

**Christmas Eve Worship  
First Presbyterian Church  
December 24, 2020**

*a thrill of hope*  
THE WEARY WORLD  
*rejoices*



**Prelude**

**Welcome**

How strange it is to celebrate Christmas Eve without the sanctuary full of people. This is not the Christmas we are used to. It is not the Christmas we had hoped for. But Christmas has always been full of unanticipated grace, ever since that night so long ago when a weary young couple, tired from a long journey and expecting a child, found no room at the inn, and instead took refuge in a stable. Regardless of where we are celebrating this year, we can be assured that there is reason to rejoice, and Christ will meet us where we are. So come, come to the manger.

**Opening Carol: "O Come All Ye Faithful"**

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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!

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!

## Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Light one candle for Christ.  
Because the world is broken and the wait is long  
but Christ is with us through it all.  
In humble manger in a back-water town - a baby.  
On a convict's cross - a king.  
in every heart and every home  
where hope, peace, joy, and love endure-  
Christ with us.  
"Glory to God in the Highest heaven," she whispers,  
"and peace to all on earth."  
So we light this candle for Christ  
a reminder of the promise of this season:  
**All: Christ with us!**

## Candle Response: "O Holy Night"

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O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming, with glowing hearts by his cradle we stand.  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming, here come the wise men from Orient land.  
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger, in all our trials born to be our friend.  
He knows our need, to our weakness no stranger. Behold your King! Before him lowly bend  
Behold your King, your King before him bend.

Truly he taught us to love one another; his law is love and his gospel is peace.  
Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we, let all within us praise his holy name.  
Christ is the Lord, O praise his name forever, his pow'r and glory evermore proclaim.  
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim.

## Come to the Manger

**The Story of Christmas based on Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-11**

**Reader 1:** Have I got a story to tell. One you may know very well. It has angels, shepherds, magi and stars shining bright on this holiest of holiest, Christmas Eve night. It's about hoping that good dreams we've long had will come true. It's a love story from heaven. A love story written...for you. And with much anticipating, we've been a long time waiting for this day, so elating, to finally be here. So without further ado, come, let us take you to the manger, where all the hopes and dreams of the world will come true.

## **Carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

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O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

**Reader 2:** Look! Here comes the blessed Mary, and her faithful husband, Joseph. They've been traveling a long way from their village of Nazareth. The days have been tough. The road has been hard. But finally, up ahead, Bethlehem sits not too far away.

**Reader 1:** God told Mary she was going to have a little baby. A sweet, perfect baby boy. And its almost time for him to come and give the world great joy. And after such a long trip, she is most ready to rest. But all the rooms in the inns of this little town are taken. But one innkeeper does his best.

**Reader 2:** He had no room in his inn. They were already packed to the brim. Like them, many had traveled so very far for the census that Caesar demanded so he could boast and raise taxes. But what the innkeeper had, he gave. He was sorry, it wasn't much. It was his stable, where the animals sleep. Tonight, maybe they would help keep the young family warm. *(place stable and animals in nativity scene)*

**Reader 1:** So they went to the stable, and there Mary and Joseph were able to thank God for providing them some place to rest and some peace. It was going to be a story for the ages, at least. Because there, amongst the oxen and donkeys and rams, amongst strange noises and stranger smells, was born...the Great I Am. God's holy perfect lamb. A baby boy. Heaven's joy. The Savior of all humankind. *(place Mary, Joseph, & Jesus in the nativity scene)*

## **Christmas Prayer**

We come to your manger, each of us, in the stillness of this night. Here we know our profound powerlessness, and here you are – a fragile powerless newborn, yet the newborn child in whom we recognize the ruler of the universe. We hear your newborn cry, the cry we have been waiting for – "Make room! Make room for me!" Fragile God, born in the night – Meet us here at your manger. Meet us as a newborn child meets new parents, come to change our lives forever. Meet us as the newborn who insists that we make room for you, who requires that we reorder our lives to pay attention to you, who demands that we be re-centered on the very center of life. Fragile God, born in the night – You come as a tiny light in a vast darkness, yet that fragile and flickering light changes the darkness completely. Fragile God, meet us here in the lighting of our small lights, that we may know your awesome power making room among us as the light that shines in the darkness, the fragile light that the darkness cannot overpower. Fragile God, there is room in our inn. Be born in our night. Amen.

