

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE  
DECEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup> 2019, 7 P.M.

Prelude

Welcome & Opening Prayer

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

(All are welcome to the table. Please hold each element until everyone is served. Bread served is gluten free.)

Invitation

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People: It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Leader: How can we thank you, O God? for sun and moon and stars; for breath and life and all things good; for your steadfast promise and your faithful love; for the day that is surely coming when all things will be made new. With saints, with angels, and with the whole creation, we join the ancient and eternal hymn:

**People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might; Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Leader: We give you thanks, Holy God, for Jesus, who came to be your living Word, to baptize us with Spirit and fire, to feed the hungry, to humble the mighty, and to announce the good news of your coming realm. With thanksgiving, we remember how, when the hour had come, Jesus took his place at the table with the apostles. He said to them, I will not eat this Passover again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God....

The Lord's Prayer

**All: 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 evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Communion of the People

**+Carol** "I Wonder as I Wander" No. 139 (vs.1&2)

I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Jesus the Saviour did come for to die for poor ordinary people like you and like I; I wonder as I wander, out under the sky. When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall, with wise men and farmers and shepherds and all, but high from God's heaven a star's light did fall, the promise of ages it then did recall.

THE WORD IS PROCLAIMED

Scripture Reading

Luke 1:1-4  
Genesis 1:1-2

Meditation

The Rev. Natasha Sudderth-Davis

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:1-6

Lighting the Advent Candles

"Hope, Peace, Joy, Love"

Special Music

"Breath of Heaven; Mary's Song"

Juanita Ratliff

I have travelled many moonless nights, cold and weary, with a babe inside. And I wonder what I've done Holy Father, you have come and chosen me now to carry your son. I am waiting in a silent prayer I am frightened by the load I bear. In a world as cold as stone, must I walk this path alone? Be with me now, be with me now. Breath of heaven hold me together, be forever near me, Breath of heaven. Breath of heaven, light up my darkness, pour over me your holiness, for you are holy, Breath of heaven. Do you wonder, as you watch my face, if a wiser one should have had my place. But I offer all I am for the mercy of your plan. Help me be strong. Help me be. Help me. Breath of heaven hold me together, be forever near me, Breath of heaven. Breath of heaven light up my darkness, pour over me your holiness, for you are holy Breath of heaven.

Meditation

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:7

SERVICE OF LIGHTS

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Carol

"What Child is This"

What Child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping? Chorus: This, this is Christ, the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing: Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary! Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear: for sinners here The silent Word is pleading.[Chorus] So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh, Come, peasant, king to own Him. The King of kings salvation brings; Let loving hearts enthrone Him.[Chorus]

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:8-14

**+Carol**

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"

(See Insert)

ES IST EIN' ROS'

**The Lighting of the Candles** The ushers will light the first candle on each row. Light the memorial candles if you are sitting near a window.

**+Carol**

"Silent Night, Holy Night"

(See Insert)

STILLE NACHT

**+Carol**

"Joy to the World"

(See Insert)

(Raise your candle)

RICHMOND

**+Benediction**

Welcome to all who join us on this sacred night. To our visitors, we add a special word of welcome, along with the hope that this service will communicate to you the love and wonder of Christmas. We invite you to join us for worship on Sunday mornings at 11:00.

Please leave your candles in the narthex at the conclusion of the service, but please remember to take the light of Christ with you to **illumine the path wherever you go.** Thank you, and Merry Christmas!

**+Postlude**

**+If able, please stand**

### Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

This Advent and Christmas hymn expresses and acknowledges a particular tension we ought to be aware of during the Christmas season. Just as, in the prophecies from Isaiah, a “rose,” or stem, shoots up from the stump, so too do we celebrate Christ’s birth in the knowledge that He brings life out of death. Our celebrations of Christmas must always point us to Easter. We celebrate Christ’s life because His death brings us a new kind of life. So too, the season of Advent points us not only to Christmas, but to the second coming of Christ, when He will finally make all things new. This is a beautiful and peaceful hymn, but there is just a touch of melancholy in the tune. Even in the arrangement the composer was able to convey the tension amidst our celebration, the sorrow that must lie within our rejoicing, if only for a moment. We know what is coming that week before Easter morning, and this should give us reason to pause. But we also know that the tiny babe whose birth we celebrate, our “Rose,” came to “dispel...the darkness everywhere.” Thus, even amid the tension of life out of death, we celebrate the ultimate life we are promised in Christ.

### Silent Night, Holy Night

In the small, quiet town of Oberndorf, Austria, on a snowy Christmas Eve, a priest and an organist wrote what is now the most beloved Christmas carol world-wide. Stories abound as to the exact circumstances of the hymns origin, and there are societies dedicated to the task of protecting the authentic hymn text and story. If you ever visit Bronner’s Christmas Wonderland in Frankenmuth, Michigan, you can visit a replica of the Silent Night Chapel. Movies and operas revolve around the hymn, and almost every recording artist that has ever made a Christmas album has recorded it. In a sense, this spreading of the Word is a joy. But these honors should also make us wary. Paul Westermeyer writes, “Partly because of its popularity, STILLE NACHT can easily point to itself rather than beyond itself to the Word” (Let the People Sing, 153). It is important, then, to not simply listen to what we might consider a quaint, nostalgia-evoking carol, but to sing out the depth of these words. For the “dawn of redeeming grace” is something far greater and grander than any song we could ever write. [www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)

### Joy to the World

In Genesis 3, one of the great tragedies in all of Scripture occurs. Adam and Eve sin against God, and are banished from the garden as God puts a curse upon the ground. It is a heartbreaking rupture in God’s perfect creation, and it is hard not to read this text without feeling a twinge of despair. And yet, before the curse comes a promise. God declares that the woman shall bear offspring that will crush the head of the serpent. Jesus, the Son of Man and Son of God, will come to break the curse, to renew the creation, to make whole what is now broken. In Psalm 98, all of creation is called upon to make a joyful noise before God, for the Lord has come to “judge the earth,” and restore (God’s) Creation. We should not fail to see our own hand at work in the destruction of creation, in our sins of waste and decadence. This “judgment of the earth” is, in some part, a judgment of us as caretakers. But God is merciful and full of grace, and rather than leave everything in our hands, (God) gives us the Life-giver. In this beautiful hymn, Isaac Watts makes the connection between the coming of Christ into this world and the beginning of that restoration. Christ brings “joy to the world,” a light where there is darkness, growth where there is decay. And we, along with all Creation, respond with a song of praise. [www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)

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*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

John 1:5

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