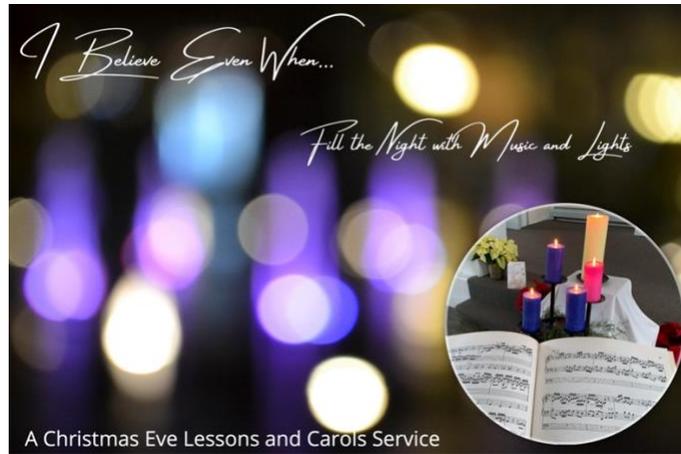


**I Believe Even When...Fill the Night with Music and Lights
Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols Service 2020**

December 24, 2020



**Christmas Eve
“We Believe, Even Now”**

“If you believe light is divine.
Remember light was born out of darkness.”

— **Rajesh Omprakash**

“This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.” – **Leonard Bernstein**

“Christmas, my child, is love in action.”

— **Dale Evans Rogers**

WE GATHER

GREETINGS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good evening my name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am the pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We’re so glad you have joined us for this most precious and joyous service, a celebration of the birth of a baby whose arrival signaled a revolutionary love coming into the world!

Welcome

Whether you are a regular attender, this is your first time, or your first time back in a while, you are welcome here!

Welcome for Christmas (adapted from Shaping Sanctuary by Gordon Brown)

No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here:

If you are old or young, noisy wiggly babies and children of all ages
If you have brown skin, black skin, white skin, people of all colors, cultures and abilities, you are welcome.
If you are married or single, gay, straight or bisexual
If you are female, male, transgender or gender non-conforming
If you are sick or well
If you are happy or sad
If you are rich or poor
If you are a refugee or a citizen
If you claim this religious tradition, or another or none at all.
If you believe in God some of the time or none of the time or all of the time, you are welcome.

Come with your gifts, your hopes, your fears.
Come enter into this silent night, calm and bright.
Come listen for a word from the angel messengers that tell us “do not be afraid!”
Come to the manger again to hear the stories that remind us of humility and courage and love.
Come and listen for the Holy Spirit that calls you to love your neighbor wholeheartedly, seek justice, create peace and practice compassion.

For the truth this night is that God has invited us all to new birth. That makes us all the same—humans on a life path who yearn for the messages of God, bringing more hope, more peace, more joy and more love to our lives. Let this be a moment of knowing all these can be yours, for you are loved by God! You are welcome here!

Crossing the Threshold

In this season leading up to this night, we have been hearing the Good News from all the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, because we have *needed* good news and that’s what “Gospel” actually means. We have heard stories of courage all along our journey—of people who have sung out songs of hope, love, joy, and peace. Our luminaries have been a witness to the light we believe has come and is coming.

Tonight, we return to the story of Jesus’ birth as it is told in the Gospel of Luke. This account is the narrative we read again and again on this holy night, for this author gives us the most beloved detail. We yearn to see the scene play out, to hear the music of the angels, to feel the rush to the manger to see what this star that pierces the night sky has come to proclaim. We so desire to believe the Good News of the messengers, that is the culmination of humanity’s pain of birth: “don’t be afraid” for unto us a sign has come that will be to all people... “on earth, peace.”

I believe in the sun, I believe in the sun,
even when, even when it’s not shining.

Pastor: Over the last four weeks, our theme song has helped us remember that we can believe that God is with us, even and, especially, in the midst of hard times.

Even when the sun is hidden from sight
Even when love feels so remote
Even when God is silent
Even then...
We believe
We believe

We believe in the presence of Emmanuel—God with us.
This is the night we celebrate that the Holy came in human form
to be light in our lives...
to speak to us, touch us, comfort us, and call us.

“I Believe”
by Mark A. Miller

Prayer

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpse of heaven on earth
in the faces and the light of those around us.
even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle
even when our view is obscured
by clouds of doubt,
let us ignite the flame of hope, love, joy, and peace within us.

