

**Worship Service of First Presbyterian Church
December 24, 2017 - "Candlelight Communion Service"**

PRELUDE
A CHRISTMAS VIDEO

Dr. Dan Dykema
Emmanuel

After the video, the preacher will return to the lectern & say....

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Isaiah 9)

There will be no gloom for her that was in anguish.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy;

They rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest,

As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder,

The rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Mid'ian.

For unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given;

And the government will be upon his shoulder,

And his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Of the increase of his government & of peace there will be no end,

He will establish the throne of David, and uphold it

With justice and with righteousness for evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Let us worship God, beginning with the lighting of the Christ candle by the Whitehead family...

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Whitehead Family

READER 1: On each Sunday of Advent, we have taken special notice of the angel's messages in the Christmas story and thought about what each of them meant to those hearing them then-- and now. As we light the Advent candles tonight, we begin by lighting each of the candles we lit during the four Sundays of Advent. The first candle reminds us of the words spoken by the angel to Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard."

(Reader 2 lights the first purple candle.)

The second candle calls to mind the angel's encouragement to Mary, "The Lord is with you."

(Reader 2 lights the second purple candle.)

The third candle recalls the appearance of the angel to Joseph with the instruction, "Give him the name Jesus."

(Reader 2 lights the third pink candle.)

The fourth candle represents the announcement to the shepherds of "I bring you good news of great joy."

(Reader 2 lights the fourth purple candle.)

READER 2: The center candle represents the central message of Christmas, "God is with us." This time there would be no visit or message from an angel. God came himself, in the form of a child, to fulfill all that the Lord had promised through the prophet Isaiah, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Emmanuel-- which means 'God is with us'." John tells us, "For God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

We light this candle because on this night we celebrate the coming of God into the world.

(Reader 2 lights the center white candle.)

READER 1: Let us Pray... O God, on this most holy of nights, you took our nature upon yourself, were born of a woman and dwelt among us, that we might be born anew. Grant that by your grace we might become your sons and daughters and live every day of our lives secure in the knowledge of your love for us. O Come Emmanuel, be with us and dwell with us, this night and forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

(Return to your customary seats. Thank you for helping.)

*CAROL

“O Come All Ye Faithful”

The Hymnal #41

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us come away from our preoccupation with the things that have kept us from making room for Christ in our lives or for taking notice of his coming. In the confident humility and obedience of Joseph, Mary, and the Shepherds, let us confess our sins and pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

God of the Manger and the Cross, our eyes have focused for so long on what is temporary that we cannot see the signs of your everlasting presence & activity. We confess that we have too often squandered our opportunities to share your Word and show your Love to those in need around us. We have allowed our doubts to overwhelm us, our sins to bind us, our fears to freeze us in our tracks. You offer us new dreams, & we succumb to old weaknesses you offer us hope and we choose the comfortable. Our questions are silenced; our petitions, unexpressed; our faith, insufficient; our service, inadequate. Come among us and shine the light of your righteousness upon us exposing our hypocrisies, ignorance, and impotence. Then grant us the grace of your forgiveness so that we may be freed to share the Good News of your coming and our hope we have in your coming again in all your glory. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Hear again the message of the angels to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid; for behold--- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace among those whom he favors!” ..Friends, believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA

Refrain from “Angels We Have Heard on High”

The Hymnal #23

Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

He has removed the divisions between ALL people and God and has become our peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Pass the peace with one another.

Let us remain standing, and confess the faith which unites us in love and service to our Lord Jesus Christ, by saying together, the affirmation of faith adapted for us from Hebrews 1 and printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe.

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Hebrews 1

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC

“O Holy Night”

Dr. David DeSeguirant

After the soloist finishes, the preacher will return to the pulpit & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 2:1-20

(Pew Bible, p.889)

“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.

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Our thanks be to God!

SERMON

“What If He Hadn’t Come”

Rev. Mike Morgan

Preparing for large Christmas Eve family gathering, a mother had been giving out orders like a drill sergeant: "Pick up your things! Don't get your clothes dirty! Put away those toys."

