

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

December 24, 2022

Christmas Eve



**Welcome** to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the 'Hart'". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this special Christmas Eve worship service script. We have gathered to celebrate, for the Word of God came to earth and lived among us!

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we are blessed to know your glory. We have come to worship and praise you for who you are and all you have done – for Jesus Christ, you are the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, through whom all things were created and who holds everything together (Colossians 1:15-17), and you revealed yourself to us in signs and wonders – in the manger, in your teachings, in your miracles and healings, on the cross, through the resurrection, and gifting us with your Holy Spirit. As we reflect on these things, may our hearts be moved as we worship you tonight. Amen.

**Music** Let's begin by celebrating his coming to us by standing as comfortable and joyfully singing Joy to the World.

## **Joy to the World**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719

Music: arr from GF Handel, 1741 by Lowell Mason, 1848

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is 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.
3. 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.
4. 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 of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

## **Reading 1**

Lay Reader: In very nature God, in his great love for us, Jesus Christ left his throne and kingly crown, He came, in great humility, from God's heaven to a manger. The word of the father became Mary's little son. He came to earth for us -- emptying

himself of all riches but love, seeking to save -- leaving the lush halls of heaven to the rough and rugged cross and his loved reached all the way to where we are to set people free from sin and darkness. He finds us with his limitless redeeming love and makes peace between God and ourselves and the potential for us to live in peace with each other. Therefore, God lifted him from the grave to the highest place of honor so that every person will recognize his holy name and honor him as Savior and Lord.

amplified paraphrase based on Philippians 2:6-11

## **Advent Candles**

Pastor: Yet we still live in a world where Jesus is often shut out, no room is created in the important places of our world or in the hearts of humanity – he is still relegated to stables and feeding troughs, often acknowledged only on holy days, and even then, only on the outer fringes of our life. But for we who make room for him and invite him to come to our hearts and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to glory of God the Father, and pray that as he continues to come to us; that the leaders of home and leaders of the world will recognize and follow his wisdom and bring order to a world that is often chaotic and dysfunctional. Let's sing that prayer as we prepare for the Advent Candles.

### **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

♪ 2. O come, thou Wisdom from on high,  
and order all thing far and nigh;  
to us the path of knowledge show  
and cause us in her ways to go.

(P – Pastor, L – Lay Reader **C – Congregation**)

P: God of hope, we look around at our world. We see all that is wrong and wonder where you are.

L: We are a broken people, unable to work together for our common good.

P: Yet your glance brings a glimmer that something better is coming.

L: You call us to seek your deliverance. We look for the light of your redemption.

P: People, proclaim that our hope is in God's comfort and healing:

**C: Our hope is in God's comfort and healing.**

L: Therefore, we light the candle of hope.

[P lights candle 1 with the above sentence]

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P: Prince of Peace, we look around at our world. We see differences and become defensive.

L: We build dividing walls of “protection” and fight to conquer others into conformity.

P: Yet you have woven variety in the warp and weft of your creation’s tapestry.

L: You call us to love and be at peace with all that we meet.

P: People, proclaim that our peace is in God’s forgiving grace:

**C: Our peace is in God’s forgiving grace.**

L: Therefore, we light the candle of peace.

[P lights candle 2 with the above sentence]

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P: Spirit of Joy, we look around at our world, and we feel the frustration of an empty, barren wilderness.

L: We sorrow and despair over the darkening in the depths of many souls.

P: Yet you break through the clouds and shower your blessings on society’s dryness.

L: You call us to be cleaned up and dressed up – to burst into beautiful bloom.

P: People, proclaim that our joy is complete in God’s love.

**C: Our joy is complete in God’s love.**

L: Therefore, we light the candle of joy.

[P lights candle 3 with the above sentence]

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P: God of love, we look around at our world. We see distractions and distortions from what could be.

L: We search high and low and everywhere but to the One who has come and returned to heaven.

P: Yet you continue to make your home with us and make a home for us.

L: You call us to open the doors of our hearts – to you, to each other, and to the world.

P: People, proclaim that our love flows from God’s reaching, uniting harmony.

**C: Our love flows from God’s reaching, uniting harmony.**

L: Therefore, we light the candle of love.

[P lights candle 4 with the above sentence]

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P: Heavenly Father, we look around at our world. We see chaos and confusion.

