



Pioneer Pastoral Charge
December 24, 2020
Christmas Eve with Communion

Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister
Office: 780-672-9266 Cell; 403-664-9266
e-mail: helen.reed9266@gmail.com

As we come together in this shared virtual Christmas Service, you are invited to come prepared with a candle for Christ (and perhaps an Advent wreath for storytelling), elements for Communion, (bread/wine/juice) voices to sing, ears to hear and hearts of love.

Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

Reflection by Georgia Sullivan

Here we are! Christmas Eve has arrived! After nine months of COVID 19 crisis, partial lockdowns, angry people on either side of the mask controversy, parted families, and empty churches, Christmas is arriving in spite of all of that. Take time to still your racing minds and hearts. Calm yourselves and just Be.

Stay quiet and just listen. Can you hear it? The animals stomping softly in the manger. The quiet snorting of the cattle. The tap, tap, tap of the shepherd's hook. The jangling of the camel harness. But wait! And there it is. The contented snuffling of a baby as he suckles at his mother's breast.

Stay still and breathe it in. The earthy smell of the manger. The pungent odor of sheep. And that awful camel smell. There is nothing like it.

Stop everything else and just look around you. Look up at the sky and gaze at the extraordinarily bright star. See the three men approaching on their camels, dressed in rich velvet, bringing caskets of expensive spices. But look who is

already here. The humble shepherds are gazing with awe and adoration at the new born baby nestled in the young mother's arms, while the father is doing the same.

Use all of your senses to take in this amazing fulfillment of God's promise. As Isaiah foretold, the Messiah has arrived. Yes, after the long wait, Jesus is born.

Have you ever noticed that throughout the Bible, God's time is often a long time. Moses wandered in the desert for forty years before he brought his people to the Promised Land, and then he died before he himself could enter. The Israelites were in exile in Babylon for seventy years before they returned to their sacred city of Jerusalem. Even Noah sat in the ark for forty days and forty nights while it rained and rained. Then he had to wait another 150 days for dry land to appear. Meanwhile, we are having a hard time staying in our houses with running water, electricity, the internet, and satellite TV.

Our modern society seems to have a hard time waiting for anything. We have instant coffee, instant pudding, and instant potatoes. We want our cars, trains, and planes to go faster. We want faster internet and more megabytes for our computers. No wonder we are having a hard time waiting out this pandemic, even though the restrictions didn't start until March.

But there have been some interesting things happening throughout the pandemic. Sometimes it was hard to buy flour and yeast at the store because people had begun to make their own bread once more. There is something very ancient and basic about making one's own bread. As a person who crochets, I began to have a problem finding

yarn. I would go into the store, and whole shelves would be empty. The clerk told me they were having a hard time keeping yarn in stock because people had gone back to knitting and crocheting as a rewarding pastime. I also heard about people starting gardens in their backyards, regaining a connection with the soil and food. Finding seeds became difficult. If the gardens were successful, the people began preserving the food for their future use. Even canning jars were in short supply.

Stores like Home Depot and Lowes were having trouble keeping up with stock because people were making decks and patios for families to enjoy the outside together. Reno projects have been pursued to update homes and make them more liveable for the whole family because they were spending more time in them.

It became difficult to find a site in a campground as more families enjoyed the outdoors and vacationing in their own province. They were discovering that there is nothing like a campfire to bring a family together.

People turned to dogs and cats for companionship and comfort, but even those pets became hard to find. There was one unexpected benefit for the dogs. They were being walked more often, and they and their owners began to get in better shape.

Parents were working from home and children were distance learning from home as well. Suddenly, families were eating meals together instead of rushing off for sporting practices because there were none. Board games were selling out quickly as families discovered the joy of playing together as well.

As I think about all of these developments, I can't help but wonder if maybe this is really part of God's plan. We have been forced to slow down and do a reset (or reboot, in computer language) and re-evaluate our priorities. If you examine the things I have just listed, almost all of them involve bringing the family closer together. Twenty years from now, if we ask the children who are now grown up what they remember about the pandemic, they may reply, "That was the time we started camping together, eating our meals together, and playing games together. And laughing. There was lots of laughing."

Perhaps, just perhaps, God is giving us a sign about what is really important in our lives. As I age, it has become more and more apparent to me that nothing but family really matters. Perhaps the pandemic is driving that home to the younger generation as well.

