

December 24, 2020 – At Home Worship

Welcome to worship for our Christmas Eve service ☺ We are used to a Christmas Eve service in our beautiful sanctuary at church, with candles lit, organ music, bells and piano and this Christmas Eve we miss our church building, which remains physically closed for services through at least January 4th, 2021. If our municipality remains in Stage Red beyond January 4th, we will remain physically closed too.

But, BUT – we are still able to gather for worship with Zoom, or to access this service for which we give thanks. Until we work out our technology limitations, we are experimenting on Heide's Zoom service for live online worship. This allows us to gather together for worship from our respective homes. We want to ensure this is the best package for our use before the church invests in our own Zoom subscription. **You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of the Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply):**

1 587 328 1099 or
1 647 374 4685 or
1 647 558 0588 or
1 778 907 2071 or
1 204 272 7920 or
1 438 809 7799

Use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked.

On Christmas Eve worship service is available in three formats: a paper mail out, an online offering with youtube links that you can access at your convenience, and a live online video Zoom service at 7pm. The different formats may include different content as technology allows.

Christmas Eve Worship Service

Dec 24, 2020 06:30 PM Zoom opens, service begins at 7:00pm.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81940328156?pwd=OVcreGpNbWJYRWQxSjlTWm5vakVHZz09>

**Meeting ID: 819 4032 8156 and
Passcode: 538456**

Christmas Day service:

We will have a 10:00 am Zoom Christmas Day service, which will be jointly lead by myself and Ven. Reverend Rosalyn Elm.

Christmas Day Service

Dec 25, 2020 09:30 AM Zoom opens, service begins at 10:00 am.

Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/94892614909>

Meeting ID: 948 9261 4909

We hope you enjoy the music and videos Lorre and Brad have put together with guest voices including Randy Murphy and Debbie-Lou Ludolph.

As always, if you need a phone call or distanced visit, please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721 ... The church office is closed, but walking visits or coffee shop visits, video phone visits or regular phone visits remain available ☺ Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if I may be of help or support in these times!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

I want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who has generously allowed the use of your photographs in the making of our videos for use in our online worship services. I will still take any scenery photos you'd like to send along to be included in future videos. Full credit will of course be given. And also I want to thank everyone who has sent words of appreciation for the efforts of Brad, his guest singers to make our worship the best it can be. We have all learned quite a few new tech

skills throughout 2020 and each video gets better than the ones that came before. Thank you for bearing with us and for your words of encouragement. God bless you all during this holy season.
—Lorre Calder

We give thanks to God, for granting our existence on this safe, bountiful, land,
and we recognize that we thrive and enjoy life here,
on the traditional territories of
the Anishnabe, Neutral and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart, centre yourself for worship.

Gathering Hymn: #292 Love has Come

Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9Xw4KrnCzQ>

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Greeting:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: God of humble beginnings, today and tonight we celebrate the humble beginnings of your son, Jesus. How amazing it is, that you came into our world, in the wriggling, squirming, crying, pooping, blood-covered reality of a newborn baby. What a reminder to us that salvation and restoration and grace and mercy and the most incredible acts of love have humble beginnings. Remind us this Christmas to hold fast to humble beginnings, as we celebrate the light of Jesus, entering into darkness that fails to put out the light. Amen.

The First Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7.

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.

You 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.
For 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.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

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

His 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. [NRSV]

Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation: Bless the Lord, My Soul, Taize; Bradley Moggach, Synthesizer and Bells

Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wi38m9haMno&t>

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The Holy Gospel according to Luke 2:1-14.***C: Glory to you O Christ.***

Now in those days a decree went out from [the emperor] Caesar Augustus, that all the inhabited world (the Roman Empire) should be registered [in a census]. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to register for the census, each to his own city. So Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was with child. While they were there [in Bethlehem], the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her Son, her firstborn; and she wrapped Him in [swaddling] cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no [private] room for them in the inn.

