

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
December 27th, 2020
First Sunday in Christmas
Worship Leader: Rev. Stephen Dunkin

Welcome

Call to Worship

(Based on Psalm 95)

O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:

**The Magi studied the heavens and noticed a Star that spoke to them of
the birth of One who was King of the Jews.**

O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:

The peoples who live in the shadows see a glorious light!

O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:

**The Christ who embodies the Word unveils the hidden plan,
making us joint heirs of the promise of salvation through the gospel!**

**O come, let us worship the Lord,
for God has done wondrous things!**

Responsive Prayer of Invocation

God, you have made yourself known,
but in a most amazing way,
coming in weakness, in a tiny baby;
you covered your glory and hid your greatness.

God of mystery and surprise, we praise you.

God, you have made yourself known,
but in a most amazing way,
in a dirty poor stable no one else wanted;
you hid your wealth and infinite riches.

God of mystery and surprise, we praise you.

God, you have made yourself known,
but in a most amazing way,
born to humble working people,
hidden in a simple life,
and yet announced in the stars of heaven and visited by kings.

God of mystery and surprise, we praise you. Amen.

Hymn #174: “Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBEmXFkwcOE>

1. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

2. Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,
comfort your sorrows and answer thy prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

3. Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

4. These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

5. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

Call to Confession (based on John 3:19)

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Let us confess our Sin to God.

Prayer of Confession

God of the Bethlehem star,
everyone is searching for your light
shining in the face of Christ.
The Magi sought Christ simply to worship him.
But Herod sought him to appease his jealous anger.
We confess that our motives in seeking Jesus are not pure.
We do not come simply to worship:
we come to Christ, asking his benefits of reassurance, health, wealth;
asking him to fulfill the hundred petitions

for not-so-important requests that we heap before him.
 But the Magi sought first the kingdom.
 Help us, God, to follow their example,
 putting our own need in perspective,
 worshipping the Christ in love, content to be in your presence,
 and laying our gifts before you.
 Then may we journey, trusting that your goodness and light
 will accompany us all the days of our life. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon (Based on John 1)

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

The Lord's Prayer

**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 the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen**

Responsive Reading Micah 5

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops;
 siege is laid against us;
 with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

**But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
 whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.**

Therefore, he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has given birth;
 then the rest of his brothers shall return
 to the people of Israel.

**And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of
 the LORD,
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their peace.

Ministry of Music #170: “What Star Is This”, Charitas Chamber Chorale
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILmzvfOYtzg>

1. What star is this, with beams so bright,
more lovely than the noonday light?
'Tis sent to announce a newborn King,
glad tidings of our God to bring.

2. 'Tis now fulfilled what God decreed,
'From Jacob shall a star proceed,'
and lo! the Eastern sages stand
to read in heaven the Lord's command.

3. O Jesus, while the star of grace
impels us on to seek your face,
let not our slothful hearts refuse
the guidance of your light to use.

4. To God the Father, God the Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One,
may every tongue and nation raise
an endless song of thankful praise.

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

6 ““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.””

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,

“Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” [9](#) After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10](#) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11](#) And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12](#) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer for Illumination

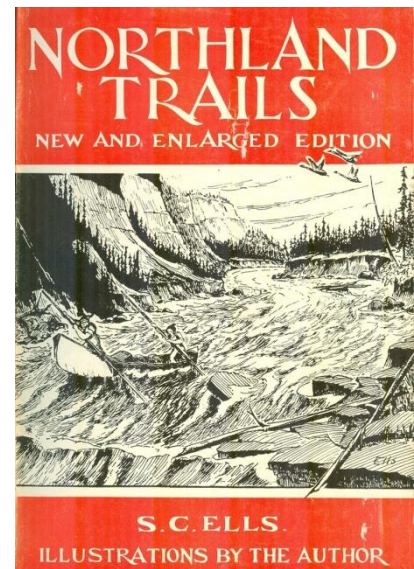
Lord God of the nations,
 we have seen the star of your glory rising in splendor.
 The radiance of your incarnate Word
 pierces the night that covers the earth
 and signals the dawn of justice and peace.
 May his brightness illumine our lives
 and invite all nations to walk as one in your light
 even now as your Word is read and proclaimed.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
 in the splendor of eternal light, God forever and ever. **Amen.**

“What Leads Us To Christ?”

Matthew 2:1-12

Different people enrich their lives in different ways. My life has been immeasurably enriched through the books I have read. As a teenager, I was fascinated by Canada’s North Country and I read everything I could get my hands on that related to it. I especially loved reading about people who had homesteaded in remote regions, but I read other books as well.