Advent Wreath plus Christ Candle

Patty: Because injustice and despair threaten to overwhelm us, we pray for hope...

Blessed: Because so many swords have not yet been beaten into ploughshares, we pray for peace...

Peter: Because grief and loss weigh so heavily, we pray for joy...

Nancy: Because hatred is still so strong, and because people all over the world are suffering, we pray for love.

Lucy: God has come to us as a child.
Christ is present in our world.

May the light and the fire from these candles burn away everything that is preventing the God of hope and peace and joy and love from being born among us and within us...

**People: Let us glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Friends, be not afraid, even now, even now – the light of Christ is overwhelming the world!
Amen!

OPENING HYMN: “Bright Morning Star is Rising” American traditional, *GCC virtual choir*

INVOCATION & OPENING PRAYER

by Quinn Caldwell

If you came to this place expecting a tame story, you came to the wrong place.

If you came for a story that does not threaten you, you came for a different story than the one we tell.

If you came to hear of the coming of a God who only showed up so that you could have a nice day with your loved ones, then you came for a God whom we do not worship here.

For even a regular baby is not a tame thing -

And goodness that cannot threaten complacency and evil is not much good at all,

And a God who would choose to give up power and invincibility to become an infant for you, certainly didn't do it just do you could have dinner.

But -

If you came because you think unwed mothers are some of the strongest people in the world.

If you came because you think that the kind of people who work third shift doing stuff you'd rather not do might attract an angel's attention before you, snoring comfortably in your bed, would.

If you came because you think there are wise men and women to be found among undocumented travelers from far lands and that *they* might be able to show you God.

If you came to hear a story of tyrants trembling while heaven comes to peasants.

If you came because you believe that God loves the animals as much as the people and so made them the first witnesses to the saving of the world.

If you came for a story of reversals that might end up reversing you.

If you come for a tale of adventure and bravery, where strong and gentle people win, and the powerful and violent go down to dust,

where the rich lose their money but find their lives and the poor are raised up like kings.

If you came to be reminded that God loves you too much to leave you unchanged.

If you came to follow the light even if it blinds you.

If you came for salvation and not safety, then, ah, my friends, you are precisely in the right place. So what are you here for?

WE PROCLAIM

CHILDREN'S STORY: *Sleeping Moon* by David Atwell *read by Mary Alice Amidon*

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-4 New Revised Standard Version *Tony Barrand*

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

²The Word was with God in the beginning.

³Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being

⁴ through the Word was life,^[a]
and the life was a light for all people.

HYMN: #132 “O Come All Ye Faithful” Words and music: John Francis Wade (1743);
Translated from the Latin by Frederick Oakeley (1841); *GCC Virtual Choir; Patty Meyer, organist.*

Luke 1:26-38 The Voice *David (Narrator), Sander (Messenger) and Lily (Mary)*

Six months later in Nazareth, a city in *the rural province of Galilee*, the heavenly messenger Gabriel made another appearance. This time the messenger was sent by God ²⁷ to meet with a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David himself. ²⁸ The messenger entered her home.

Greetings! You are favored, and the Lord is with you! Among all women on the earth, you have been blessed!

The heavenly messenger’s words baffled Mary, and she wondered what type of greeting this was.

³⁰ Mary, don’t be afraid. You have found favor with God. ³¹ Listen, you are going to become pregnant. You will have a son, and you must name Him “Savior,” *or* Jesus.^[b] ³² Jesus will become the greatest among men. He will be known as the Son of the Highest God. God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, ³³ and He will reign over the covenant family of Jacob forever.

³⁴ But I have never been with a man. How can this be possible?

³⁵ The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Most High will overshadow you. That's why this Holy Child will be known, *as not just your son, but also* as the Son of God. ³⁶ *It sounds impossible*, but listen—you know your relative Elizabeth has been unable to bear children and is now far too old to be a mother. Yet she has become pregnant, *as God willed it*. Yes, in three months, she will have a son. ³⁷ So the impossible is possible with God.

³⁸ Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be.

And the heavenly messenger was gone.

HYMN: #148 “Lo How A Rose” Words: 15th c. German (anon.); Music: harmonized by Michael Praetorius (1609). *Ellen Crockett, Fred Breunig, Tom and Connie Green, with Andy Davis, pianist.*

Matthew 1:18-23 New Revised Standard Version *Lynette and Scott Howard*

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.”

