

Straight from the "Hart"

December 24, 2023 -- Advent – Love
The Arrival – Standing on the Promises
of Christmas (Introduction)



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.

Affirmation of Faith

(P – Pastor, C: Congregation with Reader)

P: Do you believe in God?

C: **We believe in one God, who is Creator, maker of all we see and all we don't see. Who is Ruler of the universe: Source of all creation!**

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

C: **We believe in one God, who is Jesus Christ, God from God, Light from Light, true God and true human. He is one with the Creator; the Word made flesh, our Messiah: Savior of all creation!**

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: **We believe in one God, who is Holy Spirit, Breath of God moving among us; Who is one with the Creator; one with the Christ; our Comforter and our Guide: Mentor of all creation! Amen.**

ad. to be responsive, "Advent Creed" written by Lisa Frenz, in
Word of God Come Be With Us: © Lisa Frenz. All Rights Reserved. Used with permission.

Special Music Do You Hear What I Hear?

(Donna Allmond, Piano and Katy Novak Saxophone)

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you bless us with so many gifts, including Christ himself. We offer you ourselves, in part signified by what we share through this church -- that we may unite to bring your love and goodness to your world. In Jesus name, Amen.



Call to Worship

(R: Reader. **C: Pastor with Congregation**)

R: As we look around our world, we see so few signs of God's uniting love.

C: Yet Isaiah promises that all nations will come to see his radiant glory.

R: Nevertheless, some seek positions of power for the purpose of pushing people into their perception of their proper place -- and call it "love".

C: Yet the promise is fulfilled in a humble couple in a less than modest setting.

R: We long to be loved, and to love. Christ's love compels us to be a new people -- living not for ourselves, but reconciled to God and to each other.

C: As surely as God's son was born in Jesus, his love will be born in all who will receive him.



Music Our first hymn speaks to the wondrous birth, not only in Bethlehem, but in all who worship Christ. Let's sing [Title]

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Words: Phillips Brooks, ca 1868 Music: Lewis H Redner, 1868

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all on earth!

3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

Advent Candles



Review

And as he abides with us,

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]

I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will
be complete. John 15:11 (CEB)

Therefore, we lit the candle of joy. [Relight Candle 3]

Bible Reading 1

Today John speaks to us.

My loved ones, let us devote ourselves to loving one another. Love comes
straight from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and truly knows

God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Because of this, the love of God is a reality among us: God sent His only Son into the world so that we could find *true* life through Him. This is *the embodiment of true* love: not that we have loved God *first*, but that He loved us and sent His *unique* Son on a *special mission* to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins. So, my loved ones, if God loved us so *sacrificially*, surely we should love one another. No one has ever seen God *with human eyes*; but if we love one another, God *truly* lives in us. Consequently God's love has accomplished its mission among us. 1 John 4:7-12 (VOICE)



Poetic Reading

An unknown author offers this prayer:

God almighty and divine,
I praise You in unwavering faith and love;
Through each moment comes a sacred rhyme,
which draws me ever closer to thee above.
Be still and know that God is with you...
be still and know His love is real.
Be still and know your Heavenly Father...
feels every joy and pain you feel.
Let worship be a tapestry of love,
where unity and harmony prevail;
No barriers of faith, no walls to divide;
in oneness, every soul finds love's avail.

author unknown

Prayer Let's pray. Dear Lord, We are overwhelmed and give humble thanks for your holy, faithful and perfect love for us! A love so powerful for your creation that you made a plan for our salvation through Jesus coming to earth to pay for our sins. May we feel your love and presence not just during this Christmas season, but all year around; and may we reflect your love to others too. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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

Advent Song (Light the Advent Candle)

[Candle 4 is lit during the intro to the song]

Words - Music: Mary Lu Walker © 1975 Mary Lu Walker

4. Light the Advent candle, four: think of joy forevermore;
Christ Child in a stable born, gift of love that Christmas morn.
Candle, candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night;
Candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.

Special Music But the question is, if we really want Christ to fill our hearts and lives with his love, will we be able to make room for the birth of Jesus in our hearts? Listen to Mary Jo ask the question through 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.



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 the 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?

