

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

Worship Service from December 19, 2021

**Advent 3 - Love**



**Opening Prayer** Almighty God, you bless us with so many gifts, including Christ. we have come to meet with you and offer you ourselves, -- that we may bear good fruit in your world, the fruit of compassion, of self-denial, of sharing, so all will have enough -- so that at Christ's coming to us this day, he may find within us hearts that are ready for his habitation. In Jesus Name, Amen.

**A Christmas Affirmation** (P – Pastor C – Congregation)

P: We believe in God, the creator and giver of life,

**C: who brought all creation to birth, protecting, nurturing, and cherishing us.**

P: We believe in Jesus Christ: God born among us as a fragile baby,

**C: embodying both love and the need for love, and calling us to trust in God as a tiny child does their parents.**

P: We believe in the Holy Spirit, breathed into us at our birth,

**C: always drawing us on to be born again, nourishing our growth and inspiring our living.**

P: We believe in the reconciliation of the world to God, through Christ. Hunted at birth and humiliated at death,

**C: Christ entered our fearful darkness so that we might enter his glorious light and share the life of his resurrection.**

P: We believe Christmas is a sign of the life to come,

**C: a call to live in peace and celebrate living and loving together. Amen.**

(abridged, adapted from — A Christmas Affirmation by Nathan Nettleton, 1999)

**Music** Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

**Music** (vv 1,4,5) O Come, All Ye Faithful

**Call to Worship** (L: Lay Reader C: Congregation)

L: Come, let your light shine, let your spirit soar. Open your minds and hearts.

**C: For love is making its home among us.**

L: It shines in the darkness and sings in the shadows.

**C: Love is the hope of the saints, the call of the prophets, and the heart of the church.**

L: We know what love is because God loved us, sending his Son to live among us, and promising his return. A love such as this compels a response.

**C: We see our salvation in the child of Bethlehem.**

L: Jesus is the lamp in the window, the beacon on a hill, our star in the night sky.

**C: He makes us new and fills us with his unfailing love.**

## Advent Candles

**Call of the Candles** *We Lift the Light of Hope*

...  
We lift the light of love, O God  
your candle in our night.  
You come to give and help us live  
the mighty love of Christ.



**Candle of Hope, Peace, Joy, Love**

(presented by lay reader – no script available)

**Music Response** **Special Music** *Let it Be Christmas*

## Prayers

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, we want Christmas to be everywhere, we want to experience it all around us. But at times, in all our anxiousness to prepare for celebrating you, it is easy to get lost and forget about you. When we sense the darkness all about us, remind us that the sun always rises, even if it is behind the clouds, remind us that your Light has come, even though circumstances sometimes make it hard to sense you. Almighty God, visit us again with your salvation. Fill us with joy to sing your praises, for you bring to us your hope, your peace, your love, and your joy, and we welcome you into our hearts and among all people here and online. You promise us your love again and again, ultimately demonstrating it through the gift of your Son Jesus Christ. We receive him and your love, confident of your care and mercy for all your creation. You shepherd us so that we have everything we truly need. **Praises and Petitions** and in turn we pray for the needs of our loved ones, our community and our world. We pray for those who are traveling during this season for whatever reason, that they will stay safe and healthy, we pray for those who are under the weather, be it from covid or

flu or any other illnesses that come our way... Specifically we continue to pray \* for those effected by the Oxford school shooting, \* for lone Bennett with cancer, \* for Susie Stevick with covid, \* for the family of Brian Martin, who has a child with covid, \*for the family and friends we have lost (some due to covid), \* also for Tim Tidmore who passed away this past week, and Jerry Weaver's friend, Lou Goleb who also passed away this week. \* and for Terri's friend Carol and for others for whom we may not know the reason of the request, but you do, or for those whose needs are not spoken publicly at all – but are still deep in the hearts and minds of your people, and we lift them all up to you because you do know every need. **Quilt** And then finally today, we also pray for 6 year old Claire Gordon, who has a cancer that is difficult to treat, and for whom we now dedicate this quilt.