HYMN: “Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear” German 15th century carol, *Perrin Scott and Tom Yahner, Peter Amidon piano*

Luke 2:1-5 New Revised Standard Version *David Shallenberger*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

HYMN: #151 “O Little Town of Bethlehem” Words: Phillip Brooks (1868); Music: Lewis H. Redner (1868) *GCC Virtual Choir, Patty Meyer, organist.*

Luke 2:6-7 New Revised Standard Version *Rosanne Hebert*

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ 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 for them in the inn.

INTERLUDE: “A Child Is Born” by Thad Jones, *Rosanne Hebert, piano and Dwayne Johnson, trumpet*

Luke 2:8-14 New Revised Standard Version *Nan Tierra and Lily Quintero*

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[a] praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”^[b]

HYMN: “Carol of the Drum” *Mariam Diallo, Cara Fisher, Finn Breismeister, June Breismeister, Lila Tadlock, and Genevieve Redmond*

Luke 2:15-20 New Revised Standard Version *Stennie Nelson*

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.”¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The Witness of Music

For all of Advent, we have called on the power of music that inspires those who hear it to a brighter tomorrow. It has been a difficult time in this pandemic for singing to be restricted. In its absence, we have been reminded just how important it is to sing together. Indeed, music has often been the soundtrack of hope.

We enjoyed a season of music *appreciation*—as well as reflection on the power of music. You may have watched the documentaries that accompanied this worship series, which told courageous stories of people singing as witness hope, love, joy and peace, even in the midst of poverty, death camps, protests, disasters, and the oppressive bonds of enslavement. We have filled the night of loss and discouragement with music and light.

We have also heard some carols of resistance that have been sung as commentary on injustice. Tonight, we bring you another. It is a song you will no doubt have heard on other Christmas Eve nights. But this time, listen with a new appreciation.

Written in France by Placide Cappeau with melody by Adolphe Adams, the song was banned from church services when Cappeau’s theology was deemed heretical (some called him an atheist) and Adams’ music was labeled as “Jewish” (the ultimate insult in Christian circles at a time when Gregorian chant was having a resurgence). Further, the song’s message of humility and shared humanity went against the late 19th century idea that slaves did not have souls. Even though the church in France tried to kill the song, the American abolitionist and Unitarian minister, John Sullivan Dwight, made it popular in the Civil War era with its third verse proclaiming a radical message:

*“Truly he taught us to love one another;
his law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother;
and in his name all oppression shall cease.”*

Someday, we will once again be able to join our full voices in song in our Sanctuary. We will sing as never before. For now, we allow this song to be a prayer of hope that we will destroy the inequity that still haunts us.

ANTHEM: “O Holy Night” words Placide Cappeau, music Adolphe Adam 1847,
GCC Virtual Choir; soloists Carolyn Wesley, Louisa Sullivan Hungate and Rhys Glennon;
Patty Meyer, organ

Matthew 2:1-2 New Revised Standard Version *Carole Crompton*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

HYMN: # 141 “The First Nowell” traditional English carol, *GCC Virtual Choir, Patty Meyer organ*

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

The Christmas Fund aids our retired clergy and lay employees. Gifts to the Christmas fund help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This special offering will be collected throughout the month of December. You can send a check made out to Guilford Community Church and put “Christmas Fund” in the memo line.

John 1:14 Common English Bible *Margaret Holland*

¹⁴ The Word became flesh
and made its home among us.

POEM: “I Have Come into this World to See This” by the Sufi mystic and poet Hafiz

I have come into this world to see this:
the sword drop from men’s hands even at the height
of their arc of anger

because we have finally realized there is just one flesh to wound
and it is His – the Christ’s, our
Beloved’s.

I have come into this world to see this: all creatures hold hands as
we pass through this miraculous existence we share on the way
to even a greater being of soul,

a being of just ecstatic light, forever entwined and at play
with Him.

I have come into this world to hear this:

every song the earth has sung since it was conceived in
the Divine's womb and began spinning from
His wish,

every song by wing and fin and hoof,
every song by hill and field and tree and woman and child,
every song of stream and rock,

every song of tool and lyre and flute,
every song of gold and emerald
and fire,

every song the heart should cry with magnificent dignity
to know itself as
God:

for all other knowledge will leave us again in want and aching –
only imbibing the glorious Sun
will complete us.

I have come into this world to experience this:

men so true to love
they would rather die before speaking
an unkind
word,

men so true their lives are His covenant –
the promise of
hope.

I have come into this world to see this:
the sword drop from men's hands
even at the height of
their arc of
rage

because we have finally realized
there is just one flesh
we can wound.

