



December 14, 2020
First Presbyterian Church of Willmar, MN

Prelude

Welcome

The light shines in the darkness.

In the darkness when masks slip and grief is allowed to surface, when the chill of loss burrows its way into fragile and vulnerable souls exposed and bereft, light whispers: *love lasts forever.*

In the darkness when memories taunt instead of comfort, when regrets triumph over achievements, light whispers: *love lasts forever.*

In the darkness when confidence wains and hope takes flight and faith is questioned, light whispers: *love lasts forever.*

The light of love will carry us through the darkest nights.

Carol: "Love Came Down at Christmas"

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Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely love divine;
love was born at Christmas, star and angel gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead, love incarnate, love divine;
worship we our Jesus: but where-with for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine,
love to God and all of us, love for plea and gift and sign.

Call to Worship (based on John 1:1-5 and Isaiah 9:2,6)

One: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

All: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

One: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined.

All: For a child has been born to us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Carol: “In the Bleak Midwinter”

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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.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there;
cherubim and seraphim thronged in the air;
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

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.

Prayer of Approach

Lord Jesus, we come tonight as your friends, seeking companionship during the long nights, admitting we are uncertain and have questions, ready to rest awhile in your presence as we bring to you our different emotions.

In this time we can take off the mask that says we must behave a certain way, that we must not admit our sorrow for we know, Lord Jesus, that you share in this sorrow with us.

You, too, wept for a friend, and for those who grieved their loss.

You, too, have experienced the pain of parting and you also bring to us a hope that breaks beyond the boundaries of what we know.

May we come in this time and space to release our emotions into this offering of worship acknowledging both our own grief and the grief of others, and receive the hope you offer.

Be ever present with us, Lord Jesus, our friend and companion, through life and death, through sorrow and joy, through ups and downs, through tears and laughter, through love and loss. Amen

Carol: "Welcome to Our World"

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Tears are falling, hearts are breaking;
How we need to hear from God.
You've been promised, we've been waiting,
welcome holy Child, welcome holy Child.

Hope that you don't mind our manger,
how I wish we would have known.
But long awaited, holy Stranger,
make Yourself at home, please make Yourself at home.
Bring Your peace into our violence,
bid our hungry souls be filled.
Word now breaking heaven's silence,
welcome to our world, welcome to our world.

Fragile finger sent to heal us,
tender brow prepared for thorn,
tiny heart whose blood will save us,
unto us is born, unto us is born.

So wrap our injured flesh around You,
breathe our air and walk our sod.
Rob our sin and make us holy,
perfect Son of God, perfect Son of God.
Welcome to our world.

Poem for Blue Christmas

As winter dusk
pulls the solstice close,
and frost lays down
its silver hush,
the deep blue of the season
chills the senses,
and folds itself into the silence
where words
leave no impression,
with hardly an echo

in the cold,
you hold your breath –
the weight of a winter's night –
heavy with waiting,
and you have the sensation
something extraordinary is about to happen.

It is as if there is a gap in your memory
where a distant phrase once sat,
and ancient word
that has lived there for long lengths of time,
but has now shifted
just out of sight,
but the pattern of it
agitates the air
as if drawing breath,
and soon to be spoken,
and you have the sensation
something extraordinary is about to happen.

And the deepest midnight
harbors such promise,
filled with silent echoes
of words not yet spoken,
sounds not yet made,
fingers not yet clinging,
eyes not yet seeing,
love not yet broken,
and you have the sensation
something extraordinary
is about to happen,
in the night.

Carol: "Behold the Savior"

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Oh, what innocence sleeping
in a manger under dreamless skies.
See the newborn King trading
ev'ry glory for a silent night.

Here is the promise we have waited for.
He will not leave us in the dark.

He will bear our weight. He will bear our shame.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Jesus Christ, law of love and light.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.

Veiled deity, praise of ev'ry angel,
shepherds bowing low.
Sweet humility, mercy as a baby,
God in flesh and bone.