L: We are filled with questions for which we have no answers. Differing opinions are met with angry intolerance.

P: Yet you guide gently and teach truthfully, revealing yourself through your Son.

L: You call us to follow him, not in abstract principle, but in the principled practice of life as Christ lived, and lives with us.

P: People, proclaim that Christ is with us.

**C: Christ is with us.**

L: Therefore, we light the Christ candle.

[P lights Christ candle with the above sentence]

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♪ **Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel has come to thee, O Israel.**

## Reading 2

Knowing all that God has done for us in Christ -- and receiving him in our heart and life and priority, we are encouraged and comforted. We participate in his Spirit and his love; we feel his tenderness and compassion.

If this is so, then we are called to have the same mind of Christ, the same valuing of others, the same self-giving love, the same willingness to sacrifice for the betterment of the relationships with each other and throughout the world.

amplified paraphrase based on Philippians 2:1-5

## Offering

Let's give in thankful response to all he has done for us.

### Doxology # 95

**Offering Prayer** God of mercy, you have come looking for an invitation to dwell. Inspire our hearts to hospitality that welcomes all your children in your name, and may these offerings be used to that end. In Jesus name, Amen.

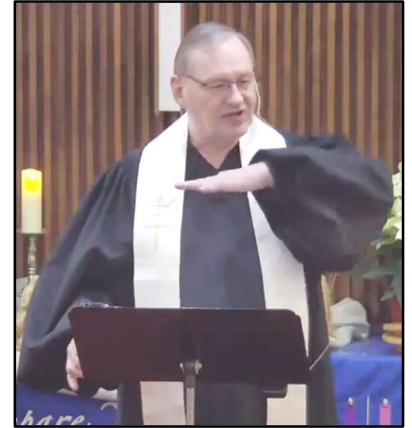
## Sermon Introduction

A journalist was excited about an opportunity working in international development by spending time in the African desert. She imagined living in a small personal hut with a palm tree to the side. Inside, a little desk surrounded by mosquito netting where she could write and work. It is a version of a romanticized



ideal for many people:.. To make a significant impact on our world without actually engaging with it face to face.

When she arrived at her destination, no housing had been arranged. They showed her a room with a view. The walls reached to about this high. [Gesture to collar bone]. It meant lots of exposure, lots of community and lots of opportunities to connect. For two years, she shared her group home with more than 30 children, 4 freedom fighters, a government bureaucrat, a wife-beater, a Red Cross worker with a taste for alcohol, a number of prostitutes, a madman, and all the customers of the tea shop next door."



In this community, united by half-walls, there is no room for pretense, for false appearances, for deceptions, or for self-serving fantasies and dreams. There is no opportunity to vent or scream to the heavens. No possibility of being charming in public and nasty in private, because everything was public – everything was a matter of public record. And this reporter discovered that she was not as altruistically, lovingly connected to her world as she had assumed she was. It was a wakeup call. Such awareness can be painful, but important to growth.

Historically, we most often hear that it is the vast silence of solitude in the desert that allowed mystics to contemplate the mysteries of life and confront the chaos of their hearts. But our journalist discovered that sometimes we learn as much about God and ourselves and our world when we are forced away from quiet isolation and into the chaos of a life that is never alone.

### **Special Instrumental Music**

Be it in the stillness, or in chaos, she needed to hear, and we need to hear it again – the message of Christ's birth and life and what that means for us today. Listen to Donna and Kathy as they play, "Do you hear what I hear?"

#### **Do You Hear What I Hear?**

Said the night wind to the little lamb,  
Do you see what I see? (Do you see what I see?)  
Way up in the sky, little lamb.  
Do you see what I see? (Do you see what I see?)  
A star, a star, dancing in the night with a tail as big as a kite  
with a tail as big as a kite

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy,  
 Do you hear what I hear? (Do you hear what I hear?)  
 Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy.  
 Do you hear what I hear? (Do you hear what I hear?)  
 A song, a song high above the trees with a voice as big as the sea.  
 With a voice as big as the sea.

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king,  
 Do you know what I know? (Do you know what I know?)  
 In your palace warm, mighty king  
 Do you know what I know? (Do you know what I know?)  
 A Child, a Child shivers in the cold  
 Let us bring him silver and gold. Let us bring him silver and gold.