Speaking of signs, on November 30, my Facebook page was flooded with photos of glorious sunrises and magnificent sunsets. They came from all over. I was stunned by their beauty! I wondered if this was another sign from God that no matter how bad things may seem in our lives, there is always beauty to be found, if we just choose to look for it.

There is also goodness to be found. We have heard stories of extraordinary acts of kindness and generosity toward others during this pandemic. This is what loving our neighbours is all about. This is what Christmas is all about.

Our Christmas this year is looking different from past Christmases. We will not be able to have the big family gatherings at our tables. We shall probably try to maintain our smaller bubbles to keep us all safe. But we shall be able

to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The birth of any baby signals a new beginning, but the birth of Jesus signaled an unprecedented new beginning. We can certainly take it into our hearts and resolve to love and be kind in an unprecedented way.

I would like to close with a quote from our Moderator, Richard Bott: “I received a call from a friend who was commenting on the fact that our bubbles are getting smaller, and that they were hearing more often that people are ‘cancelling Christmas.’ They asked me what I’d say, if I were told that I had to cancel Christmas this year. What I said was, “It is impossible to cancel Christmas. Christmas is celebrated each time a disciple of Jesus lives love. Christmas isn’t an event. Christmas IS”.

Christmas IS. Remember that as we go into the world, whatever that world looks like. We are the ambassadors of Christ and Christmas.

Blessings to you all. Be kind and love in abundance.

Call to Worship (Richard Bott, 2020)

On that first Christmas Eve,
Mary, Joseph, and the newborn
Jesus were in their family bubble;
safe and together, for that night.
We gather tonight,
distant, but together;
as families in our own homes,
but also as family with Jesus.
We may be separated from
the night of his birth by geography and time.
We may be separated from each other,
because of this pandemic.
But we are together in God's love.

Nothing can separate us from that,
or from each other in that.
So, friends - in Jesus name –
let us be together in this time
of Christmas worship!

Opening Prayer

O Holy God, on this Christmas Eve
when we find ourselves in familiar and unfamiliar places,
when we are separated by care for each other,
we gather to hear the story of your love
joining with us in our living.

**Open our hearts to see the
gift of love found in an uncrowded stable.
Open our heads to hear your voice of love
always there to inspire us
and fill us and accompany us.**

May the quiet of this Holy Night,
filled with the memories and stories
of loved shared then and now,
fill us with wonder and excitement.

**God-with-us, Emmanuel,
be among us and with us
again and again and always. Amen.**

☪ **Hymn: ♪ VU#60 O Come All Ye Faithful”** (Verses 1,3,5)

The Lights of God:

Through our Advent journey,
the light of Christ has travelled with us.
Each week, we have been reminded
of the blessings of travelling together in faith and in life.

**On our first Advent Sunday
Christ’s light showed us Hope.**

(light the Candle)

**On our second Advent Sunday
Christ’s light showed us Peace**

(light the Candle)

**On our third Advent Sunday
Christ's light showed us Joy**

(light the Candle)

**On our fourth Advent Sunday
Christ's light showed us Love**

Now we light a candle for Christ.

We celebrate God's most precious gift to us:

a fragile child who has the strength to bring

Hope, peace, joy and love into the world

and into the hearts and minds of each one of us.

☩ Hymn: VU#64 O Little Town of Bethlehem (1,2)

The story of Christmas...

Let us share the Christmas Story together...

Many, many years before Jesus was born, there lived a prophet called Isaiah. Isaiah was concerned about the kings and leaders in his time who had forgotten God's way.

Isaiah dreamed of a time when God would send a new leader, someone who would be fair and loving and would show people God's way once again. He described the coming of this new leader in this way:

Isaiah 9:6-7 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

⁶ This will happen when the special child is born. God will give us a son who will be responsible for leading the people. His name will be "Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace."

⁷ His power will continue to grow, and there will be peace without end. This will establish him as the king sitting on David's throne and ruling his kingdom. He will rule with goodness and justice forever and ever.

The strong love that God has for all people will make this happen!

☩ Hymn: ♪ VU#1 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (VU 1, Verses 1,5,6)

Then we move ahead in the story about 700 years from Isaiah's day into the time of the Romans when Emperor Augustus was the ruler.

The Spirit of God was preparing for miracles...

