

(The format for the evening Christmas Eve service included a four part meditation of word and song; copied below is an annotated worship bulletin from that service which includes the spoken meditation.)

Christmas Eve
7:00 p.m.
December 24, 2017

God Most High, Your only Son embraced the weakness of flesh, to give us power to become Your children. Your eternal Word chose a dwelling among us, that we might live in Your presence. Grant us a spirit of wisdom to know how rich is the glory You have made our own, and how great the hope to which we are called in Jesus Christ, Your Word made flesh, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendor of eternal light, one God forever and ever. Amen.

*From the **Book of Common Worship**, c. 1993*

PRELUDE *Medley of Carols* *arr. Mary King, Harpist*
INTROIT *Angels We Have Heard on High* *Handbell Choir*
***CALL TO WORSHIP** *Isaiah 9:1,2,6,7*

In the latter time He will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.
THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT, THOSE WHO DWELT IN A LAND OF DEEP DARKNESS, ON THEM HAS LIGHT SHINED.

For unto us a child is born, unto 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, THE PRINCE OF PEACE.
Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.

***PRAYER OF ADORATION** *(in unison):*

GLORY TO YOU, ALMIGHTY GOD, FOR YOU SENT YOUR ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WE MIGHT HAVE NEW LIFE. GLORY TO YOU, LORD JESUS CHRIST, FOR YOU BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME YOUR PEOPLE. GLORY TO YOU, O HOLY SPIRIT, FOR YOU FILL OUR HEARTS AND DIRECT OUR LIVES. GLORY TO YOU, ALMIGHTY GOD, AND TO YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST, AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND FOREVER, AMEN.

***+HYMN** *O Come, All Ye Faithful* 208

"THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS ARE MET IN THEE TONIGHT"

A Four Part Advent Meditation in Word and Song

The next carol we will sing is "O Little Town of Bethlehem", and I particularly draw our attention to this line I love from that carol: "*The Hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.*" The message of the words and songs of the Christmas story certainly resonates with and speaks to all the hopes and fears of the human heart, the heart's deepest longings. The church family does tonight what most families do when they gather for special celebrations ... we tell and re-tell the favorite family stories. Telling these stories rehearses our identity and our sense of belonging to the family. Every Christmas we gather as the family of God to rehearse what may be our favorite story, that God became flesh and dwelt among us, this One who meets all our hopes, allays all our fears, and responds to our heart's deepest yearnings. Tonight we heard the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*Unto us a child has been born, unto us a son has been given.*" And we are given his names. *He will be called "Wonderful Counselor."* Isn't what every human being yearns for – someone who understands us, and who can give us sound counsel and expert advice and excellent guidance that will work wonders in our lives; in short, a "wonderful counselor?" *And He will be called "Mighty God."* Isn't this also what we have always yearned for – someone who can create beauty out of the darkness and the chaos and craziness in our lives, just as the mighty God took the darkness and chaos at creation to bring about beauty and order and light and life? *He will also be called "Everlasting Father,"* and that, too, is what every human being has yearned for ... a Father who will nurture us and care for us and love us through all of life with grace, truth, wisdom, and a love that knows no conditions. *And He will be called the "Prince of Peace."* And certainly, this is also what we've yearned for ... someone who can bring us peace, shalom, wholeness out of all the fractured parts of our lives; someone who can pull it all together for us.

Four related universal longings of the human heart are represented in our Advent wreath candles: longings that are more than amply addressed and answered in the One Whose birth we celebrate this evening. THE LONGING FOR HOPE, THE LONGING FOR LOVE, THE LONGING FOR JOY, AND THE LONGING FOR PEACE.

THE LIGHT OF HOPE

(The Worship assistant lights the candle of HOPE) THE LONGING FOR HOPE. A world without hope is a bleak and frightening place. Without something to look forward to, without a purpose to live for, our lives can become living deaths. Do you know why you exist? Do you know why you were created? Does your heart cry out for meaning? Of course it does. And our hope, our purpose, as so succinctly explained in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That gives our lives meaning, genuine hope and purpose in this life and the next. Christmas tells us God has come in the flesh that we might have life that is full, abundant, rich, eternal and purposeful.