Well, her 4-year-old daughter had been underfoot all day, so she sent her to the next room to play with their wooden Nativity set.

As the mother scurried around setting the table she overheard her daughter talking to her toys in the same tone of voice the mother had used: "I don't care who you are, get those camels out of my living room!"

For years, many have attempted to get more than camels out of their living rooms. Over the years, there have been repeated and concerted efforts to get Christ out of Christmas-- everything from removing Christmas carols from the public schools, to banning nativity scenes on public property, to taking the name of Jesus and any mention of Christmas out of all public discourse. It has been a persistent and unrelenting push to remove any influence God may have on this holiday.

In 1991, Dave Barry commented on the effect this phenomena has had in Florida:

“To avoid offending anybody, my son’s school has dropped religion altogether and started singing about the weather. They now hold the winter program in February and sing increasingly unmemorable songs such as ‘Winter Wonderland,’ ‘Frosty the Snowman’ and--this is a real song – ‘Suzy Snowflake.’ All of which is pretty funny because we live in Miami. A visitor from another planet would assume that the children belonged to the Church of Meteorology.”

What if political correctness wins out? What if we lose the celebration of Christmas with its traditions and meanings? What would your life be like without Christmas?

Each year we get to enjoy one of the most enduring Christmas films of all time, the Frank Capra classic, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. Jimmy Stewart plays the part of George Bailey, who, following a series of calamities, wishes out loud that he had never been born. His guardian angel, Clarence grants his wish and lets him see what his world would have been like if he had never been born.

I would like us to imagine, as horrible as such a thought might be, what would our world be like if Jesus had never been born. What if the divine had never taken human form? What if the feet who walked on streets of gold, never walked the rock and dirt roads of earth?

If Christmas had never happened there would be...no winter family gathering.....no hope of a coming greater Light as days get shorter... no warm hearts and warm wishes from family, friends, and church to re-

move the cill from our lives and thermometers and spirits fall..... no Christmas gifts..... no holiday traditions..... no Christmas carols.... no decorations... no Christmas trees... no Charlie Brown Christmas specials..... no replays of "A Christmas Carol".... and... Children would have to go to school the entire month of December. Without Christmas, December would be a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad month!

If there had never been a Christmas, the world would be far different than it is today – in ways you may never have considered. For instance, when Jesus came, He taught His followers to love God, but also their neighbors! To live out this idea, His followers invented the idea of organized charity.

It was the early Christian communities that stressed support for widows, orphans, the sick and disabled. They organized efforts to help those who were dying. They built, staffed, and paid for hospitals. In recent times, Christ's followers have founded virtually every charitable organization on earth, including the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, World Relief, World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, Food for the Hungry, and Compassion International.

Without the birth of Christ, education would be very different today. Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, and of course, Jerusalem on the Brazos, Baylor University wouldn't exist. In fact, almost every one of the first 123 American colleges and universities were founded by Christians. Hard to imagine those schools that now teach evolution & deny the very existence of God were started as Christian universities.

If there had never been a Christmas, much of the good in this world would be missing. Much of the good you've experienced would be missing. Everyone has a Christmas memory that warms the heart when it is icy cold everywhere else.

But without Christmas, something far worse wouldn't have happened: Christ would not have come. Christ would not have died for us, and our sins would still be tied around our necks like an albatross.

It is so ironic to watch children open their presents on Christmas morning. The joy in their faces, the anticipation of what's in those brightly wrapped gifts. The highlight of opening Christmas presents is to watch the facial expressions of those we love as they unwrap that special gift that was picked out just for them. We want to get our kids a good gifts, don't we? It makes us feel good. What kind of feeling do you think God gets whenever one of His children open up the gift He gave especially for them?

Do you think that any child would leave a gift unopened if they knew it was the best gift ever and that it was theirs? Yet, to this day there remains for some, an unopened gift from our heavenly Father--Forgiveness. If you were playing Monopoly it would be a get out of jail free card, good for unlimited uses. If it was golf, it would mean unlimited mulligans on every shot on every hole. If the game was "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire", it would be unlimited phone a friends. If the game is life, which it is, one gets unlimited do overs, as if you were Bill Murray trapped in an endless loop of Groundhog Days, with each morning bringing you closer to getting it right and being changed for the better with the dawn of each new day.