HYMN: "Go Tell It On the Mountain" *Clark Glennon, Sam Amidon, Stefan Amidon, Louisa Sullivan Hungate, Carolyn Wesley, Aiden Meyer, Wynona Meyer, Rebecca Potter, Derrick*

Harnish, Arthur Davis, Emma Schneider, Amelia Fontein, Lauren Breunig, Emma Davis, Peter Green

WE GO FORTH

Introduction to the Carol:

We come to the classic moment of every Christmas Eve...the moment to light our candles and sing, "Silent Night." We have wondered this year how we could possibly recreate a sense of normalcy in this moment. We wondered how we could get through it with the joy we usually feel on this night, having lost so much this year.

No, it is not the same. And we know that because of the people we have lost, the jobs and security we have lost, that it will likely not ever be the same. Surely, every year, we will remember this moment when we thought perhaps light and song would elude us. But here we are. We will light our lights and we will have our song. Just like those soldiers in World War I sang across enemy lines. Everything stopped for a short while as the message that all is calm and bright prevailed above the violence and dark night of the world. We have been sorely divided on many things. We are devastated by our losses. We are tired and we are not so calm. But for this moment, this night, let us remember that we are not alone. And that we believe that the music and light of God's promises come again and again: hope for a better tomorrow, love that works for a more equitable world, joy that wells from a place deep within us, and peace that offers us the assurance we need.

Witnesses to the Light

Luminaries in memory of those who were lights of love in our lives

"Silent Night" arr. by Ron Boud, *Rachel Johnson piano*

CLOSING HYMN: "Silent Night" Music Franz Gruber, 1818, words Joseph Mohr, music Franz Gruber 1818, arr. by Ron Boud, *GCC Virtual Choir, Patty Meyer organ, Dwayne Johnson trumpet*

Closing Words

Why is Christmas Eve so magical?

Because candlelight lets us see our true nature.

The light of one candle can be seen from 30 miles away, likewise one small act of love, even as small as a newborn infant can change the world.

God's light shines upon us—each one of us—

God's light shines within us – each of us -

alighting anew the possibility that we can carry this message through the witness of our lives each and every day.

BENEDICTION Where the Light Begins: A Blessing for Christmas

Perhaps it does not begin.
Perhaps it is always.

Perhaps it takes
a lifetime
to open our eyes,
to learn to see
what has forever
shimmered in front of us—

the luminous line
of the map
in the dark

the vigil flame
in the house
of the heart

the love
so searing
we cannot keep
from singing,
from crying out
in testimony and praise

Perhaps this night
will be the mountain
over which
the dawn breaks.

Perhaps we
will turn our face
toward it,
toward what has been
always.

Perhaps
our eyes
will finally open
in ancient recognition,
willingly dazzled,
illuminated at last.

Perhaps this night
the light of love begins
in us.

HYMN: #132 “Joy to the World” words Isaac Watts, music Lowell Mason, GCC Virtual Choir & Wind Band, Patty Meyer organ

POSTLUDE: “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas” written by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blaine; *Rosanne Hebert, piano*

LUMINARIES

Janet Freeman Hudak
Dorothy Hope Harris
Charles J. Davis
Christopher Yeazell
Martha Elizabeth Yeazell
Mel Meyer
Elizabeth Israel
Pooja Meyer
Linda King
Debbie Coburn
Dinah Stix Breunig
Barabara & Jonathan Will and little Billy
Bob Will, Jennifer Labovitz and Leslie
Vanderwood
Dona,
Bev
William Stacy
Penny and Hank Harnish
Kathy Mercier
LynnD Sylvester
Don and Joan Johnson
Wilbur and Mary Elizabeth Maxwell
Virginia Maxwell Weatherly
Nicolas Scott Remfrey
All those who have died from racial violence
and COVID
Barbara and Reed Anthony
Marilyn Page

Anne and Roger Davis
Jennifer Lynn Terry
David Lambert Terry
Ruth Hallock Scott
Betty Murray
Alice and William Breunig
Dinah Breunig
William Murray
Bill and Florence Warriner
Leonard "Bud" Wilmot
Donald Marsh
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Ashworth
Melissa Burbank
John C. Drechsler
Nancy Drechsler
Winston and George Tannenbaum
Rich Blazej
Doris Spahr
Mary Lou and Bill Falion
Fred Ligon
Bob Carvutto
Harlan Harris
David Rein
John O. and Phyllis Green
Ted Vial
Alice Vial
Mary and Clifford Hebert, Sr.
Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott