

## Christmas Eve Service

\*Call to Worship (Kathy: Leader)

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God

People: He was in the beginning with God

Leader: All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

People: What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people

Leader: The light shines in the darkness

People: And the darkness did not overcome it

Leader: Hallelujah! Let's praise the Lord together

\*Opening Hymn: O Come All Ye Faithful #41 blue hymnal

Call to Confession: (Dennis)

All those who are standing may be seated.

Hear these words from the book of Genesis chapter 1.

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (After reading, Dennis can sit down in lector chair)

*Pastor: Everything was good. Very good. That is how the story begins. But God's children broke God's rules, and because they ate the forbidden fruit, their relationship with their creator changed. Genesis chapter 3 tells us: They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid."*

*That, for me, is the saddest verse in all of scripture: "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid." Those of us who have children or pets, when we get home from work, should they be cowering in the corner? No! Our dogs leap to lick our faces. Our children run to us for embraces. Our cats...well. Who knows what they do. But our relationship with God was always supposed to be one of love and trust and safety. Of hearing the sound of God and running towards it, not hiding away in fear. But the relationship broke down.*

*We see the result of this first break in our own lives every day. When we are impatient, when we are unkind, envious, prideful, rude, selfish, easily angry, resentful, spiteful, or dishonest, we are living out echoes of that first break. But God doesn't want things to stay that way. Confident that God desires relationship with us, God's beloved creation, let us confess our sins before God and one another.*

Prayer of Confession: (Psalm 51:1-2, 6, 10)

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

Moment of Silent Confession

Assurance of Pardon

*God speaks these words over us through out scripture: Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. You are forgiven.*

*This very long story is about God trying to solve this problem. "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid." It breaks God's heart that our sin separates us from God, that God is so perfect and we are so imperfect that God's perfection and glory frightens us now. God reaches out again and again until finally, God chooses a family to bless all nations of the earth. Abraham's family.*

Lets read from Genesis 12 and 15

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

*<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him;*

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”*

*He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.”*

*When we confess our sins, reaching out to God for forgiveness, we find that God has been reaching back all along. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God speaks these words over us: Do not be afraid. You are forgiven. Thanks be to God*

Canticle of Turning      -- Dr. Jonathon and Rev. LydiaGrace Gray

Kimber:

God kept God’s promise to Abraham, and, even in her old age, his wife Sarah bore him Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah had Jacob, renamed Israel. Israel had 12 sons who had families of their own. The children of Israel became refugees in Egypt because of famine in their land. There, as the chosen family grew, Pharaoh grew anxious and suspicious. So, he enslaved the children of Israel. They suffered and cried out to God. God heard their cries and rescued them from the house of bondage. But, when they left Egypt and the Pharaoh chased them down, they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Pharaoh’s army! There, they heard those familiar words: Do not be afraid.

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

*Pastor: God was faithful to deliver the chosen people. God split the sea and the people walked through on dry land to safety. Years later, when Moses died and Joshua, a new leader of the children of Israel was chosen, God reached out and said these words again: Do not be afraid.*

Ben:

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you...Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

*Pastor: God kept God's promise. God was with Joshua and the children of Israel settled in the land of their ancestors. But, as the generations came and went, they forgot about God. They forgot that God was for them and not against them. They forgot to follow God's laws for loving your neighbor as yourself. So God had to choose new leaders again and again, reaching out to them and telling them: do not be afraid.*

Dr. Jonathon:

Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup>The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." <sup>13</sup>Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian." <sup>14</sup>Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." <sup>15</sup>He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." <sup>16</sup>The LORD said to him, "But I will be with you...  
...and the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. <sup>22</sup>Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD; and Gideon said, "Help me, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." <sup>23</sup>But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you; do not fear, (Do not be afraid!) you shall not die." <sup>24</sup>Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it, The LORD is peace."

*Pastor: Already, we hear echoes of the Christmas story! Please rise in body or in spirit as we softly sing together #135 in your red hymnals, a hymn about unlikely people encountering a holy messenger and hearing those words: Fear not. Do not be afraid.*

While Shepherds Watched their Flocks #135 red

*Those who are standing may be seated. Keep turning the pages of the holy story of God's chosen people, and you'll keep finding out how forgetful God's people are. Yet God is persistent. King David, of David and Goliath fame, had one of the most intimate relationships with God depicted in scripture. He was a man after God's own heart. After years as a shepherd, then a warrior, then a king, after sinning and confessing, and grieving and growing old: the shepherd king David had these words of wisdom to pass on to his son:*

Jon:

“Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished.”

*Pastor: Do not be afraid, he said. So Solomon built the temple for the LORD and the children of Israel saw it as a way to connect with the God of Abraham: they had a relationship with God. They did not need to be afraid.*

*But the prophets tell us that the people forgot God again. They did not love their neighbors as themselves. They went through the motions of worship in the temple, but did not act out the law of love in their everyday lives. They forgot God. King David's descendants were beaten in battle. The temple was destroyed. The holy city lay in ruin. It seemed all hope was lost. But some people, even in the midst of the destruction, remembered God.*

Karen:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,

for his compassions never fail.

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

I called on your name, LORD,

from the depths of the pit.

<sup>56</sup> You heard my plea: “Do not close your ears

to my cry for relief.”