Said the king to the people everywhere  
 Listen to what I say! (Listen to what I say!)  
 Pray for peace, people, everywhere  
 Listen to what I say! (Listen to what I say!)  
 The Child, the Child sleeping in the night. He will bring us goodness and light.  
 He will bring us goodness and light.

### **Sermon He Comes – To Make Humanity a Family**

Do you remember the lyrics of that song? The wind asks the lamb to see the star, the lamb asks the shepherd boy to hear the angels' song in the sky -- the shepherd boy asks the king to know that there is a shivering baby to whom we need to bring gifts, and the king told the people everywhere to pray for peace for the Child will bring goodness and light.

Of course, the king in the song was a more noble king than the one who was in charge of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem area where Jesus was born. He had no room for a new baby who would grow up to rule his life and turn his known world upside down. The question is, do we? Or like we heard Herod say last week in the pageant that we had, Do we say the words of desiring worship -- but have a different agenda at work. I believe most of us sincerely do desire and intend to worship or we wouldn't be here tonight or tuning in online to see this, or read this.

Yet, like the town of Bethlehem, the duties and events and obligations of life get in the way of our noble desires and intentions and we discover we don't have the *space* to give room (in our busy lives, in our divided hearts) for the Christ Child.

**Space Pressures**

There is an old tale about a peasant and his wife who lived in a tiny cottage. It was so tiny there was no room to have guests or to raise a family. Even with just the two of them, they were constantly hovering in each other's paths and stepping on each other's -- last nerve. They needed a bigger house. Well, as luck - and fairy tales - would have it, a wizard arrived to grant them their desires.

He said, "You shall have a bigger house IF you do as I tell you. First, you must bring all your chickens, ducks, geese, and fowl into the house with you. Next, bring in the dogs and the cats and the pigs and the cows and the horses and the goat." The peasant and his wife pushed and shoved, and they finally squeezed them all in tight. Then the wizard demanded they put on a feast and invite their neighbors and their animals to come as well. If you do this, by tonight you will have a bigger house."

It didn't seem possible that they could fit them all into the already overstuffed cottage, but the invitations were sent, and the banquet began. It was a noisy and very crowded affair, but it was a festive time. Eventually, every neighbor, beast, fish, and fowl had been welcomed and fed and went home. When it was over, the peasant and his wife collapsed in happy exhaustion and put up their feet to rest. It was then that they noticed how spacious their house was. They decided they could start a family after all.

Maybe our life and priorities feel really crowded, and we don't know how we are going to fit God in on this day or that day. Could it be we squeeze all of those other things in in order to keep God out? Invite God in anyway. It will be surprising how much extra room he can help us create.

Sometimes it isn't the space for multiple things, it is the time do get things done. Years ago, an experiment attempted to measure how time pressures enable or hinder us from being the king of people we want to be.

### Time Pressures

The professor recruited 15 volunteers. They met at 2 pm. He handed out instructions in sealed envelopes. The first five were the "high hurry group". (None of the groups heard this label, they were only given the instructions in the envelope). This high hurry group was instructed to proceed across the campus to a certain place without delay. They had 15 minutes to reach their destination, or their grade would be docked. The next 5 were given "medium hurry" instructions. They were given 45 minutes to make their way across the campus. The last 5 were

given the "Low Hurry" envelopes. They had til 5:00, they had 3 hours to meander across campus and get to where they needed to be.

Meanwhile, the professor had arranged for drama majors to be on the path. One sat with his head in his hands, crying and wailing in a way nobody could not notice that. Another was lying face down, as if he had had some kind of seizure and was unconscious. At some point, all 15 students had to make their way past these obviously needy persons to reach their destination.

No one in the high hurry group stopped to help. 2 in the medium hurry group stopped, but all 5 of the low hurry group made attempts to help.

We live in a culture that praises being "too busy to turn around". Could it be that some of that is an unconscious effort to chase our own agenda and avoid having to self sacrificially serve someone else's needy agenda "because we don't have time"? And in the New Testament story, it was even stopping to help someone who belonged in the category of "not one of us", but one of -- "them undeserving others" quote unquote -- and that Samaritan did it all for the sake of bringing a bit more peace and healing and wholeness to God's world, after all, that is what God did for us -- that is what the Christmas story is all about. God stopping to come in Jesus to bring wholeness to our world.

