

Straight from the "Hart"

December 17, 2023 -- Advent – Joy

Pageant – The Innkeeper's Heart



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script. * Due to some technical difficulties, we are unable to supply pictures this week.

Advent Affirmation (R: Reader, C: Pastor with Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God?

C: We believe in God, creator and lover of the earth, origin and destiny of us all.

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

C: We believe in Jesus the Christ— God coming to us in the fragile promise of a baby yet unborn — who emerges as the herald of hope, God's laughter in the face of despair. Plunged into death, he broke free the captives, and is leading the way to the land of promise where justice and peace will flourish.

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: We believe in the Holy Spirit, who implants the seed of truth, brings us to birth as the body of Christ, and empowers us to confront and transform all that is corrupt, degrading and deceitful within us.

P: Do you believe in God's kingdom?

C: We believe in the coming reign of God. Announced by the Baptist, it has drawn near to us in Jesus, and will be consummated in the world to come, when all believers will be robed in righteousness, and gathered into the joyous fulfilment of God's desire. For the coming of that day we work and pray: Come, Lord Jesus, Come! Amen.

ad. to be responsive and some additional edits —
written by Nathan Nettleton, Laughingbird.net

Opening Prayer

Father, during the busy-ness of this season, may you remind us to prepare our hearts for your ultimate gift, the coming of Christ to us. And it is in his name that we pray. **Amen.**

Call to Worship (R: Reader, C: Congregation)

R: We no longer live in the dark so don't be caught off guard.

C: We are children of the light and live in the day.

R: We do not live in nor belong to the night. So let's not sleepwalk through life

C: We will walk into the day filled with hope, peace, and joy.

R: The Son comes to give us a life that we may fully enjoy.

C: We will remain faithfully awake, alert and filled with expectant joy.

Music

In the coming of Jesus, he brings light and life so that all the nations can rise in joy and join the angelic song. Let's sing Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

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 new born 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!"

Advent Candles -- Hope, Peace, Joy**Review**

We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13 (CEV)

Therefore, we lit the candle of hope. [Relight Candle 1]

Jesus said, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid. John 14:27 (TLB)

Therefore, we lit the candle of peace. [Relight Candle 2]

Bible Reading

Today we are told to *prepare a feast*. Bring out the best food and drink you have, and welcome *all to your table, especially* those who have nothing. This day is special. It is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve *over your past mistakes*. Let the Eternal's own joy be your protection! Be still. This is sacred time *and space*. (Nehemiah 8:10b-11a) Although you haven't seen Jesus, you still love Him. Although you don't yet see Him, you do believe in Him and celebrate with a joy that is glorious and beyond words. You are receiving the salvation of your souls as the result of your faith. 1 Peter 1:8-9 (VOICE)

Poetic Reading

Donna Ashworth writes how we cannot create joy out of our circumstances, nor can we achieve joy by making our lives perfect, but rather, we will discover joy coming to us if we open our eyes to what is around us and see her when she is present.

Joy

Joy does not arrive with a fanfare on a red carpet
 strewn with the flowers of a perfect life
 Joy sneaks in as you pour a cup of coffee
 watching the sun hit your favorite tree just right
 And you usher *joy* away because you are not ready for her
 Your house is not as it should be for such a distinguished guest
 But *joy*, you see cares nothing for your messy home
 Or your bank balance or your waistline
Joy is supposed to slither through the cracks of your imperfect life...
 that's how *joy works*
 You cannot truly invite her you can only be ready when she appears
 And hug her with meaning because in this very moment....
Joy chose you.

by Donna Ashworth

Prayer Let's pray: Lord, this reading reminds us of the joy and strength we find in your salvation. Your joy is not as fickle as happiness. Happiness depends on circumstances, but your joy depends on you, and we can trust you for the joy

and contentment that finds us when we walk closely with you. We pray our Christmas plans and preparations will celebrate the joy you have given us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Music Now let's sing the "Advent Light the Candle Song"

Advent Song

[Candle 3 is lit during the intro to the song]

Advent Song (Light the Advent Candle)

Words - Music: Mary Lu Walker

© 1975 Mary Lu Walker

Light the advent candle, three: think of heavenly harmony;
angels singing "Peace on earth" at the blessed Savior's birth
Candle, candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night;
Candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.

Music The Candles burn like the star burned over the Bethlehem so long ago – there is an atmosphere of anticipation that fills the air as its light shines and the beautiful angels sing over the baby Jesus.... Let's sing There's a Song in the Air...