<sup>57</sup> You came near when I called you,

and you said, “Do not fear.”

*Pastor: Even in the destruction, there was hope. And even as the children of Israel were dragged off to foreign lands, exiles far away from home, the prophets, the people who God reached out to to speak God's word to God's people, began to speak of a time to come, when they would all be gathered together again, when a descendant of King David would reign once again, when God's people would experience, once again, God's love and favor. One day, they would not have to be afraid anymore. The prophet Jeremiah said:*

Tom:

But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob,  
and do not be dismayed, O Israel;  
for I am going to save you from far away,  
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.  
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,  
and no one shall make him afraid.

<sup>28</sup> As for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob,  
says the LORD,  
for I am with you.

*Pastor: The prophet Isaiah said:*

Chris:

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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us...

*Pastor: Let us sing together the advent candle lighting song to the tune of Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*

An Advent Candle Lighting Song

Tune: W Żłobie Leży, a Polish folk melody – the same as “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

Lyrics by Rev. Elana Keppel Levy, 2021

Candles glowing, promise showing Jesus born a baby small.

Hosts rejoicing, shepherds voicing – praising Christ the Lord of all.

God is with us, shout hosanna, raise a chorus, singing ever:

Praising Christ the Lord of all! Praising Christ the Lord of all!

Lighting the Christ Candle

Reader 1: Hear these words from the prophet Isaiah: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem

*Light the Candle of Hope*

Reader 2: You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off” Do not fear.

Reader 3: Do not fear. For I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

People: **Do not fear. For I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.**

*Light the Candle of Peace*

Reader 1: But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands

Reader 2: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations...

Reader 3: Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down my God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

**People: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

*Light the Candle of Joy*

Reader 1: 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.

*Light the Candle of Love*

Reader 2: 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.

Reader 3: We light the Christ Candle today, we see all of scripture as it points to messiah Jesus.

*Light the Christ Candle*

**People: We have hope, peace, joy and love in Christ and because of Christ we know we do not need to be afraid.**



## O Holy Night #148

*Pastor: The Christmas story echoes God's hope for us: do not be afraid. As God breaks into the world, becoming human, the ultimate expression of the lengths God will go to show us God's love and longing to be in relationship with us, God knows this is terrifying. To encounter the divine is life changing. But God wants us to know: we do not have to be afraid.*

*At the beginning of the new story, the angel tells Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the coming messiah:*

Damon

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord...even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

*Pastor: The story continues and the angel tells Mary of the birth of Jesus, who will save the people from their sins.*

Kathleen:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[d]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

*Pastor: Mary was a virgin engaged to Joseph of the house of David. When Mary was found to be with child before they were to be wed, he wanted to save her from public disgrace and planned to dismiss her quietly. He too heard those familiar words from an Angel:*

Emily:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid. Take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, God is with us.”

Choir Anthem: Come, and Adore Him by Lloyd Larson

*Pastor: All these were intimate encounters with individuals. But when the child was born in Bethlehem, God sent the angels to tell the least lovable people in that culture: smelly shepherds, who had the job that no one wanted, who were poor outcasts, to be the one who would hear the news of the birth of the savior first. They heard those words too. And I invite you, to hear those words for yourself. They echo throughout scripture: this is what God wants us to know. We don't have to be afraid anymore. We are invited to have a relationship with God. We don't have to hide when we hear the sound of God. We are invited to hear and see and praise God and not be afraid.*

Luann Spicer

Luke 2:8-20

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them

about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## Angels We have Heard on High

*Pastor: The good news of Jesus' birth is worth singing about! But Jesus didn't stay in that manger. Jesus grew up and a few chapters later, told us why he had come:*

*Read: Luke 4:16-21*

*What a mission! Throughout his ministry, Jesus invited us along. Jesus taught us how. Jesus was unafraid to make powerful people angry, but even their attempt to put him death only lasted three days. Jesus was crucified, suffering the depth of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised him from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, and delivering us from death to life eternal.*

*Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus left his followers with these familiar words:*

**Bill:**

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Do not be afraid.... “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you...Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

When he has said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.”

*In the book of Acts, Luke writes:*

**Statsia:**

from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

*Tonight we light the Christ candle, we spread it's light to each person here. (Pastor LydiaGrace lights her candle on the Christ candle) We sing the Christmas carol, celebrating the beautiful story: we do not need to be afraid. God is with us.*

*God never leaves us. We are God's adopted children, ready to receive the Holy Spirit, glory streams from heaven above, and we join the angel choirs singing Hallelujah*

## Silent Night

## Charge and Benediction

*Please Rise in Body or in Spirit and receive the charge and benediction*

*The Gospel, the good news is this: Do not be afraid. Do not hide from God any longer. God loves you so much that God became a human to walk with us and teach us and show us how to live. Jesus died for us, and rose for us that we might rise with him. Now nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus said, when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself. So do not be afraid, beloved child of God. Leave today celebrating that you are loved and spreading that love to everyone you encounter. And now may the love of God the Father, the grace of God the Son, the fellowship and empowerment of God the Holy Spirit be with you and those you love this day and forever. Amen*

*Let us sing together our closing carol: #40 in your blue hymnal: Joy to the World!*

## Joy to the World