Lord, today we ask from you a special blessing on this child, Claire Gordon, and on her parents. May your loving arms embrace her with your strength to give her and her parents faith and endurance throughout this difficult journey they face.

As they use this quilt, may its sight, and warmth be a tangible reminder that you want to bring peace to their hearts and calm to their troubled spirits, to know that they are prayed for and cared for. Help them to rest, confident that you are there, always awake, keeping watch, holding her and her parents close, hearing their inner-most fears and hopes.

May your Spirit be upon her and them, even in the darkest and loneliest of nights, reminding them that you, our heavenly Father, holds a special place in his heart for each one and is always with us every moment of every day. We are never alone. We dedicate this quilt for your effective use with Claire and her loved ones, as a sign that you are compassionately working in their lives. We ask these things in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate healer, and who taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

**Prayer Response Music O Little Town of Bethlehem**

### **Introduction to Bible Reading**

Hopes are fulfilled, and fears are relieved for those who humbly accept God's blessing of his Son entering their hearts. Seven hundred years before that first Christmas night, the joy and love of God's companionship and care in Christ was seen by the prophet Micah. He wrote:

**Bible Reading** Bethlehem [Ephrathah], you are one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. But the Lord will choose one of your people to rule the nation —

someone whose family goes back to ancient times. The Lord will abandon Israel only until this ruler is born, and the rest of his family returns to Israel. Like a shepherd taking care of his sheep, this ruler will lead and care for his people by the power and glorious name of the Lord his God. His people will live securely, and the whole earth will know his true greatness, because he will bring peace.

Micah 5:2-5a (CEV)

### **Responsive Reading** (L: Lay Reader **C: Congregation**)

**L:** And John the Baptist and Jesus teach us how to know his greatness and participate as his people. Everyone will see the saving power of God. Crowds of people came out to be baptized. But John said to them, “Do something to show that you really have given up your sins.”

**C: “What should we do?”**

**L:** “Produce good fruit. Be generous to the needy. Be fair. Don’t abuse power, be content with what you are given.” [To sum up these examples simply --]

**C: Treat others as you want them to treat you.**

**L:** This is what the Law and Prophets are all about. In doing this, we will be loving God with all we are, and others as much as we love ourselves.

**C: [“But how can we accomplish this in our lives?”]**

**L:** John said, “I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

**C: In many different ways John preached the good news to the people.**

(Selections from and adapted Luke 3:6-18,  
with Matthew 7:12, 26:37-40) (CEV)

### **Theme and Sermonette** *When Love Comes Home*

The Bible is full of heroes. A whole set of them is found in the book of Judges -- remember Samson? Gideon? Deborah? -- charismatic, powerful leaders who were raised by God to deliver his people from their enemies. Just prior to our text, Micah calls the current king a “judge” to draw attention to how much the current king was *not* a judge -- that the nation needed at that time. He was a weak, humiliated, an embarrassment. He can’t save himself, much less the people. They were surrounded and walled off from potential help or resources to survive, thanks to a siege from the Assyrian Empire.

It makes us think, who is around us that is hurting? isolated? spiritually hungry? unable to receive help or help themselves?

Micah is called to deliver God's message of hope. Doubt and despair will continue only until -- well let's break it down...

In the town of Bethlehem Ephrathah -- a minor town -- not necessarily in size, but in significance. Jerusalem had gotten too big (not necessarily in size) but too big for its britches -- remember that phrase? -- in its modern, prideful, worldly corruption -- Micah couldn't see a good king ever coming from there again. So the roots had to go way back -- way back to ancient times and ancient places...to the good old days -- the days of Adam and Eve before sin entered the world, when God and humanity were one... and then again over the centuries, but still long, long ago -- through their king par excellence -- David, and so it was from the town of David and the strong line of David that an idealized king like David would be born. When he did come, the scattered would return home, those disconnected from God would return to God, and this king would lead and care for the people like a great, loving shepherd. And it would be so world changing that Matthew that this text and deliberately misquotes Micah to say Bethlehem was by no means the least among Judah because Jesus so transformed lives and the world that he put the town on the world map for all time.

