

Saint James United Church

December 24th, 2016 – Christmas Eve

120 Chapel St. Woodstock, N.B. E7M1H1

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Ushers: David and Sandra MacNally,

Jolene Caverhill, Conrad Anderson

Candle Lighters: Vanessa & Will Belyea

WE GATHER

Prelude

Solo O Holy Night – Kim Sylvester

Welcome & 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!

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Introit VU#60 – O Come All Ye Faithful (vs.1,2)

And so, we gather with Christians all over the world this night as we say the words of Jesus: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom 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, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The bread of life.

The cup of salvation.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Communion is by Intinction

Prayer after Communion

Eternal and loving God, on this holiest of nights, we have eaten the bread of life and drunk from the cup of salvation. You have touched us by your Holy Spirit, and challenged us to live as your people. For this we praise you and give you thanks. Amen.

Lighting of Candles

VU#67 – Silent Night

(sing until all candles are lit;

End with verse 1 a capella.)

Hymn

VU#59 – Joy to the World

Blessing and Sending Forth

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 Christ brings through his life, death, and resurrection, and the gift of true hope he brings for God's *shalom* on earth. Let us go now, with the peace of Christ within us. Amen.

Choral Benediction

VU#43 – Go Tell It on the Mountain (chorus)

Postlude

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will to all.”

Emmanuel, you blessed us at Bethlehem by coming as a tiny babe. In the barren land among humble people you chose to share your life with us. You took flesh so that all the world might know that face of God.

“For unto us is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”

As one of us, you matured and grew. From that tiny babe adored by shepherds and travelers from the east, you grew into an adult who proclaimed the way of God. Through your miracles and words, your stories and healing, the world knew the love of God.

“Come, let us see this thing that the Lord has made known to us.”

You walked from the stable at Bethlehem to the cross at Calvary. You showed us the way of grace and peace, of mercy and love. With your friends you broke bread and taught them the meaning of sacrificial love.

“This is my body which is broken for you. Each time you do this, remember me.”

You also shared the cup. With it you taught them that God had not forgotten the covenant but instead had renewed it in a wondrous and miraculous way. Through your love and grace our lives have been reconnected with each other and with you.

“This cup is the new covenant which God makes with you in my blood. Each time you drink from this cup, remember me.”

Send, we pray, your Holy Spirit upon these gifts of bread and cup that through them we might celebrate your birth, honour your life, and rejoice at your resurrection. May the bread we eat this night be for us the bread of life through which we remember your sacrifice for us. May the cup we drink from be the cup of salvation through which we recommit ourselves to you this night and always.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

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 can bring a whole family together, bring us together as your family. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Advent Candle Lighting

(light four outside candles)

This evening, we gather to hear the ancient account of God with us. Not the God of elsewhere, but the God within us, the God-given birth long ago. One so delightful that, for centuries, we have named this One as the Word, Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace, and later Messiah.

The last four Sunday mornings, we drew our attention to this simple evergreen wreath. It has no beginning and no end, to symbolize God’s everlasting goodness and life in our midst. We choose the circle shape to symbolize God’s everlasting love and relationship with humankind. We lit these candles to mark our journey, our time of waiting for this evening. Many gather this evening around the world to celebrate that something powerful happened this night long ago.

Let us draw together around this wreath, with these now-lit candles, for the journey of waiting ends this evening. For those who yearn for the love within and from God, let that be so this night. Let this candle remind us that even in our short days and long winter nights, our Christ flame burns and guides us, giving us hope, peace, joy, and love.

(light centre Christ candle, while singing)

All Sing: *(tune: VU#7 Hope Is a Star)*

Christ is the Light that lightens the earth,
guiding and saving us all since his birth.
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 RESPOND TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn MV#158 – Dream a Dream

Children's Story Silent Night

Prayer of Confession

Prepare our hearts, O God, to receive the Christ Child once more. When we are lost in darkness, shine your light into the darkness of our world. When the gloom clings tightly to us, shine your glory into the shadows of our lives. Overcome our fear, Holy One, and inspire us to leave our flocks, and seek the Christ Child this night. Prepare our hearts, O God, to behold your precious gift in awe and wonder. Amen.

(silence for personal confession)

Words of Assurance

“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.”
Receive forgiveness. Receive light. Walk in God's light. Forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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WE LISTEN FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Anthem A Celtic Noel

Scripture Isaiah 9:2-7
Luke 2:1-20

Message

Hymn VU#74 – What Child Is This

Presentation of the Offering

Offertory (tune: Good King Wenceslas)

Here our gifts we offer, God, thankful for your blessings.

Take them, Spirit use them to spread the Christmas message that Christ comes to bring to us life for all creation.

May our gifts help bring to all love and transformation.

Offertory prayer

Gracious God, in this season of gift giving, we come to offer our gifts to you, knowing that we can never repay you for the gift of your Son. Amen.

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Hymn VU#48 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

As we come to this table, we are reminded that this is the table of Jesus Christ, a banquet prepared for everyone. All who seek to be nourished and sustained in the journey of faith, all who seek wholeness and compassionate paths to peace and justice, are welcome here.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give God thanks and praise.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

This holy eve our voices combine with the choirs of angels and all of creation in praise and celebration. For the Lord of lords and the King of kings has come down from heaven and the goodness of God has spread out to the ends of the earth.

*The bulletin this evening has been dedicated in loving
memory of Helen and Richard Likely
by Ken and Janet Nichols.*

TONIGHT'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. ³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For 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. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For a child has been born to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, 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 2:1-20

¹And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

⁷And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward all!”

¹⁵So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

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