



*December 24, 2023*  
*Greenfield United Church of Christ*

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*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*

*Community News*

*Prayer List and Prayers of the People*

*Prelude/Lighting of the Candles*

\* *Call to Worship*

Sing a new song to the Holy One! Emmanuel reigns!!

**Mighty God, we gather to consider your marvelous works.**

Sing a new song to the Holy One! Emmanuel reigns!!

**Wonderful Counselor, we gather to delight in your  
revelation.**

Sing a new song to the Holy One! Emmanuel reigns!!

**Prince of Peace, we gather to become messengers of your  
good news.**

\* *Invocation*

God with us, we open our hearts and souls to the beauty of your kingdom. We seek to hear the precious news once again that we might be continually renewed, transformed, and awed by your abundant love, everlasting peace, miraculous hope, and quenchless joy. May our praise and prayers be pleasing to you. May our lives reflect the beauty you have birthed in us. Amen.

\* *Opening Hymn* “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” CH #267

*Christmas Proclamation*

Isaiah 52:7-10 MSG

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger bringing good news,  
Breaking the news that all's well,  
proclaiming good times, announcing salvation,  
telling Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Voices! Listen! Your scouts are shouting, thunderclap shouts,  
shouting in joyful unison.

They see with their own eyes  
GOD coming back to Zion.

Break into song! Boom it out, ruins of Jerusalem:

“GOD has comforted his people!

He’s redeemed Jerusalem!”

GOD has rolled up his sleeves.

All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm.

Everyone, from one end of the earth to the other,  
sees him at work, doing his salvation work.

### *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. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The 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.**

## \* *Christmas Holy Gospel*

**Luke 2:1-18 MSG**

### *The Birth of Jesus*

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

**While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.**

### *An Event for Everyone*

There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

**Glory to God in the heavenly heights,  
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.**

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.

### *Children's Christmas Message / Congregation Conversation*

\* *Meditation Hymn* "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" CH #277

### *Today's Message*

\* *The Apostle's Creed*

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:  
And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was  
conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered  
under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he  
descended into hades; the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the  
Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick  
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic/Christian church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*The Lord's Prayer*

**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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

*Sung Response*

*“Hear Our Prayer, O Lord”*

TH # 501

*The Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings*

Offertory Statement

\* Doxology

TH # 551

\* Offertory Prayer

**We dedicate these gifts that have been shared for the fortification of the beloved community. Let these gifts usher joy into this world and signal to the people that God is still setting captives free. 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”*

CH #253

*\* Benediction*

*“The Work of Christmas” by Howard Thurman*

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,