

December 6, 2020
Second Sunday of Advent
“I Believe in Love: Daring Right Relationship”



"One of the essential paradoxes of Advent: that while we wait for God, we are with God all along, that while we need to be reassured of God's arrival, or the arrival of our homecoming, we are already at home. While we wait, we have to trust, to have faith, but it is God's grace that gives us that faith." - **Michelle Blake**

"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love!" - **Hamilton Wright Mabie**

The world is now too small to exhibit anything but truth, and too dangerous for anything but love. - **William Sloane Coffin**

"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like *struggle*. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now." - **Fred Rogers**

“Did You wrap yourself inside the unexpected so we might know that Love would go that far?”
- **Francesca Battistelli**

“When you love folk you can’t stand the fact that they are being treated unjustly.” - **Lucy Hunnicutt**

“Justice is what love looks like in public”- **Cornel West**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

GREETING/WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us this morning for our second Sunday of Advent, a celebration of love.

With the rise in cases of COVID, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another especially at this time of year, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pie Sale/Holiday Bazaar
Pageant 12/20
Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols Service

So, as we begin today let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki
Tribe.

These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.

We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

**It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth,
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.**

Crossing the Threshold

In both the Gospel of Matthew and Isaiah, a messenger appears as a sign from God, heralding a new era. In each passage, the words “do not be afraid” appear...offering a clue that the messenger, whether prophet or angel, was referencing something that induced fear in the recipient. A new way of being together, of relating and loving takes courage, eschewing the present order of things so that a new and better day can be born.

I believe in love, I believe in love,
even when, even when I don't feel it.

I believe in love, I believe in love,
even when, even when I don't feel it.

Pastor: The emptiness of loneliness
The wounds inflicted
The fear of the “other”

Prayer

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of daring love.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we cannot yet see a better day
when we will act like the human family we are,
ignite the flame of love within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

**I believe in love,
I believe in love,
even when... even when...
I don't feel it.**

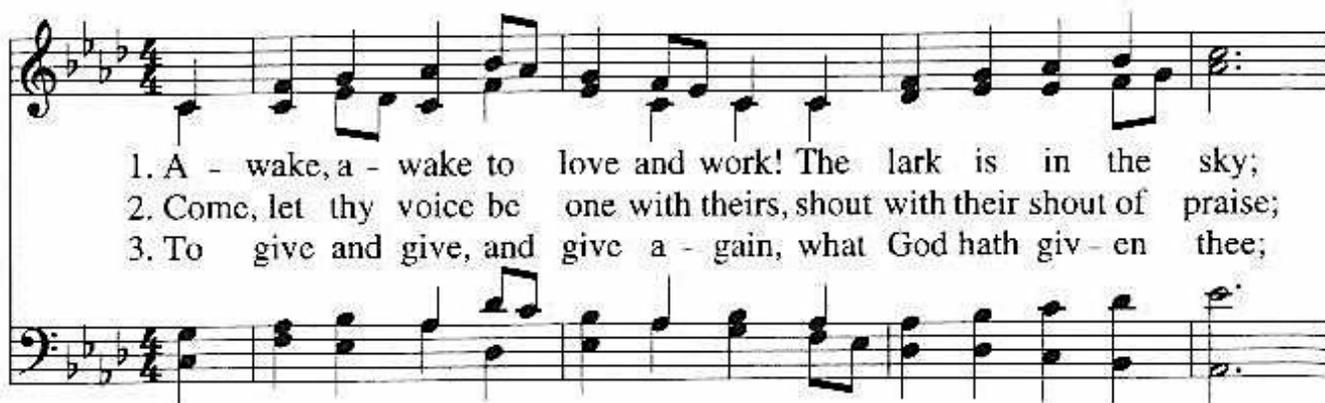
Pastor: Help us face this fear of difference
and dare to see what love can do.

Amen.