Special Instrumental Music Now hear “The Holy City” (*Piano-Saxophone*)

Pastor's Prayer

Let's pray. Gracious God, this season, as you lead us to the holy city and lead us to Bethlehem, to the manger, we are grateful you always journey with us. Guide us to stay on the path and keep us focused on the purpose of our mission. We confess that in the busyness of this season, we stray from the holy and concentrate on the “holly”. As we see the Christmas trees and lights, remind us of your Light. Grant us the patience to pause in our task and bask in the promise of the Star that we follow. As we trim our trees, let us take time to share the treasured memories of love -- for it is your love that truly decorates our homes. **Praises and Petitions** And it is your love that leads us to pray for those needs around us: We continue to pray for * those people who struggling to survive in this economy, looking for more work, or work at all. * We are thankful to see Randy Melville here and continue to pray for his heart and for a complete recovery. * we pray for Jan Martin, who continues in her treatments, and is off until next year now, we pray for her strength and peace and assurance of your love, * for peace in the world and in our lives.

Now Lord, as we open gifts, keep us mindful of the birthday we celebrate and the gift we are given in the manger. As we eat those things that we have baked and those meals we have prepared for the season, let them remind us to stir into our banquets good portions of forgiveness ... of serenity ... of peace ... of joy ... and of love -- so that our presents reflect the gift of your presence. We are bound for Bethlehem, God. But when we arrive, we still have to make the room in our hearts for your Son, the one whom the wisest seek, the Messiah, who taught us to pray

Lord's Prayer

Special Music Seasonal Singers

The seasonal singers are going to sing one of the oldest Christmas Carols, being traced back to the 1500s, but not appearing in print until 1760, and the current melody was first in print in 1829. It was originally called “Tidings of Comfort and Joy”. In those years church music was dark and somber, so the faithful took to the streets with more uplifting songs such as this. Charles Dicken's referenced it in his classic story a Christmas Carol, saying “...at the first sound of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” , Scrooge grabbed his ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror...” The carol is so ancient, it has been gone through many changes,

and many verses -- yet some of it has endured even though its vocabulary has not. Take the first phrase – God rest ye merry gentlemen – rest doesn't mean relax, or be at peace – it means keep or continue, merry doesn't mean jovial, it means strong or great, gentlemen aren't males with manners, they are the people born below the born or in position of nobility. So God rest you merry gentlemen basically means May God keep you (of lower social stature) strong, for Christ's birth (and mission) transcends anything that causes dismay. We now sing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"



God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

18th C. English Carol

1. God rest ye merry gentlemen let nothing you dismay;
remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day
to save us all from Satan's pow'r when we were gone astray.

Chorus

Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy.

2. From God our heav'nly Father a blessed angel came,
and unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same,
how that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God by name.

Chorus

3. "Fear not, then," said the angel, "Let nothing you affright;
This day is born a Savior of Virgin pure and bright,
to free all those who trust in him from Satan's pow'r and might."

Chorus

4. Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place,
and with true love and charity each other now embrace;
this holy tide of Christmas is filled with heav'nly grace.

Chorus

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

This is the beginning of the story of how heavenly grace filled the earth. In their culture, those who were engaged were bound together as husband and wife, but without marital relations. That bond could only be broken by a divorce. A women alleged to have been promiscuous prior to marriage was to be stoned, along with the man who was with her. (See Deuteronomy 22:23ff) Our reading describes Joseph as faithful to the Law, but also implies a deep love for his Mary. Joseph faces a dilemma of Law versus grace until God intervenes.



This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph was faithful to the law. But he did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.

But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That's because he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:18-21 (NIRV)

Music And so our story begins with the angels, If comfortable, let's stand and call on the angels' to sing the news to the shepherds. Let's sing [Title].

Angels From the Realms of Glory

Words: James Montgomery, 1816 Music: Henry Smart, 1867

1. Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

2. Shepherds, in the field abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant light:
(Refrain)

Music And now we join the shepherds who hear their song of invitation to come to Bethlehem. Let's sing [Title].

Angels We Have Heard on High

Words: Trad French Carol, tr. Crown of Jesus, 1862

Music: Trad French Carol, arr Edward Shippen Barnes, 1937

harm. Austin C Lovelace, 1964 harm © Abingdon Press, 1964

1. Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain:

Gloria, gloria, gloria, gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, gloria, gloria, gloria, in excelsis Deo!