READING

Matthew 1:18-25

Faith Ruhren

*HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem

201

THE LIGHT OF LOVE

(The Worship assistant lights the candle of LOVE) THE LONGING FOR LOVE. Every human being wants to know love; everyone wants to love and to be loved. Again, it is a universal human need. If you are of my generation or older, you may remember Peter and Gordon, whose most famous song "A World Without Love" came out in February 1964 *(the lyrics were actually written by a young Paul McCartney when he was 16 years old. He was dating Peter Asher's sister Jane, and gave the lyrics to Peter; Paul McCartney helped Peter and Gordon make millions!)* Remember the lyrics? "Please, lock me away, and don't allow the day here inside where I hide with my loneliness. I don't care what they say: I won't stay in a world without love." Peter and Gordon didn't want to stay in a world without love, and neither do we, because the human heart LONGS for love. We yearn to love and be loved ... and the Bible answers, especially at Christmas, "Here is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

READING

Luke 2:1-7

Hannah Clark

SOLO

O Holy Night

Molli Swiatek, Soprano

THE LIGHT OF JOY

(The Worship assistant lights the rose candle of Joy) THE LONGING FOR JOY. I've said this several times from this pulpit over the past twenty-one years I've been here, and I'm sure to say it several more times before I eventually retire, but if I've learned nothing else in my years of ministry, I've learned we will never understand God until we get it through our heads that the God we worship is JOYFUL! He is the most joyous Being in the universe. God did not create the world in order to judge it, or dominate it, or to make it obey the dictates of His will. God made the world to DELIGHT in it; He made this world and all in it to **share** in His overflowing joy and love. Christmas tells us He loved this world so much that He sent his only begotten Son, not to condemn it, but to save it ... and to show all of us in it the joyful Way, the glorious Truth, and the wonderful Life.

READING

Luke 2:8-15

Stephen Clark, Ministry Intern

ANTHEM

Deo Gloria

arr. Boyd Bacon

THE LIGHT OF PEACE

(The Worship assistant lights the candle of PEACE) THE LONGING FOR PEACE, or Shalom. *Shalom* is a wonderful Hebrew word that means completeness, wholeness, health, soundness, tranquility, fullness, harmony, as well as the absence of agitation or discord, all wrapped up in one word. We long for someone or something who can bring peace, shalom, wholeness out of all the fractured parts of our lives; Christmas tells us the One Who is called the Prince of Peace is that One Who can pull it all together and make all things new, now and forever. .

READING

Luke 2:16-20

Megan David

*HYMN

What Child Is This

213

SPECIAL MUSIC

Coventry Carol

English Traditional

Faith Ruhren, Cello; Karen Ruhren, Piano
John Black, Tenor; Olivia Vicente, Soprano

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

(Children were invited to come forward to the chancel, during which time we lit the final Candle of the Light of the World, the Christ candle, spoke of the supreme Gift of God from above in sending us a Savior while working a little "magic" with the Star and the infant Jesus from the creche, and distributed gifts to the children who came forward.)

*HYMN

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

203

Affirmation of Faith and Prayers of the People

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,

AND WE HAVE BEHELD HIS GLORY, ALLELUIA!

Jesus, Son of the living God, splendor of the Father, Light eternal:

GLORY TO YOU, O LORD!

Jesus, King of glory, Sun of righteousness, born of the virgin Mary:

GLORY TO YOU, O LORD!

Jesus, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, perfect in holiness:

GLORY TO YOU, O LORD!

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Wonderful Counselor,
the Way, the Truth, and the Life:

GLORY TO YOU, O LORD!

Jesus, Joy of the angels, and Crown of all the saints:

GLORY TO YOU, O LORD!

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, O FATHER, YOU SENT YOUR ONLY SON JESUS CHRIST TO BE OUR SAVIOR. IN HIM, YOUR WORD, DWELLING WITH YOU FROM ALL ETERNITY, BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US. THEREFORE WE PRAISE YOU, JOINING OUR VOICES WITH THE CELESTIAL CHOIRS AND WITH ALL THE FAITHFUL OF EVERY TIME AND PLACE, WHO FOREVER PROCLAIM THE GLORY OF YOUR NAME. ON THIS HOLY NIGHT DRAW US INTO THE MYSTERY OF YOUR LOVE. GIVE US A PLACE AMONG THE SHEPHERDS THAT WE MAY FIND THE ONE FOR WHOM WE HAVE WAITED, JESUS CHRIST, THE MESSIAH AND LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU IN THE UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY ...

(THE LORD'S PRAYER)

OFFERING

Offertory

Wexford Carol

Stephen Parkinson, Baritone

**Doxology*

731

**Prayer of Dedication*

LIGHTING THE CONGREGATIONAL CANDLES

*HYMN

Silent Night! Holy Night!

210

*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

The First Noel

arr. Mary King