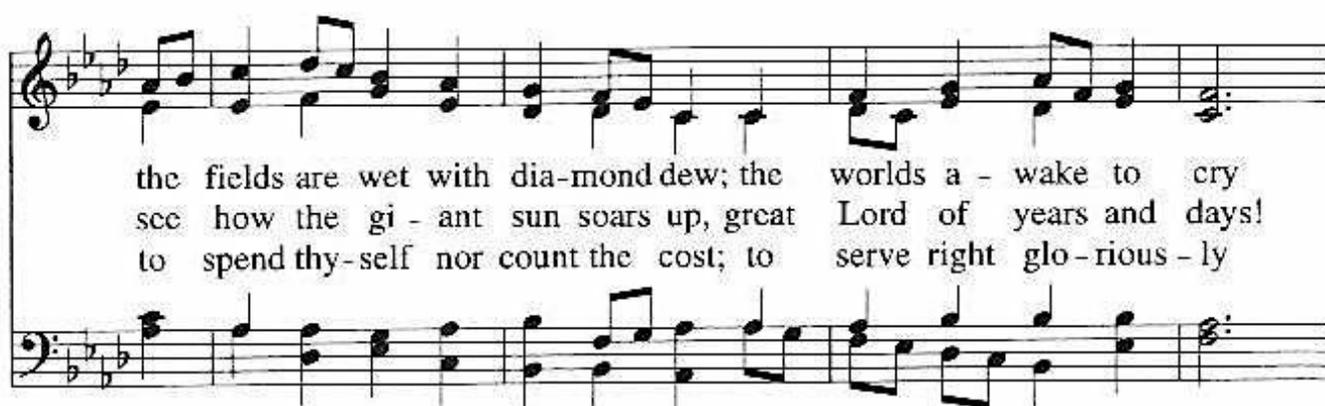
Pastor: You are invited to light your Advent 2 candle of Love at this time.

OPENING HYMN: #259 “Awake, Awake to Love and Work” Geoffrey Anketel Studdert Kennedy (1921), Tune: MORNING SONG (Dare), *Soloist Tony Barrand with Patty Meyer, piano*

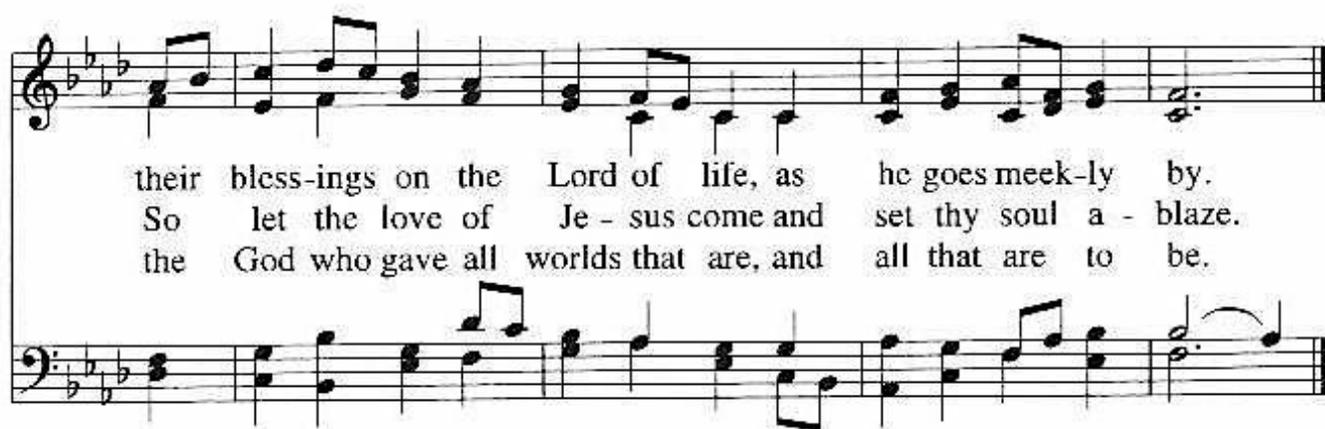
Awake, Awake to Love and Work



1. A - wake, a - wake to love and work! The lark is in the sky;
 2. Come, let thy voice be one with theirs, shout with their shout of praise;
 3. To give and give, and give a - gain, what God hath giv - en thee;



the fields are wet with dia-mond dew; the worlds a - wake to cry
 see how the gi - ant sun soars up, great Lord of years and days!
 to spend thy-self nor count the cost; to serve right glo - rious - ly



their bless-ings on the Lord of life, as he goes meek-ly by.
 So let the love of Je - sus come and set thy soul a - blaze.
 the God who gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be.