The name Bethlehem means house of bread, but it can also be translated house of war. Ephrathah means fruitful, but is sometimes translated barren or worthless. Last week we talked about Elizabeth who was barren, now fruitful. And Mary, virgin, now fruitful. And John came out of the wilderness, out of "nowhere" really, the son of old priest and wife, but out of those humble roots he brought a message of the heavenly kingdom coming and bearing fruit among us.

Jesus came from the roots of heaven, but also the roots of a very young poor virgin and her intended -- born in a stable and grew up in a construction worker's home -- and from those humble beginnings, he grew up to usher in God's kingdom and change the world.

It is almost like there is a choice to be made. Fruitful or Barren? Do we nurture or do we divide? Are we living in an empty wilderness or lush and fruitful lives?

People were eager to get in on this new, lush, fruitful world. They flocked out to John to hear his message and wonder how they could join what they assumed would be a massive, majestic movement toward God (and the fall of Rome) -- and John said, in essence, the way they get in on God's act, to bear the fruit of love for God and for others... and we are left with a choice -- to "live like Jerusalem" relying on reputation and the all insufficient powers of our own charisma and

determination and policies to change our world by constant revolution and conflict, coercing others to our will and our way -- proud, unwilling, self-centered, barren and our hearts and lives under constant siege; **OR** to “live like Bethlehem” humbly, relying on God’s reputation to direct our lives with his all sufficient powers and the charisma, the equipping gifts, of the Holy Spirit -- and encouraging and inspiring each other -- not by destructive criticism, but by our own transformation – as examples for others. As someone else summed up John’s message to the crowds -- to bear the fruit of repentance ... Live rightly. Live justice. Live for mercy. Live in generosity, live in community, live as though you belong to one another because you do. Live as though you are responsible for one another because you are! Humble, willing, obedient, cooperative, and fruitful. Maybe our theme’s story will help us illustrate what I’m talking about. It takes on a science fantasy form, but it still carries a relevant point of truth for us in our world today.

Once upon a time, long ago, almost every child had a superpower and attended superpower school to learn how to channel these energies. One day they gathered because a nearby world needed the very best of them to fight that world’s bad guys. But they couldn’t decide which people with which powers were needed to win the day over there.

Those with X-Ray vision said they could see the bad buys through walls and catch them by surprise and finish them off before they even knew what had happened.

Those with super speed said they would still escape -- but we can move faster than them and they couldn’t get away.

Those who could fly said they would be best qualified to hunt and chase them down...

Those with super strength said none of that would do any good unless you have the strength to overpower them once they were caught.

And so, the argument went on with group after group, each proclaiming their own powers as the one the other world would need. Finally, a super smart kid entered with a rather ordinary looking kid who was small, skinny, and didn’t even have a special superhero suit. But the smart kid said, “This one will solve their problems.

None of them believed it. “What secret power or weapon does he have? We can’t tell by looking at him.” The smart kid replied, “I don’t really know, all I know is he is successful at what he does.”

The others began to think it was a joke and began their arguing all over again -- but it wasn't very long before they all stopped arguing and all agreed to send him to the neighboring world, for this kid had changed them with his secret power.

The leaders who had called for help were surprised when they saw who showed up. What's more, several weeks passed and they didn't see a single bad guy being caught. So, they prepared to send him back. News spread that he was leaving from that world and crowds thronged to say good-bye. That caught the leaders' attention, and so they began to investigate. They called the prisons and found they were almost empty because crimes were no longer being committed anymore.

That world had a League of Villains -- their numbers had declined so badly that they kidnapped the kid to find out what his secret power was that was decimating their ranks. The kid said to them, "I have no secret power. I just try to make people feel better, I help out when I can, I share my things, I'm quick to forgive, I always smile..." And as he was saying this, he was handing out healthy treats and hugs, and telling jokes, and treating cuts, and listening to pains, and preparing dinners, and helping out however he could. The League of Villains became so relaxed and comfortable around him that they forgot to go out and do bad things they were supposed to do.