**Carol: "Away in a Manger"**

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Away in the manger, no crib for his 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 in the hay.

The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky, and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

**Reader 2:** Jesus. God's only son. The perfect gift for a weary world. Jesus. God intended him for the manger and then so much more. Jesus. Like a light in the darkness, he came to make hopes real. Jesus. He would be for *all* people. And we'll start with some shepherds in the field.

**Reader 1:** *(dressed as a shepherd)* Com, all you shepherds. Come now. Now's the time to tend to our flocks through the cold, cold dark night. Come, all you shepherds. We need you in the fields here. The sheep are all bleating for their shepherd to come near. Come, shepherds, come. We work hard to protect our sheep. And when night comes, we are still working even as we sleep on the cold, cold ground. There are wild animals all around. So, we have to keep watch to make sure our sheep do not wander or get taken away. That's how devote our lives each day. We are shepherds, and although we are very, very, very poor, we must be worth so much more than the dirt we sleep in on the floor. Because, well...wait and see!

**Carol: "The First Nowell"**

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The first Nowell the angel did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,  
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw as star shining in the east beyond them far;  
and to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest; o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
and there it did both stop and stay, right over the place where Jesus lay.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, born is the King of Israel.

**Reader 2:** *(dressed as an angel)* Heaven is preparing a chorus to sing of the birth of a baby, Jesus, the King of Kings. So come, angels! Come angels! From every corner of heaven, come! Come, angels, the Lord has summoned his heavenly hosts to announce this holy little one! Come angels! We must tell the world of this gift God has given to all humankind. Come now, angels. Come and ready yourselves to sing praises to God, the Most High! Hark, ye herald angels, the heart of heaven has taken on humanity, God's love for all the eye can see, born this day just a tiny baby, but His love is huge and we must say it loud! God to the earth has come down! We are the first in time to tell this timeless story of God taking off his glory to walk a human story. Ready? Are you ready? Watch and you will see. Nothing will ever be the same after this declaration we are making.

Do not be afraid! I bring you good news that will cause great joy, in Bethlehem, a baby is born. And he's so much more than just a little boy! He is for all the people! He has been born for you! He is the Messiah, the Lord! Come and see him! All of you!

**Carol: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"**

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Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king.  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;  
with the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king!"

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!"

**Reader 1:** *(still dressed like a shepherd)* God wants to see us shepherds? He wants *us* to see the birth of His Son? But who are we that God would want us to greet the holy one? We are poor, nothing great. Could this gift really be for *everyone*? Are you sure he wants us to come to the manger?

**Reader 2:** *(still dressed like an angel)* Jesus is a gift for *all* people, so don't be stranger. He's just over there, born poor, just like you, in a stable. All who are able, come to the manger! Angels, now is the moment! With joyful voices we raise glorious praise! Shout praises with me! Glory to God in the highest! Glory to God in the highest! Glory to God in the highest! *(Place angel in nativity scene)*

**Carol: "Angels We Have Heard on High"**

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Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
and the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.  
Glo-ria in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria in excelsis Deo!

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heavenly song?  
Glo-ria in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria in excelsis Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;  
come, adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.  
Glo-ria in excelsis Deo! Glo-ria in excelsis Deo!

**Reader 1:** *(still dressed like a shepherd)* Should we go to Bethlehem and see this gift of love, sent from above that God has given to you and me? Come to the manger with me!

**Reader 2:** So these poor shepherds came. God had invited them to see this gift for all people. They came to the manger on bended knee. And Mary, delighted to share Jesus with them. He would grow strong and love *all* people. Even the poorest, like these shepherds. (*place shepherd and sheep in the nativity scene*)

**Carol: “Forever Amen (Glory to God)”**

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What a bright and holy moment when heaven broke through time  
and the face of our salvation lay in a manger that night.  
The shepherds and the wise men saw hope across the sky;  
in a starlit revelation, unveiling love so divine.