In the same region there were shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord flashed *and* shone around them, and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. For this day in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (the Messiah). And this will be a sign for you [by which you will recognize Him]: you will find a Baby wrapped in [swaddling] cloths and lying in a manger.” Then suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host (angelic army) praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest [heaven],
And on earth peace among men with whom He is well-pleased.” [The Amplified Translation]

This is the Gospel of Jesus: Thanks be to Christ.**Sermon (Imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here): (A link for a recording of the sermon will be sent out following the worship service.)**

(segments of this sermon that are in quotes were included from this link:

https://www.patheos.com/blogs/gracecoloredglasses/2020/12/significance-baby-jesus-person-of-color/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Christians+For+a+Better+Christianity&utm_content=43)

It was impossible for me to NOT feel sad about being unable to have our traditional Christmas Eve service at church. In this short time, coming on to six years now that we have been together as pastor and congregation, I did not realize how much I had come to rely on the magnificence of our sanctuary, the ambiance of our candlelight, the glory of our organ, bells, choir and piano, and the many gifts of each one of you in our congregation who made Christmas Eve worship something grand. I miss the grandeur. It puts more pressure on me as a pastor to cough up a meaningful sermon and I've had to resist the temptation to abandon the truth of the Gospel, the GOOD NEWS, reality to the desire to simply preach a feel-good message ... so you will have to bear with me as I bring you to the good news with different eyes tonight.

This year, I looked at the scripture with very different eyes ... I read it from the perspective of a family of colour, from a vulnerable population (Jewish Palestinians, living under Roman Occupation), and likely part of the vast, (in the percentages of 90's) peasant class. I looked at this scripture from the perspective of families who do NOT have the luxury to be able to self-isolate to reduce risk, because multiple generations live in one house. I looked at this scripture from the perspective of families who must share their living space not with clean and pampered pets, but with farm animals and beasts of burden. I imagined brown Mary giving birth to brown Jesus ... and my wonder at the things I miss from St Peter's Christmas Eve traditional service made me ask the question of myself: How did we get from there – the real story, the original story to here – the missing of traditions and grandeur?

I read the CBC news this past week and two articles stood out for me: one reporting a significantly higher rate of COVID infection in black and ethnic communities (which the medical community identified was possibly due to lower living conditions), and another reporting adverse reactions to the vaccine in health care workers in Indigenous communities.

Like many of you, I have been visiting with family using video calls and in a recent visit with my sister who is a medical doctor, and who has read through the COVID vaccine studies in the news, I learnt that most of the people on whom the vaccines were tested were not people of colour. So we don't really know, I don't really know how someone of my ethnic background, or someone of indigenous or black or essentially non-white ethnic background will react to the vaccine. And it comforted me that Jesus was a brown baby. This may seem like a really small thing, but it was a comfort to me ... the good news came in the form of a wriggling, squirming, crying, pooping, blood-covered newborn brown baby. Jesus knows MY reality. But his colour doesn't mean he knows only the reality of people of the same colour ... Jesus knows all of our current reality ... the reality we show on the outside, and the reality we feel on the inside ...

"We acknowledge that Jesus was a baby, but we sing a lot about Jesus the King.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive its King.

Come and behold Him, born the King of Angels!

Hark! The herald angels sing: 'Glory to the newborn King!'

While it's great to welcome a baby as our soon-to-be Savior, it's sort of more First-World to welcome a *champion* – and to see him as "*ours*" (which makes us champions also by association).

This year, in the relative quiet of a Covid Christmas, let us meditate on the lowliness, the other-ness of Jesus – and the implications for us today."

The Amplified Bible Translation I chose to use today reminds us that "there was no [private] room for them in the inn."

In their context, the lack of privacy would not have been that strange, because multi-generational families living together was the norm in their context. It is still the norm for most of the people who live on our planet.

We miss the church celebration that included lights and numerous candles, organ music and bells, sometimes guitar music and flute, definitely hymn books and literate voices singing.

The stable or barn would have been lit by a lamp or two; it is unlikely to have been a big space, the animals would have been crowding the people. Mary, though birthing the Son of God, is having a very human delivery ... there would be blood and likely poop, and a placenta to deliver after delivering the baby. There would have been no running water, let alone masks and hand sanitizer. Clean blankets and towels would have been at a premium.

Somehow we translated this into grandeur ... high ceilings, stained glass, an altar flanked by tall candelabra ...

I wonder how many of you have ever been present though, at the actual birth of a baby ... I have.

When the baby crowned, when we could see her head, I was amazed. More amazed than I have ever been at any bodily feat. To see the head of the baby preparing to enter the world ... was like witnessing every magnificent thing I have ever seen all in one place.

When the birthing was finished, and the baby was wrapped up, still with bits of blood and the sticky waxy stuff that is on newborn babies, I couldn't help the tears that fell on my boots that had drops of mother's blood on them ...

They were tears at witnessing the incredible.