WE PROCLAIM

Children's Time to Shine

CHILDREN'S STORY: How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss, *Ellen Peters*

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

Isaiah 7:1-14 (CEB) *Sara Glennon*

In the days of Ahaz (Jotham's son and grandson of Judah's King Uzziah), Aram's King Rezin and Israel's King Pekah (Remaliah's son) came up to attack Jerusalem, but they couldn't overpower it.

When the house of David was told that Aram had become allies with Ephraim, their hearts and the hearts of their people shook as the trees of a forest shake when there is a wind. But the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the channel of the Upper Pool, by the road to the field where laundry is washed, and say to him, 'Be careful and stay calm. Don't fear, and don't lose heart over these two pieces of smoking torches, over the burning anger of Rezin, Aram, and Remaliah's son. Aram has planned evil against you with Ephraim and Remaliah's son, saying, "Let's march up against Judah, tear it apart, capture it for ourselves, and install Tabeel's son as its king." But the Lord God says: It won't happen; it won't take place. The chief of Aram is Damascus; the chief of Damascus is Rezin (in sixty-five more years Ephraim will be shattered as a nation); the chief of Ephraim is Samaria; and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you don't believe this, you can't be trusted.'"

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign from the Lord your God. Make it as deep as the grave or as high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I won't ask; I won't test the Lord." Then Isaiah said, "Listen, house of David! Isn't it enough for you to be tiresome for people that you are also tiresome before my God? Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Emmanuel.

The Witness of Music

As we said last week, our worship series this Advent calls on the power of music that has always called humanity to a brighter tomorrow. Rather than turn away from music in sorrow, we will turn toward the story of music and deepen our appreciation of its role in healing, change, and reconciliation. Indeed, on this Sunday with "love" at the center, we can attest that probably love songs top the charts in the history of human song.

ANTHEM: "Love Call Me Home" by Peggy Seeger, arr. Peter Amidon *GCC Virtual Choir; Patty Meyer, organ*

Matthew 1: 1-25 (CEB) A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary - of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ. So, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,
And they will call him, Emmanuel.
(*Emmanuel* means "God with us.")

When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #617 "Write These Words in Our Hearts"

HYMN: #125 "Young Mary Was to Be My Wife" words & music Daniel L. Bechtel, 1988
harmonized First Congregational Church Houston Texas *GCC Virtual Choir, Patty Meyer organ*

Young Mary Was to Be My Wife

(Joseph's Carol)

125

1. Young Ma - ry was to be my wife, the moth - er of my sons, but
2. De - spite my shame and shat - tered hopes, I took the an - gel's word. An -
3. Al - though he was too young to speak, the bless - ing which he gave was

when I heard she was with child, I would not take her home. No
oth - er's love lay in my arms; I loved her as my own. With
love in - car - nate in the flesh, a pre - sence which will save. In

oth - er's love would be my bride; no oth - er's child, my son. Then
joy and pain she bore a child; I thought, "no son of mine." Yet,
this child's birth we hear God's word to all who have no home. "You

in a dream I heard God's voice, "Go love her as your own."
when I held him in my arms, I loved him as my own.
are no oth - er's love or child; I love you as my own."

SERMON: I Believe in Love: Love Call Me Home

I once asked a bird,
“How do you fly in this gravity of darkness?”
And she replied, “Love lifts me” - Hafiz

I invite you to pray with me – May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight loving and gracious God.

It is our second Sunday of Advent when we celebrate love. “I believe in love even when I don’t feel it.” I don’t know about you, but this line struck deep, especially right now. There is so much pain and suffering, conflict and division, violence and hatred in the world, in our country, even in our own hearts. Exactly how does one feel love in the midst of all that? Then I recalled where the lines of this haunting anthem came from. They came from someone who has experienced profound pain and suffering, likely unspeakable horrors. So how does one believe in love through all the worst of what humanity can do to one another?