Glory to God in the highest! Praise him without end.  
Glory to God in the highest! Forever and ever, amen!

There is nothing that can stop it; redemptions been released,  
from the stable through the ages setting the prisoner free.

Glory to God in the highest! Praise him without end.  
Glory to God in the highest! Forever and ever, amen!  
Forever, amen!

In excelsis, in excelsis Deo, oh, Deo.  
In excelsis, in excelsis Deo, oh, Deo.

Glory to God in the highest! Praise him without end.  
Glory to God in the highest! Forever and ever, amen!  
Forever, amen!

**Reader 2:** And on that first Christmas day, in a land far away, some wise men stood gazing in the sky. For a star shone most bright that holiest of nights over Bethlehem, and these magi wondered why.

**Reader 1:** (*dressed as magi*) Could this be? Was it true? I’ve heard about this! A light sent from heaven! We cannot dismiss this sign and chance to go see this little baby born the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Messiah most holy. He is the one who will save all there is to save. Come, we must go, though it be a long way. So come, all you magi. Come all those who are wise enough to make the long journey and see heaven’s eyes in the face of a child who gives love without bias to all nations, to all people. See the star? It guides our way. So come, magi, come. We have a long journey ahead. Come, magi, come. The road will be our bed until we can lay our head and our gifts at the feet of this little king. Come, all who are wise, and we will bring the very best we have to offer. We will empty our coffers and still, could we ever bring enough treasures to honor such a King?

**Reader 2:** So these magi from far away, though the journey was long, packed up their best gifts to bring to Jesus and went on and on for days upon days and weeks upon weeks until finally in Bethlehem they found what they went to seek. A sweet little boy. Heaven’s heart. The world’s joy. A tiny little king who would bring peace to all from the very greatest to the very least.

**Reader 1:** *(still dressed as magi)* We bring gold, we bring frankincense, we bring precious myrrh. We bring all that we have to honor this Savior. We lay down our gifts at this tiny treasure's feet. Come, magi, lay down your gifts here. Do not keep anything that you have to give from Jesus. All who are wise, give your treasures, and when every treasure is given then give how you live your life every day. Live your life like the treasure you are. A treasure of God's to give away.

**Carol: "When I Think Upon Christmas"**

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When I think upon Christmas, words can't express  
how our Father in heaven has sent us His best  
to be born in a manger, the King in the hay,  
and creation will worship His name.  
For the joy of the world He was born,  
bringing peace to us all through the gift of the Son.  
Now the darkest of ages are done.  
For the Savior of heaven has come.

When I think upon Jesus, the King of all days,  
I can't help but respond with an offering of praise.  
Like the wise men and shepherds, I'll follow Your light;  
like the angels, I'll lift Your name high.  
For the joy of the world He was born,  
bringing peace to us all through the gift of the Son.  
Now the darkest of ages are done.  
For the Savior of heaven has come.

When I think upon Jesus, the King of all days,  
I can't help but respond with an offering of praise.  
Like the wise men and shepherds, I'll follow Your light;  
like the angels, I'll lift Your name high.  
For the joy of the world You were born,  
bringing peace to us all through the gift of Your love.  
Now the darkest of ages are done.  
For the Savior of heaven has come.  
Ooh. Ooh. Ooh. Ooh.

For the joy of the world You were born,  
bringing peace to us all through the gift of Your love.  
Now the darkest of ages are done.  
For the Savior of heaven has come.  
Now, I look back in reverence to that holy night,  
for the God of the heavens had us on his mind.  
Let us sing of His glory, rejoice in His Name.  
Oh, Emmanuel with us always.  
And forever His kingdom will reign.

## Celebration of Holy Communion

The bread and wine we're about to share joins us to the people throughout history and across the world who have come to this meal in search of life.

Just as Jesus' birth was for the whole world this bread and this fruit of the vine are for everyone - for the hungry, for the lost, for those who search, and those who are found, for those who question, and those who know peace. This is bread and wine for everyone.

