



~ **First United Church of Christ** ~
 229 Church St. • Easton • Pennsylvania 18042
 Rev. J. Michael Dowd, Pastor ~ Sheila Cooke, Music Director
 Telephone: 610-258-3361 ~ Email: firstucc2@verizon.net
 website: www.firstucceaston.org ~ Facebook (First UCC Easton)

~ **Christmas Eve, 2020 ~ Candlelight Service** ~

~ **PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD** ~

PRELUDES

Organ Selections *Sheila Cooke, Organist*
 Christmas Carols *Our Handbell Quartets*
 Organ Solo "Jubilate Deo" *Sheila Cooke, Organist*
 Clarinet Duet "O Holy Night" *Kelsie Hilsenbeck &*
 Clarinet Duet "Jesu Joy of Mans Desire" *Bill Arnold*

~ **RECEIVING THE LIGHT** ~

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE *The Dowd Family*

* HYMN "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!**

Refrain

**O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!**

2. **O sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation!
 Sing all ye citizens of heaven above!
 Now to our God be Glory in the highest!**



Refrain

* RESPONSIVE READING Genesis and John in Dialogue

(from Genesis 1:1-4 & John 1:1-5)

Leader: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
 And God said, "let there be light"; and there was light.

People: **And God saw that the light was good;
 and God separated the light from the darkness.**

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
 and the Word was God. What has come into being in him was life,
 and the life was the light of all people.

People: **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.**

(from Genesis 1:26-27 & John 1:9-14)

Leader: Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image.

**People: So God created human kind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

Leader: The Lord will be our everlasting light and glory.

People: Praise and glory be to you, now and forevermore.

Leader: He was in the world, and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.

People: He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

Leader: But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God.

**People: And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.**

All: Joy to the world! The LORD is come!

ANTHEM "Sing Glad Noel" *Women's Chorus*

ANTHEM "Peace" *Women's Chorus*

~ ANGELS PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS ~

READING #1 from Isaiah 9:2-7 (OT pg. 606) *Rev. J. Michael Dowd*

*HYMN "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"

- 1. Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."**
- 2. Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the Everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come To the earth from heaven's home;
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."**

READING #2 from Luke 2:1-20 (NT pg. 55) *Rev. J. Michael Dowd*

~ AMID THE LOWLY, GOD CHOOSES TO BE BORN ~

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE "Small Towns" *Rev. J. Michael Dowd*

Tonight, on this Night of Nights I want to celebrate small towns. How many of you grew up in a small town? Small towns are just a little bit different. As someone has written, “You know you live in a small town when . . .”

A baby born on June 14 receives gifts from local merchants as the first baby of the year. You speak to each dog you pass by name and he wags his tail at you.

You can't walk for exercise because every car that passes you offers you a ride.

You can name everyone you graduated with.

You have to drive an hour to buy a pair of socks.

You get a whiff of manure and think of home.

Someone asks you how you feel . . . and actually listens to what you say.

There is no town idiot everybody has to take turns.

Small towns are just a little bit different.

Janelle White's family moved to a small town. She decided to check in with the police and fire departments in case her family ever had an emergency. She dialed the number listed for the police department and a woman answered, “Courthouse.”

“May I have the police department?” Janelle asked.

“He isn't here now,” the woman replied. Now, that's a small town.

An ad for a general store in Cross Plains, Wisconsin, where I once, as a member of the Moravian College administration, preached a sermon on College Prayer Day listed its location like this: “Across from the phone booth.” That's all that was needed for everyone to find it: “Across from the phone booth.” Wonder what they'll do when there are no more phone booths?

The reason to celebrate small towns today is, of course, because Jesus was born in a small town. Each year we sing Phillip Brooks' beautiful hymn, “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.”

Brooks wrote these words in 1868 following a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He was inspired by the view of Bethlehem from the surrounding hills of Palestine, especially at night. His church organist Lewis Redner wrote the melody. The hymn catches our imagination. We can almost see Bethlehem in our mind's eye.

Jesus was born in a small town to fulfill a prophecy found in Micah 5:2-5, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (Ancient name for Bethlehem from the time of Jacob), though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times . . . He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.”

In Hebrew, the town is *Bet Lehem*, which means “House of Bread.” For believers it is significant that “House of Bread” is where he who is “the Bread of Life” (John 6:48) was born.

Bethlehem today is a city of approximately 50,000 people, but when Jesus was born it was a tiny village. It has been referred to as a “sorry, poor village, scarce worth an apostrophe . . .” Bethlehem is only five miles south of Jerusalem, about a two and a half hour walk. Joseph and Mary, residents of Nazareth, went to Bethlehem for the census ordered by Caesar Augustus. That journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem is much more arduous than the journey from Jerusalem, some 80 miles.

The message of Christmas would be just as powerful if Christ had been born in a great metropolis, but somehow this tiny village seems to capture the essence of the Christ event.

Bethlehem reminds us that God can use ordinary people and ordinary places in an extraordinary way. Each year we have to fight to maintain the simple nature of Christmas in a world of glittering materialism.