What happens to our faith when we manage our space so that there is not room for God and no extra time to act on his behalf?

Space, time, sometimes it is as simple as personal preference. One pastor received a call from a young woman asking if he would preside at her wedding at a nearby hotel on a future Sunday at 10:00 am. You are a shocked as he was – he was speechless. Because there was silence, she asked, "Is there some problem?" The pastor finally found his voice and said that he had one or two other commitments every Sunday morning at 10:00, but maybe she could try the 7th Day Adventist church.

**Personal Preference**

That's a rather extreme and kind of humorous example, but are there times when our personal preferences in life, our life styles, the things we like to do -- cut us off from God and his work in his world?

When we do manage to cut ourselves off from God by space pressures, by time pressures, by personal preferences, by many other types of pressures that could be real or imagined -- these pressures can potentially overtake and overwhelm what we want to become as Christ-followers. And when that happens for too long

**(One) Purpose of "the Wilderness"**



-- even in the best and easiest of circumstances, though we may not immediately realize it, we may eventually find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness. But even then God can use those times in our life. Christmas shows us that when life become oppressive, when darkness seeks to capture our souls, he comes to gather, save, heal, and restore his people, his family, toward real community again.

Isaiah shares that dream of spiritual and national renewal in chapter 35:

*The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and burst into bloom. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. They will see the glorious splendor of the LORD. So, strengthen the feeble hands and steady the weak knees. Say to the fearful, "Be strong and do not fear. Your God will come to you. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the speechless will shout for joy. Everything that was barren will become lush as God returns and restores his people. They will gladly sing and be overwhelmed with joy.*

amplified paraphrase based on Isaiah 35:1-7, 10

[Pause] So, in our journalist's African wilderness of chaos, one of the women living next door became a best friend. When dust storms came, they would put a candle on the wall to share the light (I'm not sure how that works in a dust storm, I'm just reading the story, but apparently they figured out some way to make that work... She would make American food and pass it over to the tea shop customers who tried to identify and swallow the strange meals. Each night as they hung their rope beds they would whisper over the wall and wish blessings for the next day. The neighbor made her a part of the family and called her sister.

May it be, that we too, can be, more and more, family -- as we journey together on this road with Jesus Christ into our future and ultimately, to heaven.

## **Communion**

**Invitation** Jesus promises us that if we make room in our hearts for him, some day he will make room for us in heaven by his side, and until that day, he is always with us in our hearts. If that is your hope -- to follow his call, to embrace his values, to desire and work for Christ, for hope, for peace, for joy, for love -- in the hearts of people everywhere, then he invites us to his covenant in Communion and you can feel free to participate in Communion. We've heard tonight from Philippians about his creation, and through his work on the cross, the availability of re-creation, and the vision for a brighter future for which all the nations hope.

**Music** We are going to sing O Come All Ye Faithful as our invitation to worship Christ the newborn king through Communion...

## O Come All Ye Faithful

Words: John F Wade, ca 1743 tr by Frederick Oakeley, 1841

Music: John F Wade, ca 1743, harm from Collections... 1792

1. 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.

3. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;  
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;  
(Refrain)

5. Child, for us sinners poor and in the manger,  
we would embrace thee with love and awe.  
Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?  
(Refrain)

### Confession

Let's prepare our hearts with a time of confession. Lord, we confess that too often, much like early Bethlehem, if we find room for you at all, it is in some insignificant corner of our heart -- a back shed -- that we hope will not do too much to disrupt living our life the way we want to live it. We use the excuse that there is not enough room for you when there is plenty of space, yet you still come to us where we are -- like the shepherds who discovered your message while busy on the job. We make the excuse that we do not have the time for you, when there is plenty -- for it seems like when we carve out that time for you, the rest of the important things of the day seem to fall into place and happens so much more effectively. We make many and varied excuses, but ultimately, we must recognize that we fear letting you in lest our personal preferences get lost.

And when we follow our excuses, we find we are living in a wilderness of our own making. Life doesn't work like we hope it could or should. Awaken us Lord to the fact that you are not bound by space or time, and especially that, when we are stripped down to the essence of our life, your preference for us is not the barren emptiness of the wilderness, but to emerge in a blooming, flourishing garden -- a garden of Eden -- where the tree of life is fed by streams of living water, and there is nothing but healing and encouragement.

