

Message: United in Love

Why are you here tonight? Is it a family tradition to attend the Christmas Eve service, light a candle and sing “Silent Night”? Or did you come because you had a role to fill? Some of us came because our family told us to. Whatever the reason, we’re glad you’re here.

There are reasons we read about Jesus’ birth on Christmas Eve. First, it’s a tradition. We also read it to be reminded of the miracle that happened long ago; a miracle that fulfilled God’s promises made over centuries. We read the narrative from Luke to be reminded that God renewed the world and all people by giving us a gift: Jesus. God’s Son was born as a baby so we can know him and so God would be with us. Christ came down and changed the world with love.

There’s more than that.

Maybe you came to church because you’re looking for something. Did you come hoping to experience God’s presence tonight? Maybe your heart is weary of the world’s empty promises. You’re hoping for God’s touch to relieve you – even if for a moment – of your loneliness or despair.

If you did, you’re in the right place. God’s Spirit fills our sanctuary this evening. Angels’ wings brush you as they fill this room. Those wings are spread wide around all who are gathered here. And angels’ wings are everywhere protecting those who are in God’s presence tonight, especially in quiet places of prayer where the faithful are alone. We gather together on this special night knowing God’s hand is reaching out to us, ready to touch us and fill us with God’s grace. Christ comes to us and fills us with God’s love in the present Christmas. We’re refreshed and ready to face a new day, filled with God’s love.

There’s more than that.

Maybe you came to church seeking the promise of a better future? We read about Jesus tonight to be renewed in hope. God is alive and at work in the world today. God’s love not only speaks to our hearts, it opens our minds to the power of God’s love in the world. Through love, barriers fall, the lost are found and lives are changed for eternity.

Jesus’ mother, Mary, pondered the miracle of Jesus’ birth and all she experienced in her heart. That’s where she found love and hope so deep and so strong she could stand at the foot of a cross and watch her first born child die and not lose faith. We can be filled with the same love, a love that will overcome all of our suffering, sorrow and grief. It’s because of the source of that love is Jesus Christ, our Messiah.

Gathered together, we are made holy. We share divine hope and love tonight because of a mother’s faith, a father’s love and the grace of a Savior who will come to us every Christmas from now to eternity. Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas future unite when we gather in God’s presence as we do on this very special night.

Open your eyes to God’s glory shining, filling the world with a spirit of peace, love and the promise of things to come. Let us join the choir of angels who are all around us singing, “*Glory to God! Peace to all of God’s children.*”

**I pray your heart is renewed and refreshed
by Christ’s love this Christmas.**

Merry Christmas!

Let us pray:

Loving God, each year we are drawn by the wonder of Christmas. More than all of the giving and getting, the love of Jesus Christ compels us. Christmas is so special. Only a loving God would put on flesh and blood to live among us. Only a loving God would care about the unlovable. Only a loving God could call us to approach Christmas with awe and wonder each year. This Christmas, may we rediscover the Christ of Christmas, whose eternal love compels us to draw near. Amen.

Luke 2:1-7 (CEB)

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David’s house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you - wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened. Let’s confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.” They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.