

## **Home Church Package – Christmas Eve – Dec 24 2020**

Materials prepared/curated by Rev. Jenn Swanson

“We Believe Even Now” from the Worship Design Studio Series

Welcome to Christmas Eve...possibly the strangest Christmas Eve many of us have ever experienced. Unable to physically be together, but together still in spirit.

This Advent we have been lifting up the power of music to light up the night even when we cannot sing together in person. And we raise up the strength of believing and trusting God’s promises even when we cannot yet see them lived out.

For the past four weeks of Advent we have explored the themes of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace that grounded us, and tonight we are finished waiting.

This special night has finally arrived.

### **Crossing the Threshold**

Tonight we return to the story of Jesus’ birth as it is told in the Gospel of Luke. This account is the narrative we read again and again on this holy night, for this author gives us the most beloved detail of Jesus’ birth. We yearn to see the scene play out, to hear the music of the angels, to feel the rush to the manger to see what this star that pierces the night sky has come to proclaim. We so desire to believe the Good News of the messengers that is the culmination of humanity’s pain of birth: “don’t be afraid” for unto you a child is born...a sign has come that will be to all people...”peace”.

### **Opening Prayer**

(You are invited to light all of the candles of your Advent wreath if you have one, or a single candle...or just imagine a single flame as you read the following prayer.)

Holy One,  
we thank you for the glimpse of heaven on earth  
In the faces and the light of those around us...and those we dearly miss.  
Even in the midst of fear,  
of challenge, of struggle—  
even when our view is obscured  
by clouds of doubt,  
You have ignited the flame of hope, love, joy, and peace within us.  
Let us glow with its brilliance  
from the inside out. Amen.

### **Scripture: Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)**

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.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## **Reflection**

(By Rev Jennifer Swanson)

We have heard the story of our faith yet again, and the themes are not new. All month we've been exploring themes of hope, peace, and joy through the use of music...music as message and inspiration, and how music has and continues to be used in times of struggle and challenge as well as in times of joy. Music is hopeful, peaceful, and can change hearts and can connect us through the spirit of Love, even when we are not together, even when we are singing alone.

Love, as we know in our bones, is the most powerful gift we humans have and our Teacher was and is the most astonishing message! Arriving as a vulnerable babe in a dark and unexpected place, God came to be with us, and is with us still. This is what is so compelling about this ancient, sacred story...that love shone into the dark and unexpected experience of a young couple with nowhere to stay in the middle of the night.

When things in our own lives feel dark and unexpected, when light is dim, when the ones we love can't be at a table together, when everything feels upside down and this pandemic drags on and on...love still shines through. Often we can feel peace of heart, hope, joy and know love through music...through a beautiful voice, a stunning chord, a particular instrument. God's message can sing in our souls and move us to tears and through the power of music we can know that even then and even now we are part of something much larger and we are always held tenderly by the Holy.

Every Christmas we are invited in to the Christmas story...not just to hear it...or to be reminded of it...but to actually become it. And some years that is easier for us to do than others. This year, it might not be very difficult to put ourselves into that stable or that cave...as dark and messy and crowded and smelly and confused as life is and as we as human beings might be feeling...we are invited to be that cave...to be that stable...and in this place to welcome in the light once more. We are invited to join in the song of life, and to allow Love to be born in us once again.

May the music and the light and the love of Christ be born in you this special night....and every night and may you know you are not alone. Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

(Reprinted from "Celebrate God's Presence" – UCPH, 2000. Modified by JLS)

God,  
you nourish us with your Word  
who is the bread of life:  
fill us with your Holy Spirit  
that through us your light  
may shine in all the world.  
We ask this in the name of the baby, whose cradle was so low  
that shepherds, poorest and simplest of earthly people,  
could yet kneel beside  
and look, level-eyed, into the face of God.  
Blessed One, we come to you in reverence, and are truly grateful. Amen.

## **Blessing**

And as we go this evening into Blessed Christmas...  
may the joy of the angels sing in our voices;  
may the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds;  
may the strong faith of Mary strengthen our spirits;  
and may the love of the Baby shine in our hearts.  
God's blessing be upon you all, this holy night and forever. Amen.