There's a Song in the Air

Words: Joseph G Holland, 1874 Music: Karl P Harrington, 1904

1. There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!
2. There's a tumult of joy o'er the wonderful birth,
for the virgin's sweet boy is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!
3. In the light of that star lie the ages impearled;
and that song from afar has swept over the world.
Every hearth is aflame, and the beautiful sing
in the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!

Special Music Before we pray, let's listen to this special music by Kathy and Donna.

What Child is This / Child of the Poor

Prayers

Lord, we long for the days when you are honored and your will is always done, where daily provision is available, where forgiveness and reconciliation is the order

of the day, where temptation is resisted and evil is on the run -- where we always can be the best selves we can be --and we live in contented satisfaction within and serenity without.

We are often singing in our hearts to you Lord, and rightly so. for even in the midst of troubles, struggles and a world gone wild, you come to us, quieting our hearts, comforting and strengthening us by singing over us with your love and your gladness.

God of glory, we eagerly await the coming of our Savior. It continues to amaze us that the birth of this baby would change the world as it did. Help us live as people of grace — people who are changed because we have encountered you through the baby Jesus. In a time when the world wants to divide people by political party, by gender, by race by religion, by an endless list of gate-keeping, help us see beyond those labels and barriers that Jesus came to break down and to see people as your children. Help us find common ground where we are able, following Jesus' teaching and example.

Let us realize our own ability to bring about change by striving to be people who live in the light, not weighed down by darkness or fear or uncertainty. We confess that that is sometimes difficult. Nevertheless, help us remember that your abiding love and mercy sustains us in good times as well as in bad. Your delight in your children is what gives us the confidence and joy and privilege of bringing our requests before you. **Petitions** * Pat Schleh requests prayers for people who are seeking employment (or more employment), * we pray for Randy Melville who is back in Michigan, but had a mild heart attack, will probably get a stent tomorrow and then see where they are at – he is doing well, but we pray for him, * We rejoice with Gar and Vivian Lemon who became great grandparents again – to baby Jasper Garland Akoto, * Mary Jo Bell's aunt Janet recovering from heart issues. * The Godoniers' cousin Kathie, recovering from a medical procedure, for the Bells' neighbor's dad, Jerry Boldt, recovering from a broken hip, * for Pat Schleh's sister-in-law Marianne who is recovering from hip surgery. * Tom Spencer who has begun healing from a back injury. * for Carol Werner (Kathy Novak's mother) * for Jan Martin, who has two more shots next week to complete her second round of treatments, had rough week, but doing some better now, * for peace in the world and in our lives,

Lord, you know our needs and our deepest desires. We ask that you bless us with what you know is best for us in your timing. And in whatever situation we find

ourselves, help us to celebrate the hope we have in the Jesus Christ the King who was born in a lowly stable and who will come again, and who is always coming to be with us each day, every day. It is why we pray with confidence the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Music If comfortable, let's stand before the pageant and sing Like a Child

Like a Child

Words & Music: Daniel Charles Damon © 1993 Hope Publishing Co.

1. Like a child love would send to reveal and to mend,
like a child and a friend, Jesus comes.
Like a child we may find claiming heart, soul, and mind,
like a child, strong and kind, Jesus comes.
3. Like a child born to pray and to show us the way,
like a child here to stay, Jesus comes.
Like a child we receive all that love can conceive,
like a child we believe, Jesus comes.

Pageant

The Innkeeper's Heart

Innkeeper - Charles Kirkpatrick
Wife - Mary Jo Bell
Joseph - Adam Naylor
Mary - Sara Williams

Shepherd - Michael Sharlow
Angel - Burt Honour
Songs
Make Room by Casting Crowns
Do You Have Room? by Shawna Edwards

Music – sung by Charles Kirkpatrick

Make Room

A family hiding from the storm found no place at the keeper's door.
It was for this a Child was born to save a world so cold and hollow.

The sleeping town, they did not know that lying in a manger low
a Savior King who had no home has come to heal our sorrows.

Chorus

Is there room in your heart? Is there room in your heart?
Is there room in your heart for God to write his story?

Shepherds counting sheep at night do not fear the glory light.
You are precious in his sight, God has come to raise the lowly.

Chorus

You can come as you are, but it may set you apart
when you make room in your heart and trade your dreams for his glory.
Make room in your heart, make room in your heart.

Mother holds the promise tight, every wrong will be made right.
The road is straight, the burden's light for in his hands, he holds tomorrow.

Chorus

You can come as you are but it may set you apart
When you make room in your heart and trade your dreams for His glory.
Make room in your heart, make room in your heart.
Make room in your heart, make room in your heart.

Innkeeper [to congregation] Good morning. My name is Caleb, and I am the infamous innkeeper in what was the most incredible nights the world will ever know. The night our Messiah came into the world changed everything. He brought hope and joy into a world that was so terrifying and troubled. But I am getting ahead of myself- let me start from the beginning.

