need because we have seen
the wonder of your love in Jesus on this holy night. Amen

Leader: Of course, Joseph's dream did get more difficult, remember?
Listen!

Reader 2: Matthew 2.12-14

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they
left for their own country by another road.

The Escape to Egypt

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph
in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and
flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is
about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got
up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.

Monologue

Old Joseph reflects:

It all seems like a dream now, looking back.

Mary bearing a child by the Holy Spirit.

And little Jesus, born just when King Herod
was plotting against all our little ones.

Those wise men from the East coming into my humble home.

Sure, I was a good carpenter in those days.

We had a good house – but it was small.
Hardly room for those wise men and their caravan of servants!
It still seems like a dream.
Those strange and wonderful gifts set out to welcome our child –
gold for a king, incense for a priest, and myrrh ... a spice for burial!
... It's as if they knew what would happen to him, my little son.
It seems like a dream – though not the dream I held when I was young.
My son didn't grow up to be the finest carpenter in the world –
though I taught him all I could.
He had a dream, too, a dream inspired by the Holy Spirit.
He had a clear eye and a steady hand but
he wasn't building tables and cabinets.
He was building a kingdom, a new world,
a world where every child is precious – as precious as he was;
a world where the poor find open hearts and a stranger finds an open door;
a world where we can always see something beautiful in each other;
a world where love always has the last word;
love that will save the world from its sin and sorrow.
That world is still a dream.
My little son gave his life for that dream.
Today we share the dream.
When we cradle this little one, we believe that this dream
can still come true for us because we cradle Jesus' love in our hearts.
And that love can still save the world.
This is God's dream for us.

Poem: 'Getting to the front of the stable'

This Christmas,
let us give thanks to God
for this man of incredible faith
into whose care God placed the Christ Child.
As a gesture of gratitude,
let's put Joseph in the front of the stable
where he can guard and greet and
cast an occasional glance at this Child who brought us life.

Leader: God's dream of new life is that world
where every child is precious;
where the poor find open hearts and
a stranger finds an open door;
a world where we can always see

something beautiful in each other;
where love always has the last word.
That world is still a dream.
And Jesus gave his life for that dream.
Today we share the dream
for his sake and ask God to
bring that dream to fulfillment in us,
through us and for us.

Leader: Let us pray:

God of miracle and manger, God of mystery and magi,
we thank you for the wonder of Christmas
for goodwill that fills even the crustiest souls,
for smiles on the faces in spite of worries that will return
in a day or two, for generosity that lights up homes and hearts
and touches those with too little of their own this year.

Steadfast God,
we thank you for Joseph and all he stands for:
For everyone in our lives and communities
we can count on – people there in the background,
looking after things; for those with dreams,
patiently waiting and working so things can improve;
for those with courage to cope
when the world turns dark and
Herod and his ilk threaten.

Steadfast God,
may Joseph inspire all of us in the year ahead.

Compassionate God,
we thank you for Mary and all she stands for:
For everyone in our lives and communities
who embraces us with comfort and encouragement;
for those who are willing to follow your leading
even when it means personal sacrifice and criticism from others;
for those who nurture children with hope and wisdom
so they become a blessing to others;

Compassionate God,
may Mary inspire us all in the year ahead.

God with us,
thank you for the Christ Child and
all he means to us:
For his gift of mercy
so that we can let the past be the past and
make a fresh start;
for his open arms,
offering us strength and hope
whenever we feel lost or lonely; and
for his willingness to suffer and die
so that we will know your presence
with us in the midst of our hardest times.

In these moments of silence,
we remember those who need
Christ's embrace this Christmas:

(Keep silence for at least 15-20 seconds)

God with us,
take us from this holy place
to find your holiness in many places and
to meet Christ in many faces
so that we may live with
the blessing of Christmas
every day and offer that blessing to all whom we meet,
in the name of Christ,
our friend and Saviour. Amen

Carol: [Hark! The Herald Angels Sing VU48 v.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.

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Leader: To you is born this night
a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.
May the love of the Christ Child embrace you;
the joy of the Christ Child fill your heart.
May the peace of the Christ Child give you rest, and the
hope of the Christ Child guide you into the year ahead. Amen

Duet: **Silent Night**

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 Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior 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.

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