You may remember the story of the television reporter who was interviewing people on the streets of Tokyo at Christmas time. Much as in America, Christmas shopping is a big commercial enterprise in Japan, even though Christians are a tiny minority in that land. The interviewer stopped one young Japanese woman on the sidewalk and asked her, “What is the meaning of Christmas?”

Laughing, the young woman responded, “I don’t know. Is that the day Jesus died?”

Well, maybe it is. We have to maintain a constant vigil to ensure that the birth of the Messiah doesn’t degenerate into the worship of Mammon, or material possessions.

The Dowd family always huddles around the television at Christmas to watch one more time the classic motion picture *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Actor Jimmy Stewart, who starred in the film, offered this reflection on its meaning, “The character I played was George Bailey, an ordinary kind of fella who thinks he’s never accomplished anything in life. His dreams of becoming a famous architect, of traveling the world and living adventurously, have not been fulfilled. Instead he feels trapped in a humdrum job in a small town. And when faced with a crisis in which he feels he has failed everyone, he breaks under the strain and flees to the bridge. That’s when his guardian angel, Clarence, comes down on Christmas Eve to show him what his community would be like without him. The angel takes him back through his life to show how our ordinary everyday efforts are really big achievements. Clarence reveals how George Bailey’s loyalty to his job at the building-and-loan office has saved families and homes, how his little kindnesses have changed the lives of others, and how the ripples of his love will spread through the world, helping make it a better place . . . Today, after some 80 years, I’ve heard the film called ‘an American cultural phenomenon.’ Well, maybe so, but it’s simply about an ordinary man who discovers that living each ordinary day honorably, with faith in God and a selfless concern for others, can make for a truly wonderful life.”

There are no superstars in the Christmas story. Even the Master comes into the world under the most inauspicious circumstances. A stable, a manger, shepherds in the field, a humble couple with no place to lay their heads.

Christian comedian Robert G. Lee put it in a humorous and memorable way. He said, “Christianity is filled with paradoxes. The Israelites expected the Messiah to be a great warrior and king. They *got* a carpenter. You generally don’t expect the guy who’s doing your kitchen cabinets to save the world.”

Well, no you don’t. But that’s the point. Bethlehem reminds us that God can use ordinary people and ordinary places in an extraordinary way.

Bethlehem also reminds us that we are a part of a sacred history. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy. This is important. The coming of

Christ was part of God’s covenant with the people of Israel, and subsequently with all people everywhere. Bethlehem was no accidental birthplace. Bethlehem was where Jacob’s beloved wife Rachel was buried and where Israel’s greatest king, David, was born. Samuel anointed David king in Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:1-13). David was a descendant of Ruth and Boaz, who were married in Bethlehem. The Messiah was to be of the house and lineage of David. We are a part of a sacred history that extends all the way back to Abraham and Sarah.

We often say that Christmas is a tradition, and it is. Tradition is from the Latin word *traditio* which means the “action of handing over.” Over the centuries Christian people have been “handing over” from one generation to the next the songs, the stories, the rituals that have come to mean Christmas to us. That is a vital part of our lives. We treasure that which has been handed down.

In mid-December the year before her first child was born a woman named Cathy was given a baby shower by her family. After opening what she thought were all of her presents, she found one additional box, wrapped not in baby shower paper, but in Christmas paper. It bore a card that read, “To my daughter.”

“This one is from my mom,” Cathy announced as she opened the gift. Inside was a quilt. She tried to smile as she held it up for all to see, but secretly she hoped her Mom couldn’t see her face. Her mother would know her smile wasn’t genuine.

The quilt wasn’t very pretty. It wasn’t a “baby quilt.” It wasn’t made of pink, blue and yellow materials; it didn’t have bunnies or bears. It was just a patchwork quilt sewn of materials that were of all different colors and patterns.

Holding the quilt up, Cathy noticed a note tucked in the bottom of the box. Not realizing the note was intended to be private, she set the quilt aside, picked up the note and began reading it. Then she discovered that her mother had made the quilt for her. The unmatched materials were remnants of her life her mother had saved over the years. She had cut swatches of material from items dating back to her first Christmas dress. Some of the swatches were as current as the shirt she wore to the doctor the day she

found out she was pregnant. Her mother had accumulated “patches” of her life over all those years to make this quilt. By the time Cathy finished reading her mom’s letter telling of the “patch” of her mother’s old robe she remembered it well; it was fleece and she used to insist her mother wear it so she could lay her head on it when her mother rocked her and the “patch” of Dad’s flannel shirt she used to put on after her bath, and each and every other “patch” and its meaning, there was not a dry eye in the dining room. Cathy picked up the quilt and held it against herself and cried. To think, just seconds before she had thought the quilt ugly, but now it was beautiful. It was the most beautiful quilt she had ever seen. This quilt was made of her life and with her mother’s love. She had sewn her love into every stitch.

