

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Wednesday, December 24th, 2025
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Our Savior Born
Christmas Eve
Luke 2:1-20**

PRE PRELUDE

PRELUDE

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

People of God, tonight we gather in the glow of Christmas Eve,
as heaven's light breaks into the world's darkness.

The true Light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world.

Let all creation rejoice! For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given.

**And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Come, let us adore Him—Christ the Lord.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

(CHRIST CANDLE) Christmas Eve

Leader: Tonight we light the Christ Candle, for the Light of the World has come.

People: **The true Light, which gives light to everyone, has entered the world.**

Leader: In Christ, hope is fulfilled, faith is realized, peace is given, and joy is complete.

People: **God is with us—Emmanuel.**

Reading:

In the fullness of time, God sent His Son: the Word made flesh, dwelling among us.

He came as a child—humble, vulnerable, yet bearing the fullness of divine glory. His light shines in our darkness, revealing God’s love, mercy, and truth. Tonight we celebrate the birth of the One who comes to redeem, restore, and renew all creation.

Leader: The light of Christ shines for all people.

People: **And the darkness has not overcome it.**

Prayer:

Holy God, we praise You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. As this Christ Candle shines brightly, may its light illuminate our hearts and homes. Let Christ’s love transform us, His truth guide us, and His light shine through us into the world. May we bear this light with joy, proclaiming that Christ is born, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. **Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Eternal God, on this holy night You broke into our world with sovereign grace. You entered not a palace, but a manger; not the courts of power, but the company of the poor; not the sanitized and orderly, but the messy, the humble, and the unprepared. Open our hearts tonight as You opened the heavens above Bethlehem.

Let us hear again the wonder of the gospel—not as a familiar tale, but as the shocking news that You have come for sinners like us.

Grant us the awe of the shepherds, the astonishment of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, and the awakened wonder of unexpected hearts.

Come, Lord Jesus, and be born in us anew.

Amen.

Call to Confession

On this holy night, let us confess our need for the Savior who comes to us.

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,
we confess that we are unworthy of Your grace.
Our hearts are often proud,
our lives often messy,
our faith often weak.
We come like shepherds—unprepared;
we come like outcasts—broken and disruptive;**

**we come like sinners—needing mercy.
 Forgive us, awaken us, and draw us to the Light who has come into our darkness.
 Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news of Christmas:
 “Unto you is born this day... a Savior.”
 Not a judge who condemns, not a coach who critiques,
 but a Savior who rescues sinners.
 In Him, your sins are forgiven, your debt is paid,
 and your life is held by sovereign grace.
 Thanks be to 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.**

OPENING HYMN #165: ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’

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.

For Christ is born of Mary;
 and, gathered all above,
 while mortals sleep, the angels keep
 their watch of wond'ring love.
 O morning stars, together
 proclaim the holy birth,
 and praises sing to God the King,
 and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
 the wondrous gift is giv'n!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 the blessings of His heav'n.
 No ear may hear His coming,
 but in this world of sin,
 where meek souls will receive Him still,
 the dear Christ enters in.

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!

Responsive Reading

Isaiah 9:2,

2 The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.

**6 For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;
 and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 and his name shall be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
 there will be no end,
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

MUSIC MINISTRY (CHOIR): 'Sleep Little Baby'

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Luke 2:1-20

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
 and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

15 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." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Sermon

Christmas Eve has come upon us yet again. It has a way of settling over us like a gentle snowfall—slow, quiet, and almost sacred.

The world does not stop, but it softens. Its noisiness and demand for our attention recedes just enough for us to hear something deeper. On this night even the most hurried of lives seem, for a moment, to slow their pace. In many places candles warm the room with a glow that feels older than electricity, older than modern life itself, as if we are returning to a simpler way of life. We sing hymns we have sung since childhood, often bringing back memories we didn't know, we still had voices of parents and grandparents, laughter with friends and family, moments of joy and grief layered one upon another in our minds.

And then something deep within us stirs, something that longs, more intensely tonight than perhaps on any other night of the year, to believe again in the possibility of God, the possibility of his presence and peace in our lives. Not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of His wholeness. The kind of peace Scripture calls *shalom*. The kind of peace that only God can give.

Tonight, as churches all around the world do, we return once more to Bethlehem. To a story we know by heart. To words so familiar we could almost speak them without thinking.

We come carrying our traditions, some cherished, some merely habitual. We come with expectations shaped by our memories. We come with assumptions about how Christmas is *supposed* to feel. And yet, with all of that, it is still possible, dangerously possible, for us to come without wonder.

Because familiarity has a way of numbing us to the wonder of God.

A story that is heard too often can lose its meaning, its strength to impact our lives. Words repeated year after year can begin to just flow past us, instead of impacting us, causing us to consider them in our lives. The edges are smoothed. The shock is dulled. And Christmas, the most staggering divine intervention in human history, can quickly and quietly become something sentimental to us rather than the wondrous event it actually was. Christmas becomes comfortable rather than glorious.