## Assurance of Forgiveness

So we receive your gracious life as we all make room and time for your pleasure in our life, where you offer us peace through your gentle mercy. Through the birth and death and resurrection of Christ you reconcile us sinners to you. And so on this communion Christmas Eve night, we bask in your peace, and light, and life, and healing that you bring -- that even we can be born again -- because you were born to us. And it is in Jesus name that we pray this, Amen.

**Music** Let's sing our gratitude for his gracious forgiveness as it is expressed in

### Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Words: Charles Wesley, 1734 alt. George Whitefield, 1753  
 Music: Felix Mendelssohn, 1840 arr William H Cummings, 1856.

1. 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!"  
 Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
2. Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
 late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.  
 Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th' incarnate Deity,  
 pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
 Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
3. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
 Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.  
 Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,  
 born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.  
 Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

## Thanksgiving

And so just as the angels sing their thanks and praise to you, so we too thank you, Father Almighty, creator of all that is. You brought forth life and love on earth. Even when we turned our attentions elsewhere, you still remained faithful to us; and in the fullness of time you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior - - to bring glory to your name.

But as Mary and Joseph went from Galilee to Bethlehem, they found no room and Jesus was born in the poverty of a stable. And then as a man, Jesus traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem and again found no room for his reign, much less his ideas, and he died despised and rejected. But through that suffering, death, and

resurrection; you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin's power and eternal death, and made with us a new covenant by water and by the Spirit.

So, pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with each other and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. And as God's children, then let's pray with meaning the prayer he taught us to pray: **Lord's Prayer**

### **Covenant Commitment**

And in saying the prayer, we are committing ourselves to living out its values -- to do your will, to seek to receive and grant forgiveness, to resist temptation and refuse to do evil; and enabled by the Holy Spirit, through the light of Christ, to bring glory to God and his kingdom. And as you have offered yourself to us through your birth, through your death and resurrection, and through these communion elements, so we in turn, as a reasonable worship, to offer ourselves to as holy and living sacrifices, united together to answer the call to be the city on a hill, the light on a stand that fills the room and moves out into the world. Through these elements, we receive your light so that we may be light.

### **Bread and Cup**

As your Word became flesh, born of woman on that night long ago; so on that the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took the bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread and offered to his disciples saying, "This is my flesh which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

[Take and eat]



And after they finished the supper, he took the cup, lifted it up and gave thanks, and said, "This is my blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins and the sins of many. Drink this in remembrance of me." Drink as a sign of the new covenant between God and his people; and remember what God has done for you; reaching out to you, drawing you back to him, claiming you as his own; giving you the right to be called his own, enabling you to be God's children. [Take and Drink]



## Christmas Candles

### Reading 3

Lay Reader: Now, friends, as you have been light, continue to work out the application of the saved life with great care and reverence to God, for it is he who works in you to fulfill his good purposes. Do this without grumbling or complaining or arguing, so that as a pure child of God, your light will stand out even brighter against this dark and corrupt world. If you hold firmly to the word of life, you will shine among them like stars in the deep night sky.

amp. paraphrase based on Phil 2:12-16

### Hymn of Lights

Pastor: We do that best when first, we respond to the invitation to come to the manger and adore his light, and second, we take the space and time at the manger to silently behold who he is -- our glorious Lord and Savior, love's pure light; and finally, as we continue more and more to shine more brightly to usher in his peace. Let's sing as we spread the light through the sanctuary, and symbolically – wherever we go in this world.

#### It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Text: Edmund H. Sears, 1849 Music: Richard Storrs Willis, 1850

1. It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King."  
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.
3. And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,  
who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,  
look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.  
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!
4. For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet seen of old,  
when with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold  
when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,  
and the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.

### Hymn

#### Silent Night

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1818 sts 1,2,3 tr by John F Young st 4 anon Music: Franz Gruber 1818

1. 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.

2. 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!

3. 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.

4. 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** Now as we prepare to leave this sanctuary in silence this night, remember that you are people who have made the space and taken the time and desired to see a great Light. Therefore, you are people who have received the ultimate gift -- the Son of God — the Light of the World. Be bearers, then, of the light, going with the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this night and always. Amen.