Now they knew his secret superpower. It changed the world without capturing a single bad guy, but by making them feel so wonderful about themselves, about life, and about their world and others that they were transformed into good people. They no longer had any desire to be bad and hurt others.

Back on the home world, the secret worked so well that the other superkids ended up forgetting about their superpowers in order to use this new secret power. And that is the reason children do not have super-powers today. Why would you need them if you have the most valuable superpower of all? Because with Jesus' help, we all have the power of love that can help brighten anyone's day. Don't be afraid to use it because so many in the world need to experience it.

(<https://freestoriesforkids.com/children/stories-and-tales/very-special-superpower>)  
by Pedro Pablo Sacristan, Translated by Spencer Woods

The sermonette title was accidentally left out of the bulletin, but it is "When Love Comes Home". In our context it is Christ coming to our world to take up residence -- the question is what kind of home have we prepared for him when he comes? and what strategy have we used to prepare it? Do we even have room for him? Mary Jo is going to come and sing for us...

**Special Music Do You Have Room?**

They journeyed far, a weary pair;  
 They sought for shelter from the cold night air.  
 Some place where she could lay her head,  
 Where she could give her Babe a quiet bed.  
 Was there no room? No corner there?  
 In all the town a spot someone could spare?  
 Was there no soul come to their aid?  
 A stable bare was where the family stayed.

Do you have room for the Savior,  
 And do you seek Him anew?  
 Have you a place for the One  
 Who lived and died for you?  
 Are you as humble as a shepherd boy,  
 Or as wise as men of old?

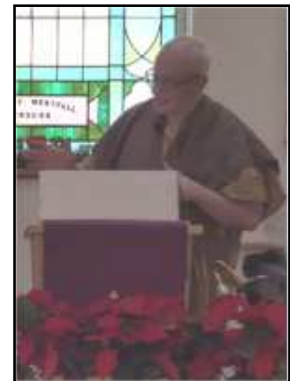
Would you have come that night?  
 Would you have sought the light?  
 Do you have room?

A star arose, a wondrous light;  
 A sign from God this was the Holy night.  
 And yet so few would go to see  
 The Babe who came to rescue you and me.  
 This Child Divine is now a King.  
 The gift of life to all the world He brings.  
 And all mankind He saves from doom,  
 But on that night for Him, there was no room.

Will you come tonight?  
 Will you seek the Light?  
 Do you have room?

**Pageant When Love Was Born**

Angel – Terri Priess, written by Mary Jo Bell, Shepherd – Charles Kirkpatrick



**Shepherd:** This has been the most amazing time in my life. I have never been more frightened and then awestruck in my whole life. The things that happened that first tonight must be recorded for all eternity. I am still in awe of what I have witnessed and seen. I am filled with such wonder and peace. When I tell you of what has happened, you will be filled with joy and love. You will be just as amazed as I. I am....

**Angel:** Babbling..... My child, why don't you let me help you tell this story? After all, I am the one that told *you* in the first place. (to congregation) You will have to excuse him. Apparently, I was his first angel visit. I think I scared him a bit.

**Shepherd:** I wasn't scared, the other shepherds were terrified but I was just fine... Ok, maybe I was a little, I mean you caught me off guard. (to congregation) Who expects an angel to appear out of nowhere? I was just watching my flocks by the light of the night



sky and then BOOM, this one just shows up. Scared my flock for sure. (turn to angel)  
And no, I don't want any help, this is MY story to tell.

**Angel:** You are missing the point here. We can BOTH tell this story. There is so much to tell. Besides, I have information that you don't.

**Shepherd:** What information?

**Angel:** *Secret angel information* that you don't know anything about. Look, I will tell the things that led up your involvement and then you can tell them what happened next. Deal?

**Shepherd:** (begrudgingly) Deal. As long as I get my opportunity, that's fine. I mean, who am I to argue with an angel?