Luke 1:26-35, 37,38 (the Inclusive Bible)

²⁶⁻²⁷ Six months after Elizabeth had learned that she would have a son, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary: she was engaged to marry a man named Joseph, of the house of David. ²⁸ Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favoured one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!"

²⁹ Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel's greeting meant. ³⁰ The angel went on to say to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus – "Deliverance." ³² His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, ³³ to rule over the house of Jacob forever; his reign will never end."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have never been with a man?"

³⁵ The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you – hence the offspring to be born will be call the Holy One of God.

Nothing is impossible with God.

Mary said, "I am the servant of God. Let it be done with me as you say."

The Learning:

How amazing is Mary's story of faith?

Life was changed forever, in unexplainable ways, yet she believed and lived her faith fully.

She listened to her heart and moved into the impossible.

What impossible places is God asking us to reach into today?

**☩ Hymn: ♪ VU#16 Mary, Woman of the Promise
(Vs 1,2,3)**

The Third Lesson

Matthew 1:18-24 (The Inclusive Bible)

Jesus's mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph. When she was found to be pregnant through the Holy spirit, Joseph, her husband, an upright person unwilling to disgrace her, decided to divorce her quietly.

This was Joseph's intention when suddenly the angel of God appeared in a dream and said, "Joseph, heir to the House of David, don't be afraid to wed Mary; it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She is to have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. All this happened to fulfill what God has said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and give birth, and the child will be named Immanuel," a name that means "God is with us".

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of God had directed

The learning:

Joseph gave up his status, his reputation for God.

He re-thought his previous attitudes and made a huge change in how he participated in his society.

He did the unexpected because he needed to do what was right.

Where is God asking us to be different, to make space for God's way in the world?

☩ Hymn: ♪ VU#55 In the Bleak Midwinter (Vs 1,2,4)

The Fourth Lesson:

Luke 2:1-5

In those days, Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole Roman world. This first census took place while Quirinius was Governor of Syria.

All the people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to "the city of David" Bethlehem, in Judea,

because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David; he went to register with Mary, his espoused wife who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn.

The Learning:

No matter what the world pushes us to do or be,
God will move through the clutter of humanity
and touch us in unexpected ways and places.

God will lead us to be where we need to be.

God is not found in the most spectacular places,
but in the quiet, least thought of places
not surrounded by people, but surrounded by love.

Hymn: 🎵 VU#69 **Away In a Manger (Vs 1,2)**

The Fifth Lesson

Luke 2: 8-14

There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them, they were very much afraid.

The angel said to them,

“You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you – news of great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David’s city, a savior – the Messiah – has been born to you. Let this be a sign to you: you’ll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth, peace to those on whom God’s favour rests.”

The learning:

Don't be afraid. God knows where we are.

God will give us what we need.

When the voice of God sings in your heart. Listen.

**☩Hymn: ♪ VU#38 Angels We Have Heard on High
(Vs 1,2)**

The Sixth Lesson

Luke 2:15-18 (the Inclusive Bible)

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, and see this event that God has made known to us."

They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw this, they reported what they had been told concerning the child. All who heard about it were astonished at the report given by the shepherds.

The learning:

Follow God. It's not enough to just hear the message.

We need to go there.

We need to go to the places where God is calling us to be.

Even if we're not always welcome.

Even if we're not comfortable.

We do God's work as we welcome love into the world.

☩Hymn: ♪ VU#73 The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy

The Seventh Lesson

Luke 1:19-20 (the Inclusive Bible)

Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds went away glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told

☩Hymn: ♪ VU#43 Go Tell It On The Mountain

Invitation to Communion...

*We remember that journey to Bethlehem
filled with change and surprise and love.*

*We know, that change and surprise and love
continue throughout generations.
And God continues with us.
We are invited into the stable,
a place with few people to see God's love in action.
We are invited to remember a table,
in a place with few people
where Jesus grew a sacred tradition
into another reminder of God's love in action.
And God continues with us.*

*Come with me to reconnect with the Holy,
the loving spirit that reaches out to us wherever we are,
some of us with company, some of us in solitude,
All of us with God.*

Call to Give Thanks

The Lord be with you **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to our God!
It is good to give God thanks and praise.

Thanksgiving Song of Faith...