Christmas is like that. We have traditions, from many lands and many cultures, all stitched together to make a holiday like no other. It is a tradition that actually goes back many centuries before the birth of the babe in the manger all the way back to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob all the way back to Moses and Joshua and David all the way back to Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah. Actually it goes farther back than that. It goes all the way back to the time God took the dust of the earth and created man and woman and breathed into them the breath of life. It is a tradition of Divine purpose and love.

Bethlehem reminds us that God can use ordinary people and ordinary places in an extraordinary way. Bethlehem also reminds us that we are a part of a sacred history.

One final thing: most important of all, Bethlehem reminds us that God is with us. Listen again to Micah’s words: “He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.” I love those words: “He will *be* their peace.” Christ doesn’t simply bring us peace. He *is* our peace. Where Christ is, there is peace.

Perhaps your life is filled with conflict, unhappiness, emotional pain this Christmas season. That is true for many people. All the happiness of this season of the year can mask the desperate hurt that many people really feel. The appropriate prayer for this season of the year is not “bring me peace, bring me happiness, bring me hope.” The appropriate prayer is, “Christ Jesus, give me yourself. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Be born anew in me.” For where Christ is, there is peace, happiness, joy.

Sue Monk Kidd in her book *From When the Heart Waits* writes about her visit to a monastery around Christmas years ago. She passed a monk walking outside the church and said “Merry Christmas.” And the monk replied, “May Christ be born in you.” At the time, Ms. Kidd thought that this was a very peculiar greeting. But she never forgot it. And, with time, she came to realize the power of that simple greeting: “May Christ be born in you.” When Christ dwells within, there is peace.

John Paul II, in his Angelus message of December 19, 1999, explained that Christmas is not simply the remembrance of the Event that took place 2000 years ago when, according to the Gospel, the power of God took on the frailty of a baby. It is really about a living reality that is repeated every year in the heart of believers. “The mystery

of the Holy Night, which historically happened two thousand years ago, must be lived as a spiritual event in the ‘today’ of the Liturgy,” the Pope clarified. “The Word who found a dwelling in Mary’s womb comes to knock on the heart of every person . . .” Bethlehem reminds us that God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Small towns are a little bit different. Christ was born in a small town. “O little town of Bethlehem / How still we see thee lie . . .” Bethlehem reminds us that God can use ordinary people and ordinary places in an extraordinary way. Bethlehem reminds us that we are a part of a sacred history. That is why the traditions of Christmas are so important. And most importantly of all, Bethlehem reminds us that God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ. And here’s what Christ wants to be born anew in our hearts in this Advent/Christmas season. May he be born in your heart today.

*HYMN “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 men on earth!**



~ CHRISTMAS EVE PRAYER ~

SILENT PRAYER, PASTORAL PRAYER, AND LORD’S PRAYER (*Spoken in unison*)

~ SHARING OUR JOY AND GIFTS ~

*~ Offering plates are in the Narthex for your safety & convenience ~
Please place your offering in the plate on your way in or as you leave.*

*DOXOLOGY (All Sing) “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”
*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen*

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

THE PASSING OF THE FLAME:

This year, for everyone's safety, we are using battery powered candles. There is a small switch on the bottom. Please switch it on when instructed.

*At the conclusion of “Silent Night”, please switch your candle off
as the church lights are brightened.*



~ CAROLS OF CELEBRATION – All join and sing ~

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

1. It came upon the midnight clear, That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth To touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, good-will to men, From heaven’s all-gracious King!”
The world in solemn stillness lay, To hear the angels sing.



Angels We Have Heard on High

1. Angels we have heard on high, Singing sweetly through the night,
And the mountains in reply Echoing their brave delight.
Glo---ri-a in excelsis Deo, Glo---r-ia in excelsis Deo.



Away in a Manger

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Good Christian Men, Rejoice

1. Good Christian men, re-joice, With heart and soul and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before Him bow, And He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

Joy to the World!

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come: Let earth receive her King,
Let every heart prepare Him room, And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and nature sing, And heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.



The First Nowell

1. The first Nowell the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,
In fields as they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter’s night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Born is the King of Is-ra-el!

Silent Night

(*The Dowds will sing a whole verse of "Silent Night" in German first, BEFORE the Congregation sings)

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 steam from heaven afar, Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, 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.



~ CARRYING THE LIGHT INTO THE WORLD ~

* BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE "Silent Night"

The candles may be returned in the basket in the narthex or you may take
The Light into the world, with you!

===== (*Those able are asked to stand.) =====

***A list of participants in this evening's service can be found on the back of
the "Christmas Dedications" insert.***

*

**ALL ARE WELCOME to join us for worship
THIS COMING SUNDAY, Dec. 27th, at 10:00 a.m. in our
Historic Sanctuary for a 'relaxed' service of "Lessons & Carols".**

*

**NEXT YEAR'S FIRST WORSHIP will be SUN., JAN. 3rd at 10 a.m.
& we will observe Epiphany & safely share the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
It's also Food Bank Sun. so please bring along FUNDS for the Food Pantry
All are welcome at the Lord's Table!**



*

**We wish you all a blessed & holy Christmas! Christ the Savior is Born!
The Light of the World has Come! Hallelujah!**