We risk turning the coming of God in the flesh into something manageable, something safe, something that fits neatly into our schedule, decor and nostalgia.

But the Incarnation is not safe.
It is not tidy.
It is not sentimental.

It is Holy.
And it is shocking.

And so tonight, if we are to recover our wonder—to feel again the weight and the mercy and the sheer audacity of Christmas—I want to set a story beside the manger. A story that seems, at first glance, far removed from ancient Bethlehem, and yet one that echoes the heart of the Gospel with surprising clarity.

It is the story told in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, a story by Barbra Robinson, it is the story of the Herdman's.

The Herdman's are the kind of children every community knows. Loud. Unruly. Chaotic. Disruptive. They lie. They steal. They bully. They smoke cigars behind the school. The teachers dread them. Many Parents fear them and all the Children prefer to avoid them.

And it's important that I say this clearly: **they are not misunderstood angels**. They are genuinely difficult and troublesome to deal with for everyone.

And they show up at church for one reason only: someone told them there would be free food.

Their arrival sends shock waves through the congregation. Parents whisper anxiously. Children inch closer to their mothers for protection. The director of the pageant briefly considers resignation, or maybe even relocation. The Herdman's threaten everything that the church values at Christmas: order, predictability, safety, tradition.

And hovering beneath every whispered complaint is the question no one quite dares to ask out loud:

"How on earth did they get in here?"

And that question, unintentionally and almost prophetically, is the perfect question for Christmas Eve.

Because the true Christmas story presses the same astonishing question upon us:

How on earth did God get in here?

Into this world.
Into our history.
Into our mess.
Into our sin.

Who invited Him?
Who prepared the way?

Who was ready?
Who deserved His arrival?

The answer Scripture gives us both clearly and consistently is this:

No one.

And this, beloved, **is the grace of God.**

The Herdman's crashing the Christmas pageant becomes a faint, but faithful parable of the way God Himself crashed into human history. Not politely. Not predictably. Not when conditions were ideal. But according to His sovereign will and eternal purpose.

God did not wait for humanity to improve itself.
He did not send His Son once the world had grown gentler, wiser, or more receptive.
He came, Scripture tells us, *"While we were still sinners."*
He came when the darkness of sin was thick.
He came when the rebellion of mankind against him was entrenched.
He came when the hearts of the people were hard.

Christmas is not the story of humanity reaching up to God.
Christmas is not the story of humanity earning God's love.

It is the story of God coming all the way down to us.

Mary was not ready.
Joseph was not ready.
Bethlehem was not ready.
Israel was not ready.
Caesar Augustus certainly was not ready.

No one stood watch that night expecting the Ancient of Days to enter the world wrapped in flesh, crying in hunger, and laid in a feeding trough.

Christmas is God breaking into the world when the world was not ready.

Luke tells us that Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that all the world should be registered. To Rome, it was paperwork. A political maneuver. Another exercise of imperial control.

But behind the decree of Caesar stood the decree of God.
Behind the will of the emperor was the eternal counsel of heaven.

Centuries earlier, God had spoken through the prophet Micah:

Micah 5:2

**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.**

And so, God bends the machinery of empire.
He uses taxation and travel and exhaustion and inconvenience.
He moves a young couple; poor, vulnerable, and afraid, at precisely the right moment to
precisely the right place, all as He had planned.

Nothing about it feels holy.
Nothing about it feels reverent.
It feels messy.
It feels ordinary.
It feels cruel in some ways.

And yet every step unfolds according to His divine providence.

Christmas is the doctrine of providence wrapped in swaddling clothes.

And then, consistent with everything, Scripture teaches us about the heart of God, He
reveals this miracle not to kings or scholars, not to priests or princess, but to shepherds.

Men who lived on the margins of society.
Men who were considered unclean.
Men whose testimony would not be accepted in the Jewish court because of their lowly
status.

And yet heaven entrusts them with the greatest announcement ever spoken:

Luke 2:10-11

**¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of
great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the
city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

This is the pattern of God's grace.

God does not choose the people that the world calls impressive and influential.
He chooses the lowly.

He does not crown the powerful and prideful.
He lifts up the humble.

And we see the same pattern in the story of the Herdman's.

When the Herdman's hear the Christmas story, not the polished pageant version, not the sentimental retelling, but the raw Biblical account, they hear it as if for the first time.

Because for them, it *is* the first time.

There is no nostalgia to dull the edge.
No tradition to soften the blow.

They hear a story about a young girl giving birth alone.
They hear a story about a baby laid in a manger because there was no room anywhere else for him.
They hear a story about a king who murders children in His fear of losing power.

And they react—not with reverence and polite nods as so many of us do every Christmas instead the react with outrage, astonishment, and grief.

They are angry that no one helped Mary.
They are furious that Herod is so evil.
They are shocked by the vulnerability of Jesus.

Why?

Because they understand where he is on that Christmas morning.
They understand what it is to suffer because of no fault of your own.
They understand hunger.
They understand fear.
They understand what it means to be unwanted by the society around them.

And suddenly the Gospel is no longer just a church story to them.
It is a real story.
A story that fits into their world.