This Sunday, when “love” is the Advent focus, two passages bring talk of “signs” of God’s presence, God’s love, but also of God’s challenge to us to get love right. Some of us may be theologically skeptical about saying, “It was a sign from God.” but signs were deeply important to ancient peoples. Think of them as symbols—tangible things pointing beyond themselves to some greater concept.

The “sign” that comes up in the complex Isaiah passage - fraught with the politics of the day and plenty of fear of annihilation (“they shook as the trees of a forest shake”), is a child. Children were often “signs” in the Hebrew texts, and certainly, as we look at this as a symbol, we see the child as the future generation. And this future is Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Our Gospel reading this morning also talks about “God with us”. This week, we turn to the Gospel of Matthew, written for a Hebrew Bible-literate crowd. The reading Sara shared with us this morning is the abbreviated version. This passage is one of the most dreaded by those asked to read Scripture, because it is the one that begins with the litany of Jesus’ ancestry. You know the one, with all the hard to pronounce names that even preachers cower at?

Matthew’s “origin story” of Christianity begins with a long genealogy, beginning with Abraham, and recalls 36 more generations leading to the birth of Jesus. In this litany, there is care taken to mention the exile, Isaiah’s time, in the midst of that history. Here we see the past struggles connected to the present, connected to the future. The child to be born, is the product of an historical lineup of generations and will be the sign that God is with us into the future trials as well.

We also hear of Joseph’s radical act of love in a situation that gave him every reason to walk away. We are used to hearing about Mary’s profound moment of walking out on faith, but we hear far less about Joseph. He, too, had to decide to choose love, which was the harder path, in order for the story to turn out the way it did. The messenger says, “Don’t be afraid to do the hard thing here. There’s a big payoff for humanity in it.”

So, I ask us on this Advent Sunday celebrating love. What acts of love have we witnessed in our lives, that compels us to proclaim that love wins?

Here is one sign of love that comes to my mind, which happened early on in the pandemic. Dennis Ruhnke, a retired farmer from Kansas, sent a single unused N95 mask to a New York first responder. In his letter to Gov. Cuomo he said “I’m a retired farmer hunkered down in northeast Kansas with my wife, who has but one lung and occasional problems with her remaining lung.” Yet he felt that there were others who needed that single N-95 mask more than they did - an unexpected gift from an unexpected place.

What are the signs of love that we miss because they come in unexpected ways?

This whole Christmas story is about love, love coming to us in unexpected ways. Think about it. God didn’t have to incarnate. It was a choice. Imagine loving someone so much that you are willing to take on the pains of the world, the everyday complications of being human, just to be near you, because they wanted you to experience a love so great that you would have no choice but to share it with others.

Advent is all about preparing the way, making ourselves ready to receive the one who is the embodiment of that radical, revolutionary, profound love.

We have been exploring the opening passages of each of the four Gospels as part of this worship series. From the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”

God’s love for us was so strong that God wanted to come in human form to love us “in person”. To be able to touch us, talk with us, heal us, eat with us, cry with us, share with us.

Today’s anthem was not what was prescribed in the worship series, but it is a song I am familiar with, having sung it in St. J’s hospice choir, and I love the sentiment - “Love Call Me Home”. Of course, we sing it in hospice choirs, because it talks about being called home, meaning called to one’s final resting place after you have died. But I would invite us to think about the lyrics in a different way: love call *ME* home. In other words, love come live in me. Well, isn’t that the perfect sentiment for Advent – love, love incarnate, love incarnate in the person of Jesus, come live in me, come and be born in me.

German mystic Meister Eckhart: “What is the good if Mary gave birth to the Son of God 2000 years ago, if I do not give birth to God today? We are all Mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born.”

How are we called to share our love, which has its home in us with the world? How are we called to put flesh on our words - walking the talk, praying with our feet.

How do we put flesh on these words? How do we nurture, grow and embody these words?

Daring to do something different, how uncomfortable that can be. Love is being present. Radical love can look “crazy”. Risking it all for love can seem senseless. It takes courage to not listen to the gossip and judgments. It takes courage to be vulnerable for the sake of love. It takes faith and hope to see the path of love when others cannot.