**Angel:** Thank you. I was hoping you would see it this way.

**Shepherd:** You mean, YOUR way. Listen, don't make me change my mind.

**Angel:** Might I begin now?

**Shepherd:** Do I have a choice?

**Angel:** Thank you. This story begins many months ago in a town called Nazareth. There was a young girl named Mary. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph and they were to soon be married. I was sent by God to deliver to Mary some incredible news. You see, Mary had found favor with God, and she had been chosen by him to give birth to a son, the Messiah. She was to name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Lord Most High.

**Shepherd:** How exactly was that supposed to happen since she was not married?

**Angel:** She inquired the same thing. The Lord is capable of all things, and nothing will be impossible with God. I explained to her that by the Holy Spirit and God's power, she would indeed conceive a son. I revealed to her that her cousin Elizabeth who is well along in years had also been chosen to give birth to a son and he is to be named John. Together their sons would do great things for God.

**Shepherd:** Who is Mary anyway? Is she a descendant of someone powerful or a great Rabbi? Surely, she must be the daughter of someone important to have been chosen.

**Angel:** No, Mary is just an ordinary young girl. She is of the peasant class and has no great skills or power.

**Shepherd:** I see. But how did Joseph react to all of this? They were betrothed to each other and not yet married. He must have had a lot of disbelief and anger for Mary after she told him the news of her pregnancy.

**Angel:** As you can imagine, it did not please him. He had some very important decisions to make. If he publicly divorces her, she could be killed. So, in order to save her from public disgrace, he decided he would dismiss her quietly. He had thought that perhaps she had not been true to him but still did not want to cause her harm.

**Shepherd:** That would have been the kind thing to do. If he had publicly dismissed her, she could have been in real danger. She would have been humiliated, judged, and possibly put to death. What made him change his mind and stay with her? I can only assume you had something to do with that.

**Angel:** Yes, I was sent to see him in a dream. I said (using big voice) “Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary into your home. The child Mary is carrying was not conceived by another man, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary will bear a son and He is to be named Jesus. He will come to save the sins of the world.”

**Shepherd:** There it is- that scary voice again! Don't you think appearing to someone isn't scary enough without that voice? (Pause) That must mean this is not a dream?

**Angel:** No, you are very much awake. Everything you witnessed is real.

**Shepherd:** That is pleasing to me. I will not ever forget what happened as long as I live. So, if Mary and Joseph are from Nazareth, how did they end up here?

**Angel:** Remember, Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that all the world was to be taxed. Because Joseph's lineage is from the house of David, he had to go out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to Bethlehem the city of David to be registered.

**Shepherd:** That is quite a long journey, it must have been such a hard trip for Mary to make.

**Angel:** Yes, it was. Mary and Joseph are true servants to God.

**Shepherd:** Ok, so without giving away the ending here, are you telling me that the only place they could stay was that place where I found them?

**Angel:** As you can imagine, there are many people here for the census which makes finding a place to stay difficult.

**Shepherd:** I suppose. Still, it sure seems like someone could have made room for them... Ok, now it's *my* turn to tell my story. So, the other shepherds and I were in the fields watching over our flocks. All of a sudden, there was a bright light and then this one appeared and said....

**Angel:** (big voice) “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city a David, a Savior, who is

Christ the Lord. This will be a sign unto you, you will the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

**Shepherd:** There is that scary voice again. And I thought I was going to get to tell my part!

**Angel:** I am sorry, I couldn't resist.

**Shepherd:** Anyway, once the angel finished delivering the message, there was suddenly a multitude of angels, praising God and saying- “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.” We could feel the Glory of the Lord surrounding us, and we no longer afraid. Our hearts were filled with love, and we knew we had to see this wonderous event for ourselves. We quickly went into Bethlehem. There was a bright star that led us to the place where Jesus lay. We were in awe of the humble beginnings of the Son of God. It was all just as the angel had said. Mary and Joseph were in a stable and the baby Jesus was lying in a manger wrapped in cloths. We fell to our knees before him, praising God. We went about spreading the good news for all to hear. We told of the birth of Jesus and that we had witnessed it to be true. (Pause)

**Angel:** You seem troubled.

**Shepherd:** Maybe you could answer a question for me.

**Angel:** Certainly, my child.

**Shepherd:** Why did God choose shepherds to be the ones to spread the word of the birth of the Messiah? Surely there were people with more authority than us?