Here is the promise we have waited for.
He will not leave us in the dark.

He will bear our weight. He will bear our shame.

Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Jesus Christ, law of love and light.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Behold the Savior. Emmanuel, Emmanuel.

Here is the promise we have waited for.
He will not leave us in the dark.
He is the promise we have waited for,
the cry of ev'ry searching heart.

He will bear our weight. He will bear our shame.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Jesus Christ, law of love and light.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.

Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Come lift Him high, behold the Savior.
Behold the Savior.

Lighting the Candles – Christmas Wishes

My wish for you this Christmas is hope:
the hope that things can be different,
that the odds can be reversed,
that justice can prevail,
that we can see God turning cartwheels
right in front of our eyes.

Why?

Because God is continually trying to attract our attention
so that, even in the darkest of life,
we can see a flicker of hope.

Light first candle.

My wish for you this Christmas is peace:
not that small moment when all is silent
and you can take a breath,

but peace that is deep and everlasting,
that seeps into everything you do,
changing your perception,
calming your fear,
letting you relax as you have never done before.

Light second candle.

My wish for you this Christmas is joy:
joy that ripples right to your toes,
not the easy smile you wear
or forced jolliness you perform,
but a joy that bubbles up from the depths
lifting your spirit,
sending you soaring,
leaving you reeling and breathless;
the joy of the baby God.

Light third candle.

My wish for you this Christmas is love:
the love that comes in the form of a baby
born in poverty and seen as a threat to political stability –
that kind of love –
not sentimental or slushy,
but grounded in the reality of a harsh and brutal life,
fighting for survival,
succeeding against the odds,
making all the difference;
love that perseveres because love is of God.

Light fourth candle.

And with these gifts
of hope and peace and joy and love,
God fills us to the brim
so that we can overflow
into the world around us,
being Christ to each other

seeing Christ in each other
and serving even the least of these.
My wish for you this Christmas is Christ.

Light the center candle.

Carol: "Night of Silence" with "Silent Night"

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Cold are the people, winter of life,
we tremble in shadows this cold endless night,
frozen in the snow lie roses, sleeping,
flowers that will echo the sunrise,
fire of hope is our only warmth,
weary its flame will be dying soon.

Voice in the distance, call in the night,
on wind you enfold us. You speak of the light,
gentle on the ear you whisper softly,
rumors of a dawn so embracing,
breathless love awaits darkened souls,
soon will we know of your morning.

Spirit among us, shine like the star,
your light that guides shepherds and kings from afar,
shimmer in the sky so empty, lonely,
rising in the warmth of your Son's love,
star unknowing of night and day,
Spirit we wait for your loving Son.

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: "Alleluia;
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.

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.

Prayers of the People

In the spirit of this season
let us now confidently ask our God
for all the good things we need:
For ourselves
as we participate in this Christmas
coping with our many different losses.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For our families and friends,
that they may continue to help and support us.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For any person we have loved who has died,
for all the losses we know in our lives,
that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For our family and friends,
that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For peace throughout the world
as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels
on that faraway hillside.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance
as taught by Jesus your Christ.

God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

God of great compassion and love,
listen to the prayers of these your people.
Grant to all,
especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas,
the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus,
who taught us to pray:

**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.**

Carol: "Still, Still, Still" or "Winter Snow"

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Still, still, still, he sleeps this night so chill!
The virgin's tender arms enfolding,
warm and safe the child are holding.
Still, still, still, he sleeps this night so chill.

Sleep, sleep, sleep, he lies in slumber deep
while angel hosts from heaven come winging,
sweetest songs of joy are singing.
Sleep, sleep, sleep, he lies in slumber deep.

Blessing

May the light of the Creator, the light of Christ, and the illuminating presence of the Spirit be with us all as we go from here, remembering the empty places in our midst, but released to serve you, God, in bringing light to our families, to our friends, and to our world. Amen.

Postlude