Are you expecting? Yes, even in the midst of a world not fit for a King. What I know is that we don’t have to be perfect, just open and willing. A tiny spark is all that is required to birth a raging fire. In the darkness, even a single candle can be seen as far as 30 miles away.

We are all being called to *attend* to a birth, to new life born out of darkness.

We are all being called to *participate* in a birth.

Let sacred rage at the ills and injustices of the world spark a fire within you that lights the way, and emblaze a path for you to step forward and offer yourself as an accomplice for justice.

Let us embody love, grace and mercy to make it a living part of who we are and how we are in the world, so that we can create a new future together.

The only way the future is cared for is to love it like a child. We must love the child, nurture the child—or, as we use the symbolic meaning—love the future, nurture the future, and that is done by being courageous enough to love differently, love fully, love in a way that nurtures all of humanity’s future, not destroys it.

"Who says it is easy? But we have the power. I watch the faces deepen all around me. It is the time of change, the saving hour. The word is not fear, the word we live. But an old word suddenly made new, as we learn it again, as we bring it alive: Love, Love, Love, Love." - **May Sarton**

PASTORAL PRAYER

Prayers in the Stillness

“Stillness”

Leader: I invite you to get in a comfortable position of rest.

I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can.

I invite you to take a deep breath and a deep listening posture—perhaps eyes closed or fixed on a candle—as we prepare for a time of prayer.

The gentle pull of God
is often lost amidst the rush
of all the obligations which lay a claim on us.

Yet just beyond the frantic pace
our restless feet have trod
lie deep still pools of quietness—

the dwelling place of God.

O take me to that secret place
where lost in wonder and in awe,
the moment comes and I rejoice
to be and be with God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive

Video: *Still Coda*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

WE RESPOND

Litany of Belief *Nancy and Tom Ragle*

In times when humanity disappoints,
perhaps when even our own thoughts and behaviors disappoint,
it is an important act to call out, name and claim, the consequences of our wrongs.
And in times of distress it is a prophetic act to call out, name and claim, our belief that daring to
love each other as God loves us is a faithful response.
Hear these statements of belief from members of our own congregation:

I believe that we have been taught to fear one another and
I believe that we are capable of learning to love.

I believe that our society is built on a foundation of oppression of some over others and
**I believe that we can speak this truth and move to act in ways
that balance this inequity.**

I believe that we are afraid and
I believe that we can lean on each other and God for courage to face anything.

We believe, even when we are discouraged.
**We believe, that when we are discouraged,
raising our voices for justice will bring about more love in the world!**

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us using whatever words help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the (kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) 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 lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: #278 “Hear Our Prayer, Oh Lord”

OFFERTORY

CALL TO OFFERING

The Love of God is born new in the world as often as we embody that love in the works of compassion, peace and justice. Let us offer our gifts in a spirit of generosity and hope.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail **38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301** or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church's website and clicking the PayPal donation button on the home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of our time and talents and dedicate them to continuing the work of showing more love in the world.

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Believe, with a loving heart!
Believe, and shine your light!
Believe, because the song we sing is sung for all!
And now let the weak say, “I am strong;”
let the poor say, “I am rich
because of what our God has done for us.”
Believe!

“Celebration of Holy Communion” by Maren Tirabassi

Invitation to Communion *

The story is told that during the Blitz in World War II Britain, when the city was strafed and bombed, Operation Pied Piper evacuated many children to the country, but some remained in London and many of those were orphans. Some were sheltered in a Jesuit order of brothers, who noticed the children had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, night after night. When the children were being put to bed one night, one of the brothers guessed the children's problem was that they were anxious because of uncertainty in their lives, and gave each child a small piece of bread, saying something like this –

“Hold on to your piece of bread while you are sleeping. Remember when you woke up this morning, we fed you and took care of you. When you wake up tomorrow, and we will be here for you. Let the bread remind you of this. Good night, children.” The children slept.

Come, to be comforted
in the story of Bethlehem,
and in this the House of Bread.

Come to be comforted at this table
by a handful of bread
and a cup of love,
that will stay with you always.