*(The following prayer was inspired by "Blessed are you, gracious God..." by William Kervin
and Lillian Perigoe in Celebrate God's Presence, page 276. Used with permission.)*

Giver of all life,
Source of love that knows no boundaries,
Your song of wisdom rang out
before the world began;
your song of justice
has filled us with your hope for a world where:
those considered last and least are first and most;
violence is overcome by the power of your ancient love;
and all people work together for peace.

We thank you for those who, like Mary and Joseph,
have the strength and courage
to bring to your love in the world;

for those who, like the shepherds,
dare to seek out the Child of Bethlehem;

We sing of your gift of love.

***œ*Hymn: ♪ VU#58 Infant Holy, Infant Lowly**

As we wait for the celebration of
the birth of Jesus, God-With-Us,
we remember the grown man
who invited his friends to God's table.

Knowing that life was full of challenge
he reminded them of their commitment
to follow God's teachings so that
the world could grow into God's vision of love

Through his birth and faith-filled living,
Jesus offered God's hope to all people
He shared food with followers and friends,
with saints and sinners,

**With crowds of thousands on the hillside,
and a few friends in an upper room.**

He took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks,
he broke it, and gave it to them, saying:

"Take, eat. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then, he took a cup, and after giving thanks,
he passed it among them, saying:

"Drink this. Do this in remembrance of me."

Through this loaf and cup, Jesus lives within us.

In our words and actions, Jesus lives among us.

Prayer for Transformation

Holy One,
through walls and doors and faithful hearts,
send your Holy Spirit,
upon these gifts of bread and cup.

When we eat this bread

may we know the power of your love.
When we drink from this cup may we be refreshed by
your spirit for the journey ahead.
Let us receive, with joy, the gifts you have provided,
for we ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Prayers of God's people, for God's people:^{HR}

Holy God,

**In this Christmas moment,
we celebrate your coming
and your living with us.**

**We remember that you came for all people
and that you love us all with abundance.**

Our faith-filled hearts are full of prayer.
and our emotions are swirling,
intertwining lament, sadness, hope, love,
and quiet joy.

**We hold your world in prayer:
may this season of rejoicing remind us of the care that
you ask us to share with each other.**

In our communities we have
family, friends and neighbours
who have loved ones in hospital
 who can't be visited
who have lost loved ones
 who can't be celebrated as we would wish.
who are not able to celebrate this season
 with family in traditional ways.

**We hold them in prayer
and ask for your presence to surround them,
to remind them that they are not alone,
that love is with them.**

We offer our gratitude for the Angels among us
who welcome the lost and lonely;

who offer healing to the hurting;
who offer words of encouragement and hope
in unfamiliar times and places;
**God of all Hope and Peace and Joy and Love,
We ask for your presence to surround us,
to lift us up, to put a song of love in our heart,
to join us together as one with you.**

The Prayer of Jesus

Let us join our voices together in prayer,
as we gather all of God's people around the world
to our hearts, as we sing together (VU960)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallow-ed 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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And deliver us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil:
for thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Sharing the Bread and Wine

Because of God's gifts we gather.
In this time and place we share:
Bread for the journey. The Cup of Blessing

Prayer after Communion

May this sacred time,
remind us of the love of God
that surrounds us in all of our days.
May we invite the Christ to be our guest this day and always,
May we welcome hope, peace, joy, and love into our lives,
and become hosts to God's presence and people.

**God of Hope,
guide us to the stables of our world,
where the lonely and longing gather.
Lead us to the mangers of our time,
where hope and renewal are born again.
Make us heralds of your love and joy.
Amen**

Blessing and Benediction

God of stables, shepherds and stars,
you gather us by the light of the star of promise.
You lead us into hope for the future.
You remind us of the power of love
to make the world a better place
one child at a time.
Guide us this night, by the light of that same star,
by the light of your love. **Amen.**

Sharing the Christ Light

☩Hymn: 🎵 VU#67 Silent Night, Holy Night

Changing the Christ Candle:

You hold in your hands, the light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth, showing us where we are and where we are meant to be.
The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us wherever we go.

Merry Christmas!

☩Sending Song: 🎵

Postlude

Acknowledgements

This service is inspired by

SeasonsFusion Advent • Christmas • Epiphany 2019-2020 (pages73-75)

Lessons and Carols: Christmas Eve Service: 2018 AdventUnwrapped.ca

Advent Communion Liturgy: 2018 & 2019 AdventUnwrapped.ca