

CHRISTMAS EVE

**Cereal United Church, Thursday, December 23, 2021 @
7:00 pm**

Oyen United Church, Friday, December 24, 2021 @ 7:00 pm

Call to Worship

Welcome, everyone, on this holiest of nights.

As Mary readied herself to give birth to Jesus,

let us prepare ourselves to welcome new birth into our lives.

As a child prepares to open a special gift,

let us prepare our hearts to receive the wonders of God's love.

As heaven and earth sing of great joy,

let us sing our joyful praises to God.

Come, let us worship God together!

Hymn VU #59 Joy to the World!

All the verses

Prayer of Approach

**God of love, as we gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus
we thank you for the gift of new life and new beginnings.**

Just as a new birth brings out the tenderness in even the hardest heart, bring out a deeper tenderness and caring in us. Just as a new birth brings a whole family together, bring us together as your family.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn VU #60 O Come All Ye Faithful

Verses 1 & 3

Our Journey to Bethlehem

Narrator: Tonight, we journey to Bethlehem. Our journey will take us from the time of the prophet Isaiah, to the time of Jesus' birth, and to our own time. First, let us begin with Isaiah.

Isaiah: Hello everyone. I had the most glorious vision of God's way! Imagine with me a world where enemies become friends, where weapons of war become farming tools, where little children are the ones who teach and lead, where people live in harmony with all creation!

I was excited by this vision! I shared it and tried to live it. But I was laughed at and scorned. But I kept dreaming that one day a leader would come - a leader of wisdom and understanding, of love and compassion - a leader who would help bring this dream to reality.

Narrator: Isaiah hoped for a leader to come in his own time and restore Jerusalem as God's city. But from the earliest days Christians saw Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Tonight, let us ask: by my life and actions, do I live by Isaiah's vision? Do I help with healing and making life better for others? Do I look to children for guidance? Do I live with love and peace? Let us get ready for the Christ Child to enter our hearts.

Hymn VU #2 Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

(verses 1 and 2)

Scene Two: Leah

Narrator: Tonight, we will follow the story of Jesus' birth as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew tells the story in simple, straightforward terms. There is no journey to Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph. They appear to already be living there by Matthew's account. Also, there are no shepherds or angels; no stables or mangers, we have just a simple birth. A mother giving birth in those days would most certainly have been surrounded by supportive family members. Here is one of those family members. We'll call her Leah, and we'll hear from her now.

Leah: Hello, there. It's so good to be with you here tonight. Let me share with you what it was like for me that special night when Jesus was born. But first, let's go back just a little bit, because for a while there, things didn't look at all good for Mary. We were so happy she would marry Joseph, for she was as loving a person as you could ever meet – truly a blessing from God. So, it was a huge surprise when we all learned she was going to have a baby before they were married! We all knew what that meant: Joseph might not marry her. She could be a disgrace to her family and end up on the street. She might become a beggar and probably

die before long. That's how things happened in my day. But a miracle happened instead! Joseph stayed with her. In a dream, he learned that the baby was of God's Spirit, and that Joseph was still to marry her. Isn't it amazing how God works in such unexpected ways! On the night of the birth, a lot of relatives were there, including children. Several of us women were with Mary all through the day and night. It was crowded in that little room, and the animals were close by, too. All we had for light was an oil lamp, that doesn't give a very bright light. But it's all we had in those days for seeing at night. We really knew the feeling of darkness, so when we heard that this baby would be like a shining light in the darkness, we knew that this meant wonderful things would come.

Narrator: The humble birth described by Leah reminds us that God often comes to us in simple, unexpected ways: a baby's smile, a meal shared, a healing touch, a tear, a painting, a snowflake, a bird, a flower that opens, a sudden inspiration, a quarrel that ends in laughter. God's creating goes ever on! And this creation needs constant loving care.

**Hymn Cereal The Christmas Nighingale sung by Evv
Miller**

Oyen O Little Town of Bethlehem (verse 1)

Scene Three: Joseph

Narrator: As Leah mentioned, Joseph and Mary became married, after Joseph learned in a dream that this was a special baby from God, and that it was important to get married. Here's Joseph now to tell us more about what he felt.

Joseph: It was all very strange and amazing, let me tell you! I loved Mary, so I was happy that we would be together. What a surprise it was to learn we'd be caring for so special a child! Yet, why would God choose us? What hope was there, really, for our world? We lived in tough times. The powerful rulers cheated and oppressed poor people like us. Sick and hungry people were everywhere. Orphans and widows had no homes. People talked about fighting against the Romans, but I knew that wasn't the way. Where could we find hope? Where could we find peace? In this little one of ours? If so, what a miracle that would be! We know that God works in unexpected ways. Imagine! God with us, in this little child! Holding the child in my arms will be like holding God.

Hymn Cereal O Little Town of Bethlehem sung by Evy Miller

**Oyen VU #64 O Little Town of Bethlehem
Verse 4**

Scripture Reading

Now let us hear the story of Jesus' birth according to the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 1, verses 18 – 25, New Life Version.

