



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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Ministers: All the Members of the Church

The Rev. Charles Ericson, Bridge Minister

Erik Haeger, Organist

Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

December 24, 2024 ~ Christmas Eve

Welcome to Our Guests!

We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church... if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!

Greeting

Cheryl Chase

Prelude

Erik Haeger

Call to Worship (adapted from Luke 2:1-14)

In those days, in the beginning,
Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem.
He was to be registered, and she was expecting a child.
The time came for Mary to give birth, so she delivered her child,
wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger.

**And the angels sang,
"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth, peace to all whom God favors."**

Let us worship our with-us God.

Let us sing songs of Christ's birth!

***Carol**

O Little Town of Bethlehem

**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.**

**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.**

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

Lighting the Advent Candle

The Russell Family

One: In a wary and worn world, how do we begin again? Where do we start?

**All: Let us begin with hope. Let us begin with peace. Let us begin with joy.
Let us begin with love.**

One: Yes, let us begin with love, for surely love knows your name. Today, in addition to the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, we light the Christ Candle. For surely God is in this place. Surely the Spirit is near. Surely love knows our name.

**All: May we rest in that good news. Unto us a child is born.
A light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.
Glory to God in the highest heaven! Amen.**

Prayer

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—

We are leaning forward. We are craning our necks, straining to hear a murmur of the angels' song, or an echo of a gloria. We always long for you, but on this night, on this holy Christmas Eve, we long for you to feel as close as possible.

So, as we prepare to hear this ancient story once again, we ask that you would awaken something new in us. Awaken in us a fire for your Word. Awaken in us proof of your proximity. Awaken in us your love, which is bigger than the sky, and as close as our very breath. We are listening. We give thanks. Amen.

THE PAPER BAG PAGEANT

Narrator (Gary Cote):

*Long, long ago—at the start of our story,
long before the coming of Christ in His Glory,
there were many wise people, prophets of Old,
who had messages from God—some told, some untold.
These people, the prophets, had a whole lot to say
about the coming of Jesus—'bout His birth Christmas Day!*

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Narrator: *Then, when the world would least expect— when nobody knew who God would select,
a young girl, so meek and so mild was chosen by God to give birth to The Child.
The air was still; the stars were bright. The world was at peace on that Holy Night.*

The **Small Stars** go to the Chancel and stand behind the manger, and then **Mary and Joseph** go to the manger while all sing:

Away in a Manger

**Away in a manger no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.**

*Narrator (Bobbi Giardina): There in a stable, with animals all 'round,
with birds in the rafters and straw on the ground –
Mary had her baby, with Joseph standing by.
They wrapped Him in a blanket, so He'd be warm and wouldn't cry.
They put Him in a manger, the cow's eating place,
and the Love that they felt shone on each happy face!*

The **Birds and the Animals (except for the sheep)** go up and stand or sit beside the manger during the singing of:

The Friendly Beasts

**Jesus, our brother, strong and good was humbly born in a stable rude,
and the friendly beasts around him stood, Jesus, our brother strong and good.**

**"I," said the donkey, shaggy and brown, I carried his mother uphill and down,
I carried his mother to Bethlehem town; "I," said the donkey shaggy and brown.**

**"I," said the cow, all white and red, I gave him my manger for his bed,
I gave him hay to pillow his head; "I," said the cow, all white and red.**

**"I," said the dove, from the rafters high, I cooed him to sleep so he would not cry,
we cooed him to sleep, my mate and I; "I," said the dove, from the rafters high.**

**Thus all the beasts, by some good spell, in the stable dark were glad to tell
of the gifts they gave Emmanuel, the gifts they gave Emmanuel.**

*Narrator: Meanwhile, in a field not too far away,
'mong the rolling green hills and the rocks brown and gray,
the trees were all resting their heads in their hands,
in the still of the evening throughout all the lands.
Then, all of a sudden without any warning
the sky was ablaze just like it was morning.*

All Sing:

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

**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.**

*Narrator (Barbara Dobrocki): There were angels all 'round– in bunches and clusters, in the air, on the ground!
They sang out the news of this glorious event.
They told of Christ's birth with great joy—and then went.
Their voices rang out over all of the earth– to spread to God's people the news of His birth!*

The **Angels** go and stand by the Animals as all sing:

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

**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 angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King!**

*Narrator: The shepherds, who watched their flocks on that night
were astonished, overwhelmed, and they quivered with fright.
When the angels first came to tell them the news,
they stumbled and fell and shook in their shoes!
But the angels said, "Shepherds, do not be afraid,
we bring you good news of the birth of a babe.
Go see for yourselves, His home is a stable.
You'll find him asleep, a manger his cradle.*

The **Shepherds** lead the **Sheep** to the manger.
The sheep stand on each side and the **Shepherds** kneel while all sing:

O Come All Ye Faithful

**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.**

Narrator (Janna Pedersen):

*While the shepherds adored the babe in the manger,
far out in the desert were three kings in danger.
They followed a star which would lead to the place
where lay the New King of the whole human race.*

The **Large Star**, takes its place next to the manger and is followed by the **Kings** carrying their gifts to kneel at the manger while all sing:

We Three Kings

**We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.
O, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.**

*Narrator: Here are the manger, the baby and mother–
with animals and birds of one kind or another.
Here are the angels, kings, shepherds and sheep.
Stars and trees stand in silence. The baby's asleep.*

*From the prophets of old to all here in these pews, this is the Gospel–this Child, God's Good News.
Our pageant is over, our story complete. Now it is time to return to your seat.*



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.

Offertory

"We See You There"

by the Rev. Chuck Ericson

Prayer of Dedication

With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let our gifts point to your presence in the world, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

Sharing the Light of Christ

John 1:1-5

(Distribution of the flame while the congregation sings)

Carol

Silent Night

**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.**

**Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!**

**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.**

**Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.**

Benediction

***Benediction Response**

Joy to the World

**Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the world, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness, and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.**

Postlude

Many thanks to tonight's participants:

Cheryl Chase, Erik Haeger, Olivia and Stephen Russell & family, Gary Cote, Bobbi Giardina, Barbara Dobrocki, Janna Pedersen, and the Rev. Chuck Ericson.

As well as all who participated in the nativity story!



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About today's quilt icon:

The love of God is represented by a heart with three triangles that seem to fold inward, ready for embrace.



LOVE KNOWS YOUR NAME

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