So for all our whining and complaining, isn't it amazing how many have left the greatest gift ever given still wrapped, unopened beneath their tree.

I recently heard about a pastor who went on a tour of the Holy land. While he was in Bethlehem he bought a nativity set. It was carved out of olive wood and had all the usually figures: sheep and oxen; wise men and the shepherds; Mary, Joseph, and, of course, the baby Jesus.

As he began the return trip home, he had to go through the very strict security at Tel Aviv airport. He didn't figure that the nativity set would attract any attention but he was wrong. Each figure was carefully scrutinized and even X-rayed. This pastor asked why they were being so diligent. The security officer explained it this way: "You see, we must make sure there is nothing explosive in them."

Christmas is explosive, it's the power of God on display.

There is power in knowing that almighty God loved us enough to come to earth, be born, live a perfect life, die for our sins, and then rise from the dead and give us the promise of new, abundant, and eternal life.

So then.....if you have never opened God's free gift of salvation, He invites you to do so today. Do it now. None of us are promised tomorrow. And if you haven't received His gift of His forgiveness, He invites you to unwrap that present tonight. Twenty four hours and Christmas will be over, but His gift of

love for you will never end.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, once more we have heard your great good news for all people. Having seen your light, having heard your word, having praised your name, help us to take this good news of great joy to all people. Open our hands and hearts to receive and serve you as our King, and then open our mouths so that we may share the love you have revealed to us, and the hope you bring to all people.

To the sick, may we speak words of healing and hope.

To the lonely, may we be signs of God's loving presence.

To the poor, may our acts of kindness offer assurance that God's love is free gift for all.

To the disbelieving, may our lives be confirmation that God really is with us, in the flesh.

Be known to us now, we pray, in the bread and cup. Consuming these elements may we take you in and offer you the highest place in our lives. Take command of our minds and hearts that we may be totally and forever devoted to Christ, who taught us to pray saying....

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.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(In Unison)

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

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

The Hymnal #38

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

Come - this is the table of the one who was born in Bethlehem for us. Come and receive the gift that he offers us - his body broken & his blood poured out - for ALL -- that all who believe may be made whole.

The Words of Institution

On the night in which we was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "take, eat, this is my body, broken for you.". In like manner, when the meal was done, Jesus took the cup, and after giving thanks, offered it to his disciples saying, "take, drink, this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me."

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

The Distribution of the Elements

Communion will be served tonight by intinction, Starting with those in the front pews, each worshiper is asked to come forward by way of the center aisle, receive a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, place it in his/her mouth, and return to your seat by way of the outside aisles. If you would have difficulty coming forward, please remain in your seat and the elements will be brought to you.

The Prayer After Receiving

Lord Jesus, we have gathered here this night to remember and give thanks, and to ask your forgiveness for forgetting those we have overlooked and forgotten. Having received of your body and blood, given so freely that we might live eternally with you, help us rightly to remember your birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May this Christmas Eve bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven. And may Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, to your eternal glory. Amen.

THE SHARING OF THE LIGHT

The ushers will pass the light from their candle to those seated on the center aisle. It is important that lighted candles not be tipped. Once your candle is lit, you are asked to pass the light of Christ to the person seated next to you. As the light from candles is passed from one to another, worshipers are asked to keep lit candles erect and to dip only unlit candles.

As the ushers begin passing the light, the minister will say...

“Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.”

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Would you join me in the Litany of the Light printed in your bulletins...

THE LITANY OF LIGHT

(adapted from John 1)

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 was made.

What has come into being in him was life,

And the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,

And the darkness did not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world.

And to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God,

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,

And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

THE SHARING OF THE LIGHT

As the light from candles is passed from one to another, worshipers are asked to keep lit candles erect and to dip only unlit candles.

*CAROL

“Silent Night, Holy 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 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 BLESSING

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep YOUR hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And may He bring you the most blessed, and merry Christmas ever. Amen.

*THE POSTLUDE

Dr. Dan Dykema