Birth of Jesus

¹⁸The birth of Jesus Christ was like this: Mary His mother had been promised in marriage to Joseph. Before they were married, it was learned that she was to have a baby by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Joseph was her promised husband. He was a good man and did not want to make it hard for Mary in front of people. He thought it would be good to break the promised marriage without people

knowing it. ²⁰While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is to become a mother by the Holy Spirit. ²¹A Son will be born to her. You will give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from the punishment of their sins."

²²This happened as the Lord said it would happen through the early preacher. ²³He said, "The young woman, who has never had a man, will give birth to a Son. They will give Him the name Emmanuel. This means God with us." ²⁴Joseph awoke from his sleep. He did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. He took Mary as his wife. ²⁵But he did not have her, as a husband has a wife, until she gave birth to a Son. Joseph gave Him the name Jesus.

Meditation

Let us now experience how Jesus can be born into our lives.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself as a tiny infant about to be born.

It's dark; it's peaceful; it's safe; and it's getting crowded.

Now imagine you are born!

You stretch..... take a deep breathyour very first! You open your eyes and look around.

Everything you see and hear and smell and taste and touch is new and wonderful.

Imagine being held in loving arms.

Imagine feeling safe and warm and content.

Now, be yourself again.

You are here, surrounded by God's family.

You look around.

Every person you see is much like you:

wanting to love, wanting to give love,

wanting life to be new and exciting and joyous.

Every person you see is precious to God,

as precious as a newborn babe,

as precious as every other part of creation,

as precious as you.

Now, imagine that you are holding a baby tenderly in your arms.

Imagine that you are rocking the baby gently.

Gaze into the baby's eyes.

Think of the hopes and dreams that you have for this child.

Now imagine that you are holding the Christ Child.

Imagine that what you are holding is every hope and dream you ever had.

Imagine you are holding the hopes and dreams of every person on earth.

Imagine you are holding God's hopes.

(pause)

And now let us stop imagining,

Let us really and truly hold close our hopes and dreams for God's peace on earth.

Let us really and truly love one another as God loves us.

Let us truly welcome the newborn Christ into our lives!

Hymn VU #69 Away in a Manger

Verses 1 & 3

Lighting of the Christ Candle

It is now time to light the Christ candle in our Advent wreath. We have lit 1 candle each of the 4 Sundays in Advent.

The waiting is over.

The dreaming has given birth to a new reality.

The source of our healing has come near.

God's promise has been fulfilled.

The Advent candles are all lit, forming a circle of light that reminds us of God's never-ending love.

Now we will light the Christ candle, and we thank God for the light of Jesus guiding us to new life. Jesus is the light for our world.

Light the Christ candle.

Hymn VU #6 A Candle is Burning

All the verses

The People Pray

In this most holy season, we have gathered, O God, to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. With us we bring the hurt, hopes and fears, and the needs of our world. We pray for peace and goodwill among all the nations and for those who are in positions of power and authority, that their focus is one of justice and peace for all people.

In this season of carols, we remember all in our midst who have little to sing about, those who are lonely, depressed, anxious, or sick; those who are poor, hungry or cold....

We remember those who are unemployed, those whose dreams have been shattered. We especially remember those whose lives are disrupted by forces beyond their control...

We thank you, good and generous Lord, that in Jesus the Christ, you have made yourself know to us. And that you have asked us to join in your creation of a world that is blessed by hope, peace, joy and love.

Create in us, O God, hearts, minds, bodies and souls, devoted to shaping such a world.

O Christ, light of the world, come to our lives and reveal meaning and truth.

Loving God, may this Christmas season and beyond, be an opening up of ourselves to you. Renew our spirits, and strengthen and guide us to do your will and your work in the world, through your power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Offering

For health and safety reasons, we will not pass the offering plate. It is at the back of the sanctuary on the table and you may leave your offering there.

Offertory Prayer

May these gifts open others to the blessing you give this Christmas: the gift of childlike wonder; the gift of radiant hope; the gift of peace which passes all understanding; the gift of joy which knows no bounds. With these gifts, we bring ourselves, O God, in response to your greatest gift of all – the Christ child. Amen.

Candle Lighting (Lower the lights)

Jesus is the light of the world. As his followers we are called to receive his light and carry it into the darkness of today. Let us now light our Christ candles, the light that can shine in and through each one of us. Watch the light grow as each of us receive the light of Christ.

Passing of the Light.

As this light of Christ now shines, may the love of Christ truly shine in each one of us. May we be a light for others as we seek to bring God's hope, peace, love and joy to our world.

Hymn VU #67 Silent Night

All three verses

In your hands you hold the light of Christ. The light of the child, of the man who came to show us that we are all children of God. Change the light (extinguish the candle) and see the Spirit of God that is with us on every adventure and every journey of our life. Breathe it in and know that God is with you wherever you go.

Commissioning

**As we celebrate the birth of the holy child,
let us remember that this is just the beginning.
Let us also celebrate the new life he brings
through his life, death, and resurrection,
and the gift of true hope he brings for God's peace on
earth.
Let us go now, with the peace of Christ within us. Amen**

**Hymn VU #73 The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy
All verses**

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE

Next church services are January 9, 2022

Acadia Valley at 11:15 am

Cereal at 9:30 am

Oyen at 11:15 am

Come Join Us!