This is grace at work.

They are not seeking God, but God is seeking them.
They are not asking for revelation, but His revelation finds them.

This is what Reformed theology calls *effectual calling*. Not that God makes someone believe in Him, but instead that He opens blind eyes, so that people can see the truth of who He is. When He speaks life, the dead respond. When the Shepherd calls His sheep, they come, not because they are righteous, but because He is merciful.

Scripture teaches us:

1 John 4:19
¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

And this is where the Herdman's quietly become mirrors of each of us.

Because spiritually speaking, every one of us is a Herdman in some way.

None of us enters the presence of God clean, composed, and deserving. None of us brings merit to the manger. We come as sinners. We come as those in need of mercy.

Grace is not God rewarding the good.
It is God rescuing the guilty.
It is not God helping the strong.
It is God saving the helpless.

And when the Herdman's finally perform the Christmas pageant, it is anything but polished. Lines are missing. Movements are awkward. The production is chaotic.

But something astonishing happens.

Mary is no porcelain figurine.
Instead she is a frightened young mother clutching her child.

Joseph is no background prop.
He is a fierce protector of his wife and child.

The Wise Men do not look dignified.
They look overwhelmed to be in the presence of the One True Living God.

And for the first time in a long time, the adults in the congregation truly see the Gospel with fresh eyes.

Because the truth is that sometimes it takes the unexpected, the unrefined, the unworthy to remind each of us of what Christmas is about.

Christmas declares this, without apology:

God saves sinners.

So, what does this mean for us gathered here tonight?

It means if you feel unworthy, Christmas is for you.

If you feel far from God, Christmas is for you.

If you feel overwhelmed, uncertain, or weary, Christmas is for you.

If you feel overlooked like the shepherds, Christmas is for you.

If you feel afraid like Mary and Joseph, Christmas is for you.

If you feel messy, inconsistent, ashamed, Christmas is for you.

The birth of Jesus Christ proclaims to the world that God did not wait for you to climb to Him.

He came all the way down to you.

Into the manger.

Into the mess.

Into the darkness.

The message of Christmas is not:

Try harder.

Be better.

Earn your way back to God and salvation.

The message is this:

“Unto you is born this day a Savior.”

A Savior.

Not a helper.

Not a life coach.

Not a moral example.

A Savior.

He has come to do what we could never do for ourselves: to bear our guilt, to pay our debt, to carry our cross, to break the chains of sin in our lives, to rise from our grave, and to make us His own.

So tonight, as we light our candles and sing of that Holy Night, may the light in your hand remind you of the Light of the World—the One who stepped into darkness and was not overcome by it. And as that flame flickers, remember that Christ not only came *to* the darkness, but now sends His people *into* it.

“You are the light of the world,” He says. Not because the light originates in us, but because His light has been kindled within us. And you are the salt of the earth—not impressive, not flashy, but faithful. Preserving what would otherwise decay. Bearing quiet witness in ordinary places. Bringing grace into a world that has grown dull to holiness and hungry for hope.

The same Christ who lay in the manger two thousand years ago, now lives in His people. The same grace that broke into the world on that Holy Night now works through fragile vessels like you and I. And just as God did not wait for the world to be ready before sending His Son, He does not wait for us to be perfect before using us for His purposes. He sends forgiven sinners to bear witness to a saving Savior.

So may the manger feel strange again tonight.
May the grace of God astonish you one again.

And may the Light of the World, who came down into our darkness now shine through you—so that a watching world might glimpse His mercy.

And may the Christ who entered the world in humility reign in your heart with peace, preserve you by His grace, as He sends you out as Salt and Light of God’s Word in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

O God of sovereign mercy,
on this night we praise You for the miracle of the Incarnation—
that You came not because the world was ready,
but because You willed to save.
We pray for those who feel far from You—
draw them near by Your irresistible grace.
For those who feel unworthy—
lift their eyes to the Savior who delights to save the unworthy.
For those in grief—

shine Your light into their darkness.
 For those in joy—
 let their praise rise like the songs of angels.
 Bless our families, our homes, and our church.
 Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.
 And as You broke into Bethlehem,
 break into our lives tonight with hope, joy, and salvation.

In Christ's name. **Amen.**

MUSIC MINISTRY (CHOIR): 'Mary, Did You Know?'

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

SPECIAL HYMN:

As the light spreads from candle to candle,
 remember how the Light of the world entered the darkness.
 He came for shepherds.
 He came for unexpected hearts.
 He came for the outcasts of the world.
 He came for us.
 The darkness has not overcome Him.
 And it never will.

Hymn #154: 'Silent 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,
Darkness flies, all is light;
Shepherds hear the angels sing,
"Alleluia! hail the King!
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 the light;
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.

Benediction

May the God who broke into Bethlehem
break into your life with peace.
May Christ, born in humility,
reign in your heart with grace.
May the Spirit who awakens faith
fill you with wonder, joy, and hope.
Go forth in the light of Christ—
for unto *you* is born this day a Savior.
Amen.