



Thornbury, Ontario
Grace United Church
Bold. Nurturing. Liberal. Christian.

December 24th, 2025

Christmas Eve

Find this service at www.graceunitedthornbury.ca/live

Leading us today in Worship:

Worship Leader: Jim Oliver

Music Director: Dr. Christopher Burton

Lay Reader: Mary Lou Gignac

Leader: regular font ~ All: bold font ~ Sung words: bold italics

Asterisk * Indicates when the congregation may stand if able.

We Gather Together in Community

PRELUDE:

"Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire"

R .Wells/Tormé, arr. C. Burton

A Stewardship Second:

Thank you for all the ways you are generous. Your gifts to this congregation and to Mission and Service really do help to change the world God loves.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION:

Christmas Eve Theme: "Love Will Find a Way"

Tonight we enter once more the story we know so well—the story of a child born in darkness, and of light that could not be extinguished. We will see the familiar scenes of the nativity, but with a twist: this year, we step into the story not only as observers, but as participants.

For we are the stars that shine above the stable.
We are the ones who carry the light of Christ into
our world.

We are the angels singing songs of blessing and
peace.

We are the ones who will kneel in wonder, offering
ourselves as gifts of love.

The message of Christmas is not confined to a
manger long ago. The birth we celebrate is a birth
within us—within our lives, our communities, and our
choices. The gifts of Advent—**hope, peace, joy, and
love**—are not only blessings we receive, but
treasures we give away. They become kindness in
action, generosity in motion, compassion that heals
and restores.

So as we watch the nativity unfold, we remember
that the story does not end with shepherds returning
to their fields; it continues when we rise from this
place and become bearers of Christ's light in the
world.

Tonight, we remember: **Love will always find a
way—especially through us.**

***OPENING HYMN: VU #60 "O Come All Ye Faithful"**

**1 O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
 O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
 come and behold him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
 O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.**

**2 God of God, light of light,
 lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;
 very God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,**

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

**3 *Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
glory to God in the highest:***

***O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.***

**4 *See how the shepherds summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.***

**5 *Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.***

OPENING PRAYER:

Holy One,

On this silent and shining night,
you come to us as a child—small, fragile, and full of
promise.

You enter the world not with power, but with presence;
not with force, but with love.

Open our hearts to receive you.

**Let the light that filled the sky over Bethlehem
fill us now—**(light four candles)

**that we may shine with your hope,
walk in your peace,
dance with your joy,
and embody your love.**

As we gather around this heartfelt story of new
beginnings,

remind us that we too are part of its unfolding.
 In our day, and in our time, help us to be bearers of
 light for those in darkness,
 messengers of comfort for those who grieve,
 and companions of courage for those who fear the
 night.

**Guide us forward, as Love guides the lost,
 as Light guides the seekers,
 as Christ guides the world into a new way of being.**

Tonight, may your love O God, find a way—
 into our spirits,
 into our homes,
 into our world.

Amen.

Lighting the Christ Candle:

Tonight, we light the Christ Candle—
 the symbol of Love's presence come into the world.

Love finds a way, even here, even now.

In a world longing for healing,
 Christ is born as peace.

In a world hungry for joy,
 Christ is born as delight.

In a world aching for hope,
 Christ is born as promise.

In a world yearning to be loved,
 Christ is born as Love itself.

Light of Christ, shine in us.

As this candle burns,
 may its light remind us that we, too,
 are bearers of Christ's flame—
 stars that shine in the night,
 voices ready to proclaim good news,
 hearts ready to welcome the Holy Child.

**For surely, Love has found a way.
 We will light the world with it.**

***HYMN: VU #7 "Hope is a Star"**

- 1 **Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.**

- 2 **Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.**

- 3 **Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.**

- 4 **Love is a flame that burns in our heart,
Jesus has come and will never depart.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.**

We Listen Together

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

(Reading from the New Revised Standard Version
Updated Edition)

Isaiah 9: 2 – 7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied exultation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Great will be his authority,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2: 1 – 15

In those days a decree went out from Caesar 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 in the guest room.

Now in that same 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 Savior, 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 favors!"

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."

MUSICAL SELECTION:

Organ solo versions of familiar hymns

LOVE FINDS a WAY: a narrated play

(written and shared by Rev John G Smith)

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth in the temple

***Hymn:** VU #64 "O Little Town of Bethlehem",
1 O little town of Bethlehem,

how still we see thee lie!
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
 the silent stars go by;
 yet in thy dark streets shineth
 the everlasting light;
 the hopes and fears of all the years
 are met in thee tonight.

2 For Christ is born of Mary;
 and gathered all above,
 while mortals sleep, the angels keep
 their watch of wondering love.
 O morning stars, together
 proclaim the holy birth,
 and praises sing to God the King,
 and peace to all on earth.

3 How silently, how silently
 the wondrous gift is given!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 the blessed gift of heaven.
 No ear may hear his coming;
 but in this world of sin,
 where meek souls will receive him, still
 the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy child of Bethlehem,
 descend to us, we pray;
 cast out our sin, and enter in;
 be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 the great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us,
 our Lord Emmanuel.

2. Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem

***Hymn: VU # 73 "The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy",**

- 1. The virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
and they say that his name is Jesus.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.**
- 2. The angels sang when the baby was born,
the angels sang when the baby was born,
the angels sang when the baby was born,
and they say that his name is Jesus.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.**
- 3. The shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
and they say that his name is Jesus.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)**

he come from the glorious kingdom.

3. Angels appear to shepherds

***Hymn: VU #75**

“While Shepherds Watched their Flocks”, Verses 1-3

**1 While shepherds watched their flocks by night
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.**

**2 ‘Fear not,’ said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind;
‘glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and humankind.**

**3 ‘To you in David’s town this day
is born of David’s line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:**

4. Gifts of the Magi

***Hymn: VU #74 “What Child is This”**

**1 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?**

Refrain:

**This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

**2 Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?**

**Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.**

Refrain:

**This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

- 3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
 come, one and all, to own him.
The King of Kings salvation brings;
 let loving hearts enthrone him.**

Refrain:

**This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

A Moment of Reflection:

Music Selection:

Organ solo versions of familiar hymns

We Respond to God's Word

INVITATION to the OFFERING:

Ready or not, the time for celebrating Jesus' birth is here!
Family, food, hope, peace, joy, love. Giving abunds! So let us
be generous here and now! Let us each give a financial gift as
we share the Good News of Jesus' birth.

Our offerings will now be received.

PRAYER of DEDICATION for OUR OFFERINGS:

O God, may gifts given here today, and those we have given by PAR [or on-line, or by e-transfer] help to share the Good News of Jesus' birth. We give with thanks. Amen.

Donate online: www.graceunitedthornbury.ca, select "DONATE"
or contact the office by **email:** accounting@graceunitedthornbury.ca or
phone: 519-599-2438 to arrange a **cheque** pick-up, or an **e-transfer**
Mail: Grace UC, 140 Bruce St. S. PO Box 219, Thornbury, ON N0H 2P0
or **Offering Plate at the back of the sanctuary.**

Tap your debit card at the door of the church, and Donate to Grace United Church through **CanadaHelps.org**. Our account is set up with them now and it is easy to register. Tax receipts are given automatically at the time of giving.
Care, Prayer, Share

OFFERING HYMN: VU #55 "In the Bleak Midwinter"

**What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wiseman, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him -- give my heart.**

LIGHTING of CANDLES: (Ushers distribute candle light.
They can light their candles from the Christ Candle.)

***HYMN: VU #67 "Silent Night, Holy Night"**

**1 Silent night! Holy night!
 All is calm, all is bright
 round yon virgin mother and child.
 Holy infant so tender and mild,
 sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**

**2 Silent night! Holy night!
 Shepherds quake at the sight:
 glories stream from heaven afar,
 heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah,
 Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born.**

**3 Silent night! Holy night!
 Son of God, love's pure light
 radiant beams from thy holy face,
 with the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.**

***BENEDICTION:**

Go now in the deep peace of this holy night.
 Go with the song of angels in your ears
 and the wonder of shepherds in your hearts.

Go with the courage of Joseph,
 the openness of Mary,
 and the joy of all who seek the Child.

And as you go, remember:
 Love has found a way—
 into the world,
 into this night,
 into our lives.

May the light of Christ shine through you
 and in you,
 And always be with you, **Amen.**

POSTLUDE:

Christmas Selections

LITURGY SOURCES: *The following are used with permission:*

Stewardship Second, invitation to the Offering, and Prayer of Dedication of our

Offerings: © 2025 The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice.

Opening Prayer, Lighting Christ Candle, Drama, reflection and Benediction written by
 Rev. Dr. John G. Smith.

HYMNS and SUNG VERSES (all copyrighted music by permission One License #608577)

-**"Come All Ye Faithful:"** Words: English Translation Frederick Oakeley 1841, et al, French translation Claude Rozier 1950. Music: attributed to John Francis Wade, ca. 1743. Public Domain

-**"Hope is a Star:"** Words by Brian Wren 1985, music by Joan Collier Fogg 1987; words and music copyright © 1989 Hope Publishing Company.

-**"O Little Town of Bethlehem:"** Words: Phillips Brooks 1868. Music: Lewis Henry Redner 1868. Public Domain.

-**"The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy:"**

Words, Music: West Indian carol, from Edric Conner Collection of west Indian Spirituals 1945 © 1945 Boosey and Hawkes, 10th Floor, 52 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10013, USA. Words, Music: Boosey and Hawkes. One License

-**"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks:"** Words: Nabum Tate. Music: Adapted from Este's *Whole Booke of Psalmes*. Public Domain

-**"What Child is This:"** Words: William Chatterton Dix 1865. Music: English melody, harmony attributed to John Stainer 1871. Public Domain.

-**"In the Bleak Midwinter:"** Words: Christina Georgina Rossetti ca. 1872. Music: Gustav Theodor Holst 1906. Public Domain.

-**"Silent Night:"** Words: Joseph Mohr 1818. English translation: John Freeman Young 1863, et al. Music: Franz Xavier Grüber 1818. Public Domain.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Prelude: "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" R. Wells/Tormé, arr. C. Burton

Musical Selections: Organ solo versions of familiar hymns

Postlude: Christmas Selections