Let us pray: Holy God, we praise you. Let the heavens be joyful, and the earth be glad. We bless you for creating the whole world, for your promises to your people, and for the life we know in Jesus Christ your son. Born of Mary, he shares our life. Eating with sinners, he welcomes us. Leading his followers, he guides us. Dying on the cross, he loves us. Risen from the dead, he gives new life.

On the night before Jesus died, he had supper with his friends. He took bread, thanked you, as we have thanked you, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends, saying: this is my body, given for you. Take it and eat. Each time you do this, remember me.

After supper he took the wine, thanked you for it, and passed it to his friends, saying: This cup is the new promise God has made with you in my blood. Take it and drink. Each time you do this, remember me.

We pray, God of love, that you will send your Holy Spirit upon us and what we do here: that we and these signs, touched by your Spirit, may be signs of life and love to each other and to all the world. Amen.

Bread: This is the bread of life.

Cup: This is the cup of salvation

## The Story Continues

**Reader 2:** Jesus. The name that holds the weight of the world.

**Reader 1:** Jesus. The hope of every man, woman, boy and girl.

**Reader 2:** Like a light in the darkness God's Son humbly came.

**Reader 1:** Like a light in the darkness he carried the name of God to the orphans, the lonely, and the lame.

**Reader 2:** He brought hope to the hopeless and we can do the same to those still walking in darkness who call upon his name.

**Reader 1:** The dark is so dark.

**Reader 2:** The light is so dim.

**Reader 1:** Thank God for the star that guides us to Him.

**Reader 2:** *(dressed like a star)* Darkness, emptiness, loneliness, fear. All who want the light to shine on them come here to the manger. Come, follow the light that breaks the darkest darkness on this holiest of nights. So come, stars, come stars! It's our turn to shine. We will not let darkness hide this little light of mine. Come, stars, to the manger. Be the light in dark places. We'll shine bright and share the light across all the faces of those who look to heaven. This love born tonight erases any traces of darker ages. That first Christmas night a single star showed the way to Jesus. Proving one star, one little light, ultimately frees us from the darkness all around us. This little light of mine can brightly shine leading others to Jesus. So stars, stand and shine brightly on Christmas Day and every day after then. We are a bright city on a hill not easily hidden. Be the light of Jesus wherever you may go. And guide those walking in the dark to come to the manger. To come home.

### **Sharing the Light: "Night of Silence" with "Silent Night"**

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As we do each year, we are going to share the light of our candles and sing, "Silent Night." This year, our candles are spread far and wide, in our homes in this community and across the nation. Wherever you are, let your light shine like the Christmas star, shining hope, peace, joy, love, and grace into the world.

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.

## **The Story Continues**

**Reader 1:** *(dressed as a shepherd)* So, now you've heard the story you may have heard before, of shepherds...

**Reader 2:** *(dressed as an angel)* ...angels...

**Reader 1:** *(dressed as magi)* ...magi...

**Reader 2:** *(dressed as a star)* ...stars...

**Reader 1:** ...and Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us.

**Reader 2:** I'm pretty sure it will not be the last time you hear this story of God's glory born in Bethlehem.

**Reader 1:** The story of God come down. Born to be our friend.

**Reader 2:** He came for the poor.

**Reader 1:** He came for the rich.

**Reader 2:** And everyone in between.

**Reader 1:** He came to bring light to a dark, dark world.

**Reader 2:** He came for you and me.

**Reader 1:** Jesus came for all people that first Christmas day. Those who were nearby...

**Reader 2:** ...or far, far away.

**Reader 1:** Jesus came to show God's love walking around on the earth.

**Reader 2:** So at Christmas time we joyfully celebrate God's gift, his birth.

**Reader 1:** So come, Shepherds.

**Reader 2:** Come, angels.

**Reader 1:** Come, magi.

**Reader 2:** Come, stars.

**Reader 1:** Come however, whenever, whoever you are. With God, you're never a stranger. So, come...everyone. Come to the Manger.

**Carol: "Joy to the World"**

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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.

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.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness and wonder of his love,  
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

**Postlude**