When I was 13 my Dad gave me a book called “Northland Trails”. It wasn’t new. He picked it up in a



secondhand bookstore. I devoured that book. It was written by an engineer who had spent 40 years working in the north. Just the dust cover called out to me: "I'm your kind of book!" The book was filled with stories and poems, but there is one that stands out in my mind after all these years. During the winter of 1924, the author was camped at the edge of the barren lands not far from the Athabasca River. He had set up his camp just inside the edge of the timber where he would be out of the wind. He built a fire and was settling down for the night when two men stumbled into his camp. Out on the barrens a blinding snow storm was raging. The men were lost, floundering around in the snow, not knowing where to go and almost on the point of perishing. As my Father would say, "They were just about ready to cash in their chips!" A chance shift of wind brought them a whiff of smoke from the author's campfire. They realized that help was close at hand and with renewed hope they made it to the edge of the timber. They followed the scent of the smoke. It led them to the author's camp and saved their lives. Later, C.S. Ells wrote a poem based on the incident. The final stanza begins with these words:

Just a wisp of smoke!
 But from sheltering spruce
 on the edge of the barrens white,
 It's breath spells life to panting men
 in tempest of winter night.
 Just a wisp of smoke!

It was just a wisp of smoke that saved the lives of those two men by leading them to a campfire. Well, it was just a star that the Wise Men – the Magi – saw in the east that brought them eventually to Bethlehem and Jesus. John Piper, in our excellent Advent devotional "Joy to the World" in what we would have read on December 8th, points out that the Star did not lead them or go before them. In Matthew 2 we read: **1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."** They simply saw "His star".

The second verse makes it plain what this story is all about. A Child has been born who is destined to become King of the Jews. What is so special about this? After all, in Canada today there are probably 3 or 4 young people who are destined to someday become the Prime Minister of Canada. Does anyone really care about this? Better yet, does anyone set to try to identify one of these future Prime Minister's or try to find them and make a big fuss over them? Of course not!

In verse 4 we are given a clue about what is meant by King of the Jew. It says: **4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.** Does it make more sense to you if we were to follow the meaning of the name “Christ” right back to the original? Christ comes from the Greek *khristos* meaning “anointed one”, the root of which is *khrio* meaning “anoint”, which is a translation of the Hebrew *masiah* which means “Messiah”. So, these wise men were inquiring of Herod where the Messiah was to be born. Herod, under the auspicious of Rome, had been “king of the Jews” for 40 years, but no one was under any delusion that Herod was the Messiah. “Messiah” means the long-awaited God-anointed Ruler, who would overcome all other rule, and bring in the end of history, and establish the kingdom of God and never die or lose his reign.



So now we can understand verse 3 when it says: **3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.** “These guys are not just looking for my successor. They are looking for the final King – the King to end all kings! Herod, the most ruthless of all Kings who ruled over the Jews at the behest of Rome, was interested only in earthly kingship. He was diametrically opposed to such a King. He knew nothing about the Scriptures as to where this Messiah was to be born.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s go back to the Wise Men. These were men who knew the night skies and when this particular star appeared, they knew that it held great significance; that it proclaimed the birth of a great King. Through the star God disclosed to these men light and truth. It was a dazzling revelation – an Epiphany.

Now, the thing I find interesting about this account is that it was not when they actually found the Christ Child – the Messiah – that they were led to believe in him. They were convinced of his Kingship even before



they left on their journey. We know this because they brought with them expensive gifts that were worthy of such a King. These gifts were not just something they picked up at the duty-free store at the border. And they certainly didn't get them at Shoppers Drug Mart that was along the strip of big box stores on their way into town. No, these men came prepared. They came, not just bearing gifts to the new born King of the Jews, but also to worship him. Go back to verse [2](#) ...**“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

The Wise Men got sidetracked on their journey, but we can't blame them for that. Isn't it only natural that one would expect a newborn King to be born in the capital Jerusalem and that the present king would know all about him? But even though they got sidetracked, it was not all loss, because it was in Bethlehem that the Messiah was to be born. Notice that God can use even the detours of our lives to guide us in the right direction. [8](#) **And he (Herod) sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”** So it was that old rascal Herod who sent them to Bethlehem. [9](#) **After listening to the king, they went on their way.** However, I want to make it very plain that it was neither Herod's instructions nor their own intuition that led them on the last leg of their journey. [9](#) ... **And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.** [10](#) **When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.**

So, a wisp of smoke led two men to safety and a star led the Wise Men to the Christ – the Messiah. This causes me to reflect on **“What Leads Men and Women To Christ?”** There is a very simple and obvious answer to this question. It is God himself who leads men and women to His Son. It was God who used a star to inform the Wise Men about the Messiah. It was God who sent an angel and a whole host of heavenly beings to the shepherds and said to them: [11](#) **For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

However, we need to move beyond the obvious to the particular. I want to look at the means or the mechanisms that God uses to bring people to Jesus. I know that God is ultimately the one who draws us to Himself. Every other religion in the world paints a picture of every person having to earn the favour of God. There are no exceptions. I am not aware of any religion that does not teach that we as human beings must climb the ladder of worthiness, and that it is only when we reach the top rung of that ladder of worthiness that God accepts us. All religions teach this except for one and that is the Christian faith. The Christian faith teaches, not that we must climb the



ladder of worthiness to the very top in order to be accepted by God, but that God reaches down to the lowest rung of the ladder and accepts us in our unworthiness by an act of grace.

Alright, but what means does he use to accomplish this? 1 Timothy 2 refers to **God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to**

the knowledge of the truth. He is a god who loves us. He sent Christ into the world for our sakes in the first place. He desires that all people be drawn to Jesus and find in him the only thing in the world that is worthy of true worship and devotion. I believe that the answer to our question is a simple one. God uses many different means to bring people to Christ and no two stories are the same.

If we look at the example of Saul of Tarsus, a strict Jew who came to Christ, we find that God used a very unusual method. Saul was a very strict and devout Jew, who we are more familiar with through his Greek name Paul, was very antagonistic to the Christian Faith and towards Jesus. He was not just an unbeliever; he was hostile to Christianity. When he heard people refer to Jesus as the Messiah, he was filled with hate.

It is not unusual to find people today who are not just unbelievers. They too are openly hostile to all things that smack of the Christian faith. They may be atheists, like Richard Dawkins, who believe there is no God. They may be agnostics who believe that while there possibly is a god, that he is unknowable. Then there are others who are just angry at God because they feel he has let them down or cheated them in some way. It doesn't really matter what they believe. When you speak to them about Jesus Christ you are able the anger and hostility that just seep out of them. And that is OK. We don't need to feel threatened by them.

These people need the opportunity to vent their anger just as Saul of Tarsus did. When we read Acts 9 we find **1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high**



priest [2](#) and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now that is some serious hostility. God, however, only allows such behavior for so long and as Saul travelled to Damascus to persecute the Christians in that city God confronted him. [3](#) **Now ... as he approached Damascus suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. [4](#) And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”** This was none other than the voice of Jesus. Saul was lead away from that encounter blinded, but a changed man. It is not uncommon for such encounters with God to be referred to as a “Damascus road experience”.

We sometimes feel that people who are angry at God and hostile to all things Christian are not worth wasting time on, but often what these people need is for us to listen to them in their pain, their anger and frustration. Some of them will resist Christ by all means at their disposal. However, others may be lead to Christ, but it will not happen until we in love are willing to listen to their pain. In the final analysis, though, it will be Jesus Himself who meets them and they will discover that he is the one they have been searching for all their lives.

We have a very different example, but no less dramatic, in the Philippian jailer. He was the kind of man who probably gave religion very little thought, but he was very contentious about his job. What made a difference here was that he had two very unusual prisoners in his jail; men who prayed and sang hymns to God. In the middle of the night the jail was shaken with and earthquake. We are not told that this was a city-wide earthquake that involved all of Philippi, but seems to have been



concentrated on the prison. In Acts 16 we read: [26](#) **and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.** Now if that happened in any other prison in the world, there would have been a jailbreak. The jailer,

convinced that his birds had flown their cage, was about to kill himself with his sword. He figured that his life wasn’t worth a plug nickel once his superiors found about the jailbreak. But our man Saul – now going by the name Paul – called out: [28](#)

But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” [29](#) And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30](#) Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

What led this man to Christ? It was the example of Paul and Silas. He saw in their lives something he had never seen before. He saw men who were prepared to live out their faith and do what was right regardless of the consequences. There are those who will only be led to Christ when they see in us – in the example of our lives – something very different. They need to see men and women who have been transformed by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Even though they would not consider themselves religious, they will discover that one thing that has been missing from their lives. That missing element is Jesus Christ.

Let us look at one last example, one which should be familiar to us, because we met Lydia at the start of our study of Philippians. Lydia was a gentile business woman but who was known among the Jews as a God-fearer. She was a good woman who was disgusted by the excesses of paganism. She was a seeker. She was seeking after God. In Judaism with its worship of the One true God and its morality based on the Ten Commandments she thought she had found what she had been seeking after for so long. However, like many good church people, Lydia was aware that she was missing something, but she couldn't identify what it was.



