

Welcome / Land Acknowledgement

Welcome everyone to this special service celebrating the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we are compelled to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. It is our love of God and neighbour that leads us to acknowledge the land where we gather. We honour God with gratitude for this land and the peoples who have fished, hunted, harvested and gathered here for generations. This is the Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ. It is traditional and unceded land – I don't know the full story of its history but with others I continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

Into this silent night as we make our weary way, just when the night becomes its darkest and we cannot see our path, just then is when the angels rush in... bringing a light of hope and joy – bringing a light of peace and love – bringing into this dark and silent night, the light of Christ.

➤ *Oh come, all ye faithful* (verses 1-4) 159

Call to Worship / Lighting the Christ Candle

We gather to celebrate the birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

With each candle we light, we commit ourselves to seeking hope, peace, joy & love.

We light the Christ candle to shine into the world, reminding us of the new life promised through Jesus' birth.

May the warmth and light of Christ comfort all people, bringing courage to the weary and strength to the oppressed.

Holy One, by the power of your Spirit, help us to shine your light brightly to the world. Affirm within us the conviction to show hope, peace, joy and love throughout our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Songs of Advent¹ Holy

Some of you may remember the first song you listened to on the radio – long before Spotify or iTunes were invented. It is hard to believe that there was a time when people didn't hear songs over the airwaves or on any device.

On a cold winter night in 1906 the sweet sound of one of our most beloved Christmas carols interrupted the quietness of the night and filled the airwaves, the first song ever to be played on the radio:

Hum or sing:

"O holy night! the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Savior's birth."

In the town of Brant Rock, Massachusetts, Reginald Fessenden, a Canadian inventor, set up a microphone in a little studio and played the song on the violin. It was nine o'clock at night on Christmas Eve and families were gathered in their homes ready to celebrate Christmas.

After he played, he read from Luke's gospel: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom God favours."*

What a wonderful thought that a new technology would be used in such a way, to declare the gospel and share the good news about Jesus.

In our world of radio and podcasts and social media where every minute of every day people share, make noise, fill the airwaves, it is refreshing to look at this exciting moment in time – that Reginald used this new platform to spread the good news.

The lyrics of *O Holy Night* have touched lives for more than 150 years in languages around the world. In churches and performance halls, on YouTube and over the radio.

It spreads the message that Christ is the light that shone into our darkness. That God loves us with an everlasting love and gave everything to rescue us from sin and despair. That Jesus is truly the hope of the world who gives meaning to our lives.

As you celebrate the hope, peace, joy and love that is ours this Christmas through fellowship and generosity and worship, may your hearts overflow. And may those who have yet to hear the good news hear it for the first time.

➤ ***O Holy night!***

Isaiah 9:2-7 [OT 638] **Doug Guille**

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. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

➤ *The angel Gabriel from heaven (seated)* **156**

Luke 2:1-7 [NT 58] **Kathy Bracken**

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.

➤ *Infant holy, Infant lowly* **143**

To You a Child is Born²

April In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Doug B An angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them,

April and they were terrified.

Doug B Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in the manger.

Laura/Mary Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Readers Together *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among all people.*

➤ **Angels we have heard on high** *(verses 1-3)* **147**

Laura/Mary When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

April Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

Laura/Mary So they went with hast and found Mary and Joseph,

Doug B and the child lying in a manger.

April When thy saw this they made known what had been told them about this child

Laura/Mary and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

Doug B But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

➤ **Born in the night** *(verse 1 - seated)* **137**

The woodcut nativity scene on the screen was carved in 1511 by Albrecht Dürer. Study it for a moment... <https://www.wikiart.org/en/albrecht-durer/the-nativity-1511>

What do you notice?

In some ways, the scene is just another picture – just another nativity fitting Mary and Joseph with the clothes of its day. The shepherds look like European peasant rather than Middle Eastern herders.

By 1511, European art had achieved some fine moments. The prints of this artists woodcuts were regarded as sophisticated achievement. This is one of his simpler carvings, but it shares one feature with all his other nativity scenes... The world it pictures is falling apart.

Did you notice? Did you spot the gaping holes in the barn roof? See the grass sprouting from the crumbling walls?



In each nativity scene Dürer produced, Christ is born into a world that is falling apart. Those who stoop to welcome the newborn king don't seem to notice but I think it is important for us to see.

