



December 24, 2023
Grace United Church of Christ

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Pastor
Mrs. Wendy Farber
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Guest Pianist
Aaron Reynolds

Christmas Thought

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who shines in our hearts tonight - to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of the Christ Child.

Based on 2 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV

Prelude/Lighting of the Candles

Special Collection – Hearts in Motion

(<https://www.heartsinmotion.org/>)

Offertory Statement

Offertory Prayer

* *Call to Worship*

He's coming! He's coming! The Savior of the World is coming!

Let us prepare our hearts to greet him!

He comes to each one of us, healing and restoring our lives!

Praise be to God for God's mighty gift to us.

O Come, Prince of Peace, bring your light to us!

We are ready to receive you in our lives! AMEN.

* *Invocation*

Glorious God, who presents us with the most precious of gifts, we praise you for all your blessings in our lives. Tonight, we have come to this place, in the midst of a busy time. We might not even have everything ready at home, yet we have come, because we ourselves need to be ready. Work in our hearts this night, preparing us for your presence. Work in our lives that we may reach out to others in comfort and compassion; work in our world that the darkness that has encompassed it may be dispelled by the brightness of your love and your Gift. In faith and expectation, we pray. Amen.

* *Opening Hymn*

“Oh Come, All Ye Faithful”

TH #112

Advent Invitation

(All candles are light)

We come to this season of Advent and gather around a wreath to light candles. This wreath reminds us of the circle of our human community and the lights that illuminate the many ways in which we bring ourselves to the Incarnation, God's longed-for presence - human and holy, Emmanuel - God with us and God coming to us.

Advent Scripture

John 1:1-5 NRSV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Advent Remembrance

We remind ourselves that there has been much light in the world that has been extinguished and we acknowledge that we have let it happen.

We remember hopes that have been extinguished. (*extinguish candle*)

We can barely remember a time of peace. (*extinguish candle*)

We have tried to protect our own joys and ignored the sorrows of others. (*extinguish candle*)

We have let love go out and have not even lifted a hand to protect the flame. (*extinguish candle*)

Now we have not fresh wicks but crumpled ones, and yet we name and claim this truth: God gives us courage and compassion to re-light hope, peace, joy and love in our lives and our times.

Advent Candles

We are empowered by the advent of Emmanuel, God with Us, because of whom Isaiah prophesied no bruised reed would be broken nor dimly burning wick quenched until justice fills all that lives and grows.

We light the candle of **Hope** for earth and air and seas, for the creatures dwelling among us and the plants alive with God's Spirit.

We light the candle of **Peace** in the midst of violence and conflict, of fear in home, discord in family and work, terror in the street, controversy that makes strangers from friends, wars that kill God's precious children, and we say that Peace is stronger.

We light candle of **Joy** because we believe that joy, not anger or fear, is the root of all justice.

We light the candle of **Love** because we have met angels and babies, caregivers and wanderers and we have received a light in our lives that we must share with the world.

Advent Prayer

Emmanuel, we celebrate the Advent of the past with its precious words and traditions, and we light an Advent of new hope, peace, joy, and love for all the seasons of your children. Amen.

Special Music

Beaver Walter

Christmas Proclamation

Isaiah 9:2-7 MSG

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

**For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—
light! sunbursts of light!**

You repopulated the nation,
you expanded its joy.

**Oh, they're so glad in your presence!
Festival joy!**

The joy of a great celebration,
sharing rich gifts and warm greetings.

The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants—
all their whips and cudgels and curses—

**Is gone, done away with, a deliverance
as surprising and sudden as Gideon's old victory over
Midian.**

The boots of all those invading troops,
along with their shirts soaked with innocent blood,
Will be piled in a heap and burned,
a fire that will burn for days!
For a child has been born—for us!
the gift of a son—for us!

He'll take over
the running of the world.
His names will be: Amazing Counselor,
Strong God,
Eternal Father,
Prince of Wholeness.

His ruling authority will grow,
and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings.
He'll rule from the historic David throne
over that promised kingdom.
He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing
and keep it going

With fair dealing and right living,
beginning now and lasting always.
The zeal of God-of-the-Angel-Armies
will do all this.

The Story of Christ's Birth

Carol "Joy To The World" TH #120

Scripture Luke 2:1-7

Carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" TH #108

Scripture Luke 2:8-14

Carol "Angels We Have Heard on High" TH #105

Oh Holy Night

Composer: Adolphe Adam

Kera Furry & Roger Knisely

Arranger: Stephen DeCesare

The Christmas Prayer

Gracious and loving Father, as we remember tonight the glorious gift of your son, we are overwhelmed by the magnitude of your love, and by our unworthiness. We know that we have spent too much time in the past few weeks preparing our homes to celebrate your Son's birthday, and too little time preparing our hearts to receive him.

Fill our souls with your great light, Father, and make us new creatures through your Grace. We pray in the name of your dear Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

** Candlelight Service*

It is God's gift to love us this Christmas. Tonight, we see his light shining in the darkness. Tonight, we hear his word, the word made flesh, piercing the silence. Tonight, the boundaries of darkness are pushed back. A light shines in the darkness. A light shines from Bethlehem's stable. A light shines in our hearts. And the darkness is powerless to extinguish it.

Lights are dimed,

Leader brings forth the light of the Christ candle.

** Candlelight Carol*

"Silent Night"

Insert

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 Savor, 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.

* *Benediction*

May the light of Christ dwell in you from this night on, and may it light your way to eternity. Glory be to God!

Glory be to God in the highest!

* *Postlude/Extinguishing of the Candle*