Now, I know a lot of you think I am the bad guy in this story but it's not true. I did the best I could. You must understand that the town was overrun with people because of Caesar's census. Everyone from miles around had to come to register and every place in the town was overfilled with travelers. People were willing to pay for any space I could find, I had people on the floors, in hallways, everywhere. My wife and I were exhausted and had been turning people away for hours.

It was late that night when the young couple arrived. They had been travelling for a long time and needed a place to stay. The young woman was great with child and she looked so weary. [Mary and Joseph enter] They needed my help desperately. What was I to do? I had no choice but to tell them I simply did not have a spot for them.

Joseph Please sir, we have been travelling for many days and my wife needs to rest before our son is born. Surely you can find us someplace to rest.

Innkeeper I am sorry. I have no place for you. You will have to try somewhere else.

Joseph You are our last chance, everyone else turned us away.

Innkeeper I too turned them away. The man said he understood and thanked me for my time. But there was this desperation in his eyes that compelled me to help them somehow. But what was I to do? I had nowhere for them to stay but then, a rather unconventional thought came to my mind. I thought of the only available place left in the entire city, the stables. Now I know what you are

thinking, but I keep a very tidy stable so it was all fresh with hay and at the very least, it would give them some privacy and a place to rest. They were so grateful. I handed them the few pieces of cloth that I had to use as bedding and showed them where they could stay for the night.

[leads Mary and Joseph over to stable]

Innkeeper I know it's not much, but it's the best I can do tonight. I will see you in the morning.

Joseph Thank you for your kindness.

Innkeeper [moves outside "stable", talks to congregation] I left them to get settled and went in to see my wife and tell her there'd be two more for breakfast. She was not going to be happy with me to say the least. [moves to the home's "kitchen"]

Joseph I am so sorry Mary. I wish that we had a better place for you, I can see how worn out you are from the long journey. I promised God that I would protect you and the baby, this is not the place where you should be preparing to give birth to the son of God. This seems impossible.

Mary Nothing is impossible with God. This is fine, I will make do. I am grateful for this place. I am not feeling well. I do not think we have much time. We must prepare.

Joseph I will make place for you to lie down and a place to lay the baby once he is born. [The scene switches to the house "kitchen" during which Joseph moves the manger to center of the "stable" and lays down the cloths the innkeeper had given him].

Innkeeper's Wife You did what?!? You put a pregnant woman in the stables to sleep for the night? What if she gives birth out there?! I know you keep them clean, but still! I feel sorry for the poor thing; I hope that they are going to be all right. What will people think? What will they say? People are going to think we are the worst!

Innkeeper Well, what would you have had me do? I couldn't just turn them away into the night, there was something different with this couple. I felt in my heart that I had to help them. The young girl was so tired, they had been travelling for days. It was the least I could do for them.

Innkeeper's Wife Oh dear, I suppose there is nothing we can do about it tonight. And I should know you and your compassionate heart by now. I might have done the same thing although I might have asked for my spouse's opinion first. Now, I need to prepare food for our new guests. Once I am done, WE will go down to the stables to see if they need anything.

Innkeeper [to congregation] I told you she was not going to take it well.
[Jesus is now born]

Joseph My heart and soul are filled with awe and wonder at the sight of the child. The messenger said we are to call him Jesus and He will do great things.

Mary My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

Shepherd [outside stable] As I was tending to my flock, a bright light woke me. A star appeared in the sky. It is so beautiful that I cannot move. What could it mean?

Angel 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. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

[Shepherd moves to manger in stable]

Innkeeper The sky sure is bright for this late hour.

Innkeeper's Wife What in the world? There is a bright shining star over the stable. What do you think it is?

Innkeeper I feel like there is something that we must witness. We must hurry.
[both go to stable]

Joseph As God has commanded, He is called Jesus and is the Son of God. He is the Messiah and has come to save God's people from their sins.

Music – sung by Mary Jo Bell

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.

Chorus

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.

Chorus

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

Innkeeper So as you can see, there is a reason I sent Mary and Joseph to the stables. I knew in my heart that I should not send them back out into the night. Despite the humble beginnings in which Jesus entered into the world, He is the Messiah and has been sent here to save us all. I feel like God used me to bring about the birth of His Son in exactly the way he planned it. I suppose that makes me one of the good guys in this story after all.

Blessing Now may God the Father be with us as we prepare our hearts for Christ's birth. May the Spirit inspire us as we join our hearts in praise of Jesus, and make room for the joy of Christ in our lives, that he might touch us all, and through us – everyone we meet. Amen.