There were no Jewish men and therefore no Jewish synagogue in Philippi. On the Sabbath she met with a group of women outside the city walls beside a river for prayer. One day Paul, on one of his numerous journeys sought out that humble place of prayer and finding the women, spoke to them about Jesus Christ the long-awaited Messiah of God's people. And as Lydia listened, the final pieces to the puzzle fell into place. **[14](#) One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, ... who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.** Lydia represents those people who are not apathetic to the message of the gospel and who are not hostile and antagonistic to those who proclaim it. She stands for all those who are earnestly seeking and searching for the

meaning of life. Really, they are searching for Jesus the Messiah. They just don't know it. When Christ is presented to them as the Son of God and Saviour of the world they open their hearts to him. They believe and in so doing discover the final piece to the puzzle of life.

So, we can see that there are many ways for men and women to be lead to Jesus the Messiah. Let's return to the Wise Men in closing. When they left Jerusalem and finally got back on track, we read: [9](#) **And behold, the star that they had seen**



when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10](#) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Why doesn't it just say that they rejoiced when they saw the star? Wouldn't that have been enough? No, because the way Matthew phrases their response, we can see that their joy was compounded four times. First, they **rejoiced!** Second, they rejoiced **exceedingly!!** Third and fourth, they rejoiced exceedingly with **great joy!!!!**

John Piper makes the point that these men ascribed authority and dignity to Jesus and that they did so with joy. Here are his words: *"I cannot avoid the impression then that true worship is not just ascribing authority and dignity to Christ; it is doing this joyfully. It is doing it because you have come to see something about Christ that is so desirable that being near him to ascribe authority and dignity to him personally is overwhelmingly compelling."*

Finally, their quest comes to an end in Bethlehem. [11](#) **And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.** There they found the last and most important piece to the puzzle: - **they fell down and worshiped him.** I pray that in this New Year of 2021, many will seek and find their way to Jesus.



Wise men and women still seek him. No matter how they are led, when they find him may each fall down and worship him, offering to him those gifts that up until that time they sold their souls for. May we say from the heart, *"Lord Jesus you are the Messiah, the King of Israel. All nations will come and bow down before you. God wields the world to see that you are worshiped. Therefore, whatever opposition I may find, I joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you, and bring my gifts to say that you alone can satisfy my heart, not these."* (John Piper)

Hymn #172: "As With Gladness Men of Old"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp52sx2_GYs

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heav'n and earth adore;
So may we, with willing feet,
Ever seek Thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our heav'nly King.

Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In that heavenly country bright
Need they no created light:
Thou its light, its joy, its crown
Thou its sun which goes not down;
There forever may we sing
Hallelujahs to our King.

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3) **We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer.** This note from our treasurer.

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com Please include your Offering Envelope # in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (eg Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

Bright Morning Star,
your light has come,
and your birth, O Jesus,
has overwhelmed us with joy.
Like the Magi of long ago,
may we be drawn to you
and offer you our best gifts. **Amen.**

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty and merciful God,
In the face of much that seems to deny your existence,
We give grateful thanks for the victory of Jesus Christ in every sphere of our existence.
We thank you that his victory has become our victory.

As we face life during this pandemic, and especially during this lockdown, we may feel alone and lonely. Remind us that when Jesus is our Saviour, we are never alone, for your Holy Spirit is present with us always. Your promise was that you would never leave us or forsake us. We pray for those in nursing homes and for those who are on their own in their own home or apartment. Support them during this time when visitors are not allowed and when there is little to fill their days.

We pray for children who find this time at home without their friends or involvement in school difficult. We pray for singles who are not able to build new relationships. We pray for those who find themselves in marriages that are difficult. We know that such times can either break a marriage or make it stronger. We pray for those who

are out of work, unable to find gainful employment and are not sure how they are going to pay their bills. We pray for owners of businesses large and small who don't know how they will remain viable during this second lockdown.

Lord, we thank you for all our provincial and federal governments are doing to try to alleviate the financial burdens that individuals, families and businesses are carrying during this time. But most of all, we pray that during these times of hardship, people will be caused to lift their eyes off their problems and focus their attention on You, who alone is able to meet the deepest needs of individual hearts and lives.

At the heart of all our problems is a big spiritual problem: "Where are we going to look for our salvation? In whom are we going to put our trust?" As was said long ago: **12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.**" Acts 4) Oh, the precious Name of Jesus. May that name be found increasing on the lips of the desperate, the fearful, the lonely and the despairing. In this great name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn:

**"O Little Town of Bethlehem"
By Richard & Jay Hendry**

<https://youtu.be/u9ERpl9xFzE>

Benediction

Depart now in peace, for your eyes have seen the salvation
which God has prepared for all people.

Grow in strength and wisdom
and bring forth a harvest of righteousness and praise.

And may God smile upon you and make you strong and wise;
May Christ Jesus share his inheritance with you freely;
And may the Holy Spirit open your eyes to the presence of God's Messiah.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.