Jesus is born for us because we are all in some way incomplete – fragile and often falling apart. Christ is born into our midst when it feels like the roof might just fall in.

For many people in 1511, the roof was falling in: the plague was stalking its victims – unrest was brewing in church and state – the high culture that surrounded Albrecht Dürer had started to come apart at the seams. And so the artist confesses his faith: *Christ is born – again and again – into a world that is falling apart.*

➤ ***Born in the night*** (verse 2 - seated) 137

Surely it seems some days that our world is coming apart at the seams. War and terrorism – crime and punishment – illness, hunger, drought, poverty, poor leadership in our nations, racism, intolerance, unkindness of every kind – everywhere we look it seems. Is there any doubt our world needs a Saviour?

But our Saviour is not a politician who threatens – not a military mind with violent solutions – not an entrepreneur making billions off the labour of others. Our Saviour is a baby.

A baby, one who calls out of us the best we have to offer – the deep concern, the tender smile, hands willing to clean up a mess. A baby needs wisdom and patience to help it grow and love that won't give up even when it wears thin on another late night.

Such are the gifts Mary and Joseph offered to their child in a threatening time. Such are the gifts we have to offer to our children – our neighbours – our community – our earth itself, when the global roof is falling in. Such are the gifts our Saviour needs to touch the time in which we live with truth and grace.

➤ ***Born in the night*** (verse 3 - seated) 137

And truly, every one of us here knows – in ways both simple and profound – that the world has a way of falling apart despite our best intentions and efforts – despite our faithful confessions and heartfelt prayers. Is there any doubt that **we** need a Saviour too?

Not one who argues with us and says, "I told you so." Not one who frowns at us and makes us regret that we ever needed to ask for help.

It is good news that the Saviour who comes to us when our confidence is leaking and the cracks in our world fill with tears, is a baby – one who looks at us with the wonder of a small child seeing everything, everyone for the first time – one who smiles and reaches for us because we are who we are.

We are there for the trusting touch of this baby's love. And this baby called Jesus – this Saviour – calls out of each one of us the best we have to offer...

- the deep concern that aches within us
- the tender smile that blesses others in a tired moment
- hands willing to clean up a mess whether we are responsible for it or not
- wisdom and patience with ourselves – and with each other – so that we can grow
- and love that won't give up even when it feels threadbare.

We can offer what we have, little though it may seem, because the love of this baby – reaching out from the cradle – reaching out from the cross – will never let us go.

➤ ***Born in the night*** *(verse 4 - seated)* **137**

Invitation to the Lord's Table³

Into our world as into Mary's womb
Into the forgotten places, as into the stable...
Into the lives of the poor, bringing hope
Into the lives of the powerful, bringing caution
Into the lives of the weary, bringing rest
Into the lives of the wise, bringing restlessness
and into our lives and longings,
whatever our estate...

This is the good news:
Christ is coming,
blessed are those who wait on the Lord
Listen, you who have ears to hear,
Listen, and sit down to bread and wine with strangers,
Feed his sheep... Love one another...
and claim new life in his name.

➤ ***Let all mortal flesh keep silence*** **542**

Sharing Bread and Wine

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.
If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.
We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Juice and wine are available.*

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus sat down to a meal with his friends. While they were eating, he took the bread, said a prayer and shared with everyone at the table saying: *This is my body, which is for you. Do this to remember me.*

Later, when the meal was ending, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying: *This cup is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me.*

The one who was first held by Mary, is held for us in this bread.
The one whose body was laid in a manger, is cradled in this cup.
In this bread and cup God comes to us so that we may come to God.

Offering and Prayer of Thanksgiving

As we have received, so let us give...

➤ *In the bleak mid-winter*

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We give thanks, O God, that you have come to us in Jesus Christ, both in the midst of time and history in the city of Bethlehem, and in the timeless presence of the Holy Spirit as we receive the gifts of bread and wine. Bless these offerings and send us out into the world rejoicing, ready to share your love with the people we meet, by the grace of Jesus. Amen

Blessing

In the silence of night, hear the cry of a newborn babe. Dark world – receive your Light – bright hope, rejoice in a Saviour... May Christmas morning see us rejoicing to be God's children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts of the Christ who promises forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit alive within each one of us. Amen

➤ *Silent night*

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² Adapted from a reflection by Nancy Cocks, Invisible We See You; © 2006 Novalis St. Paul University, Ottawa Canada; p161-167.

³ Ibid.