Words of Remembering

O, we remember God's promises
of Emmanuel, and a branch of Jesse's root,
of Leader, Wisdom, Monarch,
Key of all that is locked,
and Dawn of every morning.
And we remember the sacred story,
that happened in the House of Bread
for a new mother
and a fostering father,
sheep and shepherds,
a few wise travelers with gifts
and many, many angels.

And we remember that the baby
named Jesus,
grew up to heal people,
and teach them with strange parables,
that made people angry.
At Passover he broke unleavened bread.
and poured wine and love freely.
that all may live in peace,
and be comforted,
and be led in peace,
and also hope and joy and love,
with all the world.

Prayer of Consecration

Emmanuel, God with us,
in our lonely nights, under our guiding stars,
with the hopes and fears of all our years,
we come for comfort,
for peace of mind and peace on earth,
for a blessing on our hands and the bread in them,
on our lips and the cup we lift to it.

May this bread and cup be your holy Life,
that we may ponder in our hearts,
and pray in our community.

Sharing of the Elements

Leader: The Holy Child of Bethlehem descends to us,

Unison: and is born in us in these days.

Leader: Let us share the bread.

**Unison: We hear the Christmas angels
their great glad tidings tell.**

Leader: Let us drink deeply, Christ abides with us.

COMMUNION HYMN: #151 “O Little Town of Bethlehem” – Acoustic Christmas Vol.1,
2011

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God, we give you thanks that you have come to us – in the child of Bethlehem, in this bread and cup, and in your answer to all of our hopes and your offer of peace, deeper than any truce, truer than the upheaval that surrounds us. You have comforted us with your promise and your presence so that we too may spread the welcome wings of your good tidings. Amen.

* Note from the author: I don't know where the story of the children in London came from. Perhaps it was from my father, a Veteran of the European Theatre in World War II, or from a childhood children's sermon or some magazine I read when I was new in ministry. I have not been able to trace it online, and understood it as truth, perhaps not fully clothed in fact.

CLOSING HYMN: #183 “What Wondrous Love” music traditional, text anonymous arr. Peter Amidon *Peter Amidon, Fred Breunig, Mary Alice Amidon, Robin Davis, Peter Amidon piano.*

What Wondrous Love is This

183

1. What won-drous love is this, O my soul! O my soul! What
 2. To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing, to
 3. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on, and

won-drous love is this, O my soul! What won-drous love is
 God and to the Lamb, I will sing; to God and to the
 when from death I'm free, I'll sing on! And when from death I'm

this! that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the heav-y cross for my
 Lamb who is the great I Am, while mil-lions join the theme, I will
 free, I'll sing and joy-ful be, and through e-ter-ni-ty I'll sing

soul, for my soul, to bear the heav-y cross for my soul!
 sing, I will sing; while mil-lions join the theme, I will sing.
 on, I'll sing on, and through e-ter-ni-ty I'll sing on!

BENEDICTION

We wait for justice
but we do not wait to work for change;

We wait for restored health
but we do not wait to work to heal;

We wait for wholeness
but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace
but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news
that God is with us, Emmanuel.

And continue to fill the night left by sadness with messages of love.
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that love alive in you
and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.

Raise your voices and repeat after me...

“do not be afraid!”

“do not be afraid!”

Amen!

THREEFOLD AMEN

POSTLUDE: “People Look East” Trad. French Carol with words by Eleanor
Farjeon *Patty Meyer*

For further reflection and prayer:

Touched by an Angel by Maya Angelou

Cuomo Praises Kansas Farmer for Sending N95 Mask to NY: ‘Humanity at its Best’

Family movie of the week: **How the Grinch Stole Christmas**

Rent the original animated movie for \$3.99 on Amazon Prime Movie

Watch the live action version starring Jim Carey on Netflix

And the new musical version Dr. Seuss' The Grinch Musical! will debut on NBC on Wednesday,
December 9 at 8 p.m. ET/PT.

Adult/Youth film of the week: **Girls on the Wall**

Watch the movie trailer here: <https://youtu.be/l9QsEj3KPAo>

Rent 1.99 on Amazon Prime Video

You can also check out the “Behind the Scenes” clip on YouTube.