**Angel:** Do you think you are unworthy of such a task? Do you question God's intent?

**Shepherd:** Well, I just wonder why God chose us. We are not rich. We are not royalty. Why would He think that people would believe what we are telling them?

**Angel:** My dear child, don't you see? We are all children of God. We are all the same in His sight. Your class status or wealth mean nothing in the eyes of God. He knows your heart and he hears your prayers that come through in the night when you are laying awake under the stars. The shepherds were chosen because God knew that you would be honest messengers of this good news. He knew you would listen and rejoice in this good news. The message of the Messiah's coming would be believed to be true because it was delivered with pure joy and love.

**Shepherd:** Oh I see. People were accepting and believing when we delivered this extraordinary news. We are not done yet, we have many more people to tell.

**Angel:** Go on.

**Shepherd:** What do you mean?

**Angel:** Being a messenger for God is not always without risk of danger?

**Shepherd:** Oh, you mean King Herod. Well, whatever will be, will be. Spreading the Word of God is more important to us and we will face whatever comes our way with gladness. We know that we are protected by God's love. (to angel) Why don't you us all what happened next.

**Angel:** Well, as you mentioned, King Herod is very troubled in the new Messiah has come. He called together scholars and clerics and questioned them about where the Christ child was born. They answered him by what the prophet had written and said, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea. He then called upon three wise men. He sent them to Bethlehem to search for the child. They are to report back with what they see. Herod has told them that he wishes to come and worship the Messiah.

**Shepherd:** But that is not the truth, is it?

**Angel:** No, it is not. Herod is very much afraid that Jesus, the King of Kings, will take over his throne.

**Shepherd:** That's ridiculous, He's just a baby.

**Angel:** True, but Herod is still concerned. So, the three wise men followed the bright star that was shining over Bethlehem. When they got there, they found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus and they fell down and worshiped him. They presented Him with three gifts. They are symbolic to the life of Jesus. Frankincense represents deity, gold represents the role Jesus will play as the ultimate king on earth, and Myrrh symbolizes the way Jesus will save His people.

**Shepherd:** We had no gifts to bring Him. All we can give is our love, faith, devotion, and gratitude and joy.

**Angel:** Those are the exact gifts that Jesus would want. Earthly possessions are just things. Love is worth so much more.

**Shepherd:** So then what? Did the Magi go back and tell Herod they had found the baby Jesus?

**Angel:** no, they did not. They each had the same dream of a warning from God about Herod's intention to harm the baby Jesus. They were told to not go back home through Jerusalem to see King Herod.

**Shepherd:** Was that you who warned them?

**Angel:** No, but I will warn Joseph of Herod's plans so that he can get his family to safety. Now, that is enough for one night. I can't tell you everything that is going to happen.

Jesus has a whole life to live here on earth. You have played an important role in history. Never worry that you are not good enough and always remember how much God loves you. (exits)

**Shepherd:** Wow, this is an incredible story to tell. I hope that people will believe in all that we tell them to be true. I want all people to have this feeling that I have after seeing Jesus. I want people to know the complete joy and wonder that this baby has brought to the world. The birth of the King has changed everything. How God must love us all.

**Special Music When Love Was Born**



Let's stand for our final song, which talks about the two things we have been emphasizing this day, the humility of the heart, and the perfect love that comes to it.

**Music (vv 1,3) Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

**Blessing**

Now as you go this week, be open to humbly receive God's love to be reborn in you and look for Spirit given opportunities to share God's message of love. Give yourself fully to the worthwhile work of the Lord. Be an example of how to longingly, expectantly, prepare your heart's home for God's presence, welcoming his coming with the rise of each day. Amen.