



FOR YOUR REFLECTION

The nativity scene... is far removed from the very bloody and very raw and very human process of birth. But these are the kinds of things that make up our faith: the naked, the primal, even the offensive... the sadness, the questions, the longing, the despair, the anger. Encompassed within the birth of Jesus is the deeply difficult and deeply beautiful, the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the material. Like our lives, it was fleshly and carnal—and it was also holy.

from, “A Human and Holy Birth” by Kat Armas

Choral Introit "All My Heart This Night Rejoices" Choral Ensemble
(Johann Ebeling)

Ringing of the Bell

Christmas Proclamation (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7a)

***Opening Carol** "O, Come All Ye Faithful" Hymnal #41

***Lighting of the Christmas Wreath** Gail Skamfer and Lori Anda

Leader: To a people longing for hope and yearning for deliverance, the prophet Isaiah declared: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined..."

All: **Tonight, we come seeking hope, peace, joy, and love, and we find these things in a child. God made flesh as a baby in a manger. A baby who is both the beginning and the end of our salvation, who dwells with us even now.**

Leader: We celebrate the arrival of the Light that shines in lost and broken places. We wait for the day when we will live in the fullness of God's Realm.

All: **We light these candles as signs of our shocking hope, God's just peace, the world's fierce joy, the love that transforms all—and Emmanuel, God-With-Us.**

Leader: May the Light burning in our hearts guide us, comfort us, protect us, and tend us in all seasons and circumstances, reminding us that day and night, in the light and in the darkness, God is with us.

All: **Welcome, Emmanuel! Our salvation has come!**

***Christmas Prayer**

Emmanuel, God-With-Us tonight, your light lifts up our hearts, our spirits, and our voices. We give you thanks for your birth long ago and your presence with us always. Your hope is more trustworthy than our promises. Your peace is deeper than our prayers. Your joy teaches us to sing even when we want to cry. Your love is wider than the chorus of the galaxies, and yet your Star shines on us now in this church which has become a manger. Amen.

Carol "Angels We Have Heard on High" Hymnal #23

THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN READINGS AND SONGS

First Lesson Luke 1:26-38 Carol Diser Ropella
Anthem "The Angel Gabriel"
(arr Pettman/Wickham) Choir
Second Lesson Luke 2:1, 3-7 Jon Blomquist
Carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
(vs. 1 and 2) Hymnal #44
Third Lesson Luke 2:8-14 Rachel Ropella
Carol "Away in a Manger"
(verse 1) Hymnal #25
Fourth Lesson Luke 2:15-16 Connie Flug
Anthem "In the Bleak Midwinter"
(Rossetti/Holst) Choir w/Richie Price
Fifth Lesson Luke 2:17-20 Bob Zdechlik
Carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" Hymnal #31

A TIME TO RESPOND IN FAITHFULNESS

Offering

A portion of tonight's offering will be given to the UCC Christmas Fund, which supports medical, crisis and pension needs of clergy and lay church employees who have retired.

Offertory "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" Bell Choir

Offertory Prayer *(in unison)*

Emmanuel is born among us. Our hearts are full; our joy is boundless. God-With-Us, receive these gifts of love for the well-being of your people. Amen.

SERVICE OF LIGHTS

Anthem "O, Holy Night"
(Adolph Adam) Isaiah May

Contemporary Readings Rev. Kathleen Remund
"The Risk of Birth," by Madeline L'Engle
"Carrying A Candle," by Jan Sutch Pickard

***Candle Lighting** "Before the Marvel of This Night" Senior Choir
(Carl Schalk)

As the choir sings, the ushers will come to the start of each row to light our candles. We will pass the light, candle by candle, down the row. When all the candles are lit, the choir will lead us in singing "Silent Night." Candles will remain lit through the singing of "Silent Night" and the Benediction.

***Carol** "Silent Night" Hymnal #60

***Benediction**

Leader: On this holy night, receive the mystery of the Word made Flesh—do not try to resist it or argue against it or define it. On this holy night, rejoice in the madness that the Maker of the stars has come among us. May our hearts be open like a cradle so that Christ can be born in each soul tonight—and from there, flood every heart with light. And may Emmanuel—God with us and for us—be once again incarnate in this world.

All: Amen.

***Extinguishing Candles**

As you depart, please leave your candles in one of the buckets set out by the entrances to the sanctuary.

***Closing Carol** "Joy to the World"

Postlude "Angels From the Realms of Glory" Michaela Gifford
(Kenneth Varner)

The staff wishes all of you a joyous and hope-filled Christmas!

Kathleen Remund, Ordained Minister
Karen Miller, Director of Faith Formation
Oxana Khramova, Interim Accompanist
Pinckney and Susan Hall, Interim Choral Directors
Cathie Weissman, Bell Choir Director
Susan Zavada, Office Manager
Gail Skamfer, Custodian

Thanks to all who purchased poinsettias. Please take them home with you after the service.

Credits

- The Christmas Candle-Lighting litany was adapted from one written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, and posted in "Christmas Eve 2023 Worship Resources," <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>.
- The Opening Prayer was adapted from one written by Maren C. Tirabassi and published in *Touch Holiness: Resources for Worship*, Updated, eds. Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2012), 21.
- The Prayer of Dedication was adapted from one posted on *Discipleship Ministries*, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>.
- The Benediction was adapted from "First Coming" by Madeline L'Engle and a benediction written by Nancy C. Townley and posted on *Ministry Matters*, <https://www.ministrymatters.com>.
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