

The Prelude Ring Little Bells/ O Come Little Children
Arr Larry Shackley

The Greetings

***The Opening Hymn: "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;

Refrain

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, Born this happy morning,
Jesus to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing!

Refrain

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all Glory in the highest!

Refrain

The Call to Worship:

Leader: Come. Come from the east and from the west. Come from the north and south. Come and celebrate our expected Messiah, Immanuel, God-with-us.

People: This redeemer will bring peace and comfort to all who mourn. This Savior will wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who cry.

Leader: Come. Rejoice, for the promised one is coming.

People: We come with joy, for this child will fill our hearts with love, hope and peace.

Leader: Come. Prepare the way of the Christ.

People: Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain made low. The rough places will be made plain, for the glory of God will be revealed, the Word made flesh.

Leader: Come. Join the choir of angels; come and sing a new song.

People: The earth will sing a new song to the Lord, bless his name, and tell of his salvation.

Leader: Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth

rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the fields exult, and everything in them.

People: A child will be given to us. A new day will dawn. Let the world rejoice!

The Call to Confession

The Prayer of Confession:

Almighty God, your Son is coming. We rejoice that you are sending the promised Christ, yet we confess that still we are not ready for His coming. We are reluctant to live in the ways to which you have called us. When life is good to us, we take more credit than we deserve. When we help others, we expect honor and reward. When we fall short we blame others and even you. Awaken us, we pray, to your Spirit. Let Christ's birth make a real difference in our lives, and grant us your peace, through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Assurance of Pardon:

Our eternal God makes all things new. God's child comes to us, changing our lives in small ways as well as large. Give thanks to God for he has sent a light of hope, love and peace which will be for all people and through his good gift we are forgiven and strengthened. God so loves us that he sent his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall never perish, but have everlasting life. Accept God's gift as your own and rejoice.

The Lighting of the Christ Candle (Advent Wreath)

READER 1: Light is a gift from God, a gift to be shared. Jesus came into our midst as the light of the world and his Holy Spirit illumines our lives, our work and our witness.

READER 2: Christ comes into a broken and sorrowful world. He brings us the light of God. The light of Christ is breaking into our lives, crumbling walls, setting us free to live, work and love wholly.

READER 1: We began four weeks ago to prepare for the brilliant light of God. We began with the glow of a tiny ray of hope. We relight our first Advent candle as a prayer for our suffering world, that God, who is too often hidden, may be revealed to us and to all people.

(Light the purple candle of hope)

READER 2: Then we added the flame of peace to prepare ourselves to receive the peace Jesus brings to all who trust in him. We relight our second Advent candle as a prayer for peace, that comfort and justice will be done for all people and that peace will reign over the world.

(Light the purple candle of peace)

READER 1: Our third candle is the candle of joy, the joy God brings to the earth and to all of humankind. Joy overwhelms us when we remember what God has done and what he has promised to do. We relight our third Advent candle with a prayer of joy, rejoicing that Christ came, is coming and will always come.

(Light the pink candle of joy)

READER 2: Last Sunday we lit the candle of love, God's love shining in the darkness, coming into the world today as brightly now as it ever did. We celebrate the love we have in Christ and the love he has for us. We relight our fourth Advent candle as a prayer that God's perfect love will live in our hearts and change the world. *(Light the purple candle of love)*

ALL SINGING:

**Light the Christmas candles now:
Sing of Donkey, sheep, and, cow;
Birthday candles for the King,
Let the Alleluias ring!**

Refrain

**Candle, Candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night;
Candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.**

Special Music: Christmas Comes Again words & music by Ed Rush
Sung by Dianne Rockefeller & Kay Oosterling

The First Lesson: "God Speaks through the Prophets" Isaiah 40:3-5; Isaiah 9:2b, 6-7

A voice cries out; "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

...The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow, upon them has the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even for ever.

Hymn: "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

**Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.**

**Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit, Raise us to Thy glorious throne.**

The Second Lesson: “God Speaks to Mary” Luke 1:26-35, 38

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her and said, ‘Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.’

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, ‘Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son and shall call his name ‘Jesus.’ And he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.’

Then said Mary unto the angel, ‘How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?’ And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’

And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

The Canticle of Mary: Luke 1:46-55

“And Mary said, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filature hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent away empty. He hath helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever,’”

Hymn: “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”

**Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.**

**Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.**

The Third Lesson: “God Speaks to Joseph” Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man and not willing to make a public example, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Hymn: "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 blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.**

The Fourth Lesson: "God Comes Among Us" Luke 2:1-7

And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David. He went to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Hymn: "Joy to the World"

**Joy to the world, the Lord has 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.**

**No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings**

flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.

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, wonders of his love.

The Fifth Lesson: "God Speaks through the Angels" Luke 2:8-20

"And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were so afraid. And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad what was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Hymn: "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 th'angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"**

Refrain

**Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King."**

**Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th'incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.**

Refrain

**Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the us from of earth, Born to give us second birth.**

Refrain

The Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer: (using 'sins')

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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Sixth Lesson: "God Speaks through the Star" Matthew 2:1-11

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.'

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, 'In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.'

Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.'

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Hymn: "The First Nowell"

The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east, beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

And by the light of that same star, Three wise men
came from country far; To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Born is the King of Israel.

The Seventh Lesson: "God Sends His Light" John 1:1-5, 9-14

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not. But as many as received him to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."
(turn off lights)

The Sharing of the Light

We are a people walking in darkness, stumbling, groping, hoping, falling and failing. Our God has sent us the light that shines in deepest darkness. He calls us out of hopelessness into hope. Like the wise men we can follow his star, the light that he offers to us. Paul writes that in the Lord we live in the light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Let us light our candles tonight, knowing that the smallest flame holds the power to heal and comfort and that as a people together we can change the world. As we light our candles let us say, "May the peace of the Lord be with you."

Closing Hymn: "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.

Blessing

Go out now in peace, knowing that the Christ is here. God's own son will travel before you, beside you, behind you and within you. Go forward in the birth of peace and rejoice. Amen.

May God's gift light up your life, open your heart to love and fill you with joy which lasts all year.

Departing Music: Christmas Cheer! A New England Memory by Michael Shea

THE PHELPS UNITED CHURCH IS BLESSED
BY YOUR PRESENCE AT THIS SPECIAL CHRISTMAS SERVICE.