I can only imagine that witness being multiplied beyond measure in those who were present to see this little brown baby emerge in the midst of human mess, in a crowded barn, dimly lit – because they all knew this was the Messiah ... the Son of God, the one who was sent to bring us the good news of a God who loves us in the midst of the mess, in the midst of the confusion, in the midst of everything being not as it ought to be, for nobody can argue Mary and Joseph deserved to have a private room, hot and cold running water, an abundance of sterile towels and blankets, and top level medical care ... like any one of us living in Canada (as long as we are not on reserve) would have.

Sit with that contrast for a minute.

Our current medical amenities in non-reserve Canada ...

vs.

the birthplace of Jesus.

Now sit with this contrast for a minute ...

The Christmas eve service you are used to ...

vs.

all you might be missing today in the grandeur of a “normal” Christmas ...

Or sit with this contrast for a minute ...

The space you are currently in, likely warm, sheltered, with food in the fridge and pantry – probably abundant because I know you stocked up for Christmas! Clean running water.

vs.

no fridge or even cooler or pantry in the stable with newborn Jesus. Definitely no running water.

vs.

no potable water in so many reserve communities, and inadequate water supply in much of the world. Maybe it takes the stripping away of traditions of grandeur to invite us into remembering the really humble entry of our saviour into our world.

Maybe remembering this will also help us to remember that there is contrast between what we have and what the over 100 people in our city who are experiencing homelessness are missing ... warmth, shelter, food security, safety.

Maybe remembering this will help us to remember the grown-up Jesus telling the disciples:

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,

I was a stranger and you invited me in,

I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me,

I was in prison and you came to visit me...

(Matthew 25:35-40).

Maybe remembering this contrast between the Christmas we celebrated OUTSIDE of ourselves and the actual dimly lit birth of Jesus will help us to look INSIDE ourselves, for the light of Christ that resides there ... in the heart, in the mind, in the decision-making, love-feeling, compassion-extending core of us and encounter the good news within us ...

The good news that sees Jesus in ourselves: especially when we are grieving, lonely, isolated and depressed.

The good news that encounters Jesus in the needy: at the traffic light, holding a sign saying “homeless”, on the banks of the Grand River, in a tent pitched for Christmas ... in the person who needs forgiving, who needs your voice on the other end of the line, who needs a prayer or a sign of unconditional, boundless love. We are blessed: God is well pleased with us ... we even today, especially today, have more than the average human being has to be thankful for: WAY WAY MORE.

As believers in Jesus, we have the Christ light within us ... available to shine and so much more readily visible when the other lights have been confined in stage red, lockdown, in hearts which have gone dark. And if you have to fight to shine that light, if it feels too crowded with disappointment and sadness, with fear and anxiety, take heart in knowing JESUS was born in that kind of crowded, inadequate context ... and HE, like YOU has made all the difference in our world. Let the birth happen within you, and let your light so shine before others ...

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among all people with whom GOD is well-pleased.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: #278 Away in A Manger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPmyyqi9Fz4>

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Prayers of the People – at home without ZOOM edition ☺

In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for those things we need and seek:

For ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as beloved children, holding all of our griefs and losses. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For our families and friends, that they may be sources of constant help and support. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For all the people we have loved who have died, that the love that never dies may sustain us. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For our family and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer*

For greater understanding of the lessons of love and grace as taught by Jesus your Christ. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we seek, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Let us share the peace of Christ:

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation.

Thanksgiving at the Table:

If you are doing this at home, prepare your elements before beginning – bread or cracker, wine or juice

Click here for communion thanksgiving at the table with the Lord's Prayer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RnRfJoYmjs>

We come to God's table with thanksgiving for the unique and mysterious way in which Spirit connects us through the simplest of things. We come with thanksgiving, remembering all who have gone before, and celebrating the power of Spirit to join us in one communion of saints:

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Holy God, we give thanks for the meal you provide: to nourish, sustain and unite us, bringing us closer to you, through your power – not ours. Amen.

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 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, forever and ever. AMEN.

The Body of Christ is given for each one of us. (consume your bread or cracker)

The Blood of Christ is shed for each one of us. (consume your wine or juice)

Prayer after Communion

Emmanuel, God with us,
you grace us with life and breath
and give us bread for the journey.
Send us out in service to this world that you love,
telling the amazing news of your coming
to be Savior and Lord of all.
Amen.

Sending Hymn: O Holy Night (Randy Murphy)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZDVSQInIjU>

Recorded at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cambridge, ON, December 24, 2015

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Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.
May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.
May God look upon us with favor
and give us ✝ peace.
Amen.

Dismissal: Go with Jesus who is in our midst. ***Thanks be to God.***

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