4. See him in a manger laid, whom the choirs of angels praise,
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, while our hearts in love we raise.
(Refrain)

Sermonette (Intro to) Standing on the Promises of Christmas

Once, I plugged external computer speakers into my computer, which was fine. But then I had grabbed the wrong power cable to plug it into the wall socket, (with the wrong transforming adapter on it). They didn't reduce the power flow from the wall to the speakers as they should, and the speakers were fried and fit for the garbage.

In the Old Testament, the common thought was that if you got too close to God, the overwhelming power that flowed from him would destroy you on the spot.

Therefore, most people were terrified even when an angel in human form appeared on the scene. They set up boundaries around Mt Siani that only certain selected people that God has chosen could cross without dying.

A secular song asks, “If God had a face what would it look like? And would you want to see -- the ancient people in the Old Testament would say a definite “No thank you!” Even the afterglow of Moses’ face when he had been in God’s presence, they wanted covered up so they wouldn’t have to look at that. The song goes on Would you want to see [God’s face] if seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like heaven and Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?” (“One of Us” by Eric Bazillan)

The second question probably isn’t difficult for most of us sitting in this building, or tuning it at home (or reading this script). It is because we want to see and believe that many of us come to this place or tune in at home on Sunday mornings. Though if we are really honest with ourselves, there may be times even this question might be a bit challenging to us -- if truly believing means we might have to exchange some of the things we like to do all of better things that God would have us do.

The first question – “what would his face look like?”, we’d probably answer with the face of Jesus – though beyond general natural characteristics of a 1st century Palestinian Jew, we don’t *really* know exactly what that looks like either – but we have seen so many paintings and drawings and actors made up to portray him through the centuries that images do come to our mind.

But if we don’t take the word too literally, as we shouldn’t when we read passages like “seek his face always” (1 Chronicles 16:11, Psalm 27:8, 105:4). The biblical phrase is meant – not to see a physical face – but to get focused on his presence and to know that he is with us. It is meant to learn more who God is and what he is like. It is not so much about the physical traits Jesus, but it is the life lived by Jesus that we need to know. This is what Christmas is about – God revealing himself to the world so that we get a good view – a good understanding of who he is and what values he cherishes, and what character traits we should emulate. Our reading tells us the beginning of God’s ultimate steps to help us understand what it means to be faithful, to be God’s child, to be fully human,, even -- it begins in the birth of Jesus, and culminates in his death resurrection ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains it this way: “Now Christ is the visible expression [the image], [the exact likeness] of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15 (PHILLIPS)).

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. If you know what humanity is supposed to look like, look at Jesus. Fully human, fully God. It is in Christ that we are able to approach without getting fried, like they feared at Siani, and like my computer speakers. It is in Christ's transforming grace that adapts us to him so that we can connect with God without being destroyed. And God accomplished all of this in him because of his great love for us. He loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to a manger so that he could plug into our world, and in a sense, you could say, he got "fried" so we didn't have to. Then, by his transforming power, he adapts us and fits us into what our heavenly Father God wants us to be so that we can work, live, play, and speak – with God's grace and love within us to our very full capacity. Jesus' coming to a manger is a visible promise upon whom we can securely stand in God's grace as his children.

In a secular television show, the mayor of a small town was stressed out, which caused him to sleepwalk, which caused him to be exhausted, which caused him to fall asleep while driving which landed him in the hospital, just slightly banged up. The news spread, but people didn't know that last detail, how serious (or not) it was. His wife got to the hospital room first and they began to talk.... He said as he was having the accident that his life flashed before him and "I remembered all these ... special moments and they were all here ... with people that I love ... I've been trying so hard to change this town to make it perfect, and it already is, at least to me, and I don't want it to change. I'm just so tired of trying to get everyone to like me."

She protested, "Oh, honey, everybody loves you."

"No, they don't. I'm just a mayor to them, [but] I know that you do, and that's what matters."

"I do." she agreed.

Meanwhile in a parallel plotline, two people were working to free their children who were abducted and being held in a highly secured facility. They were almost free when one of them lost their life protecting their adult son from a gunshot. But the other escaped with both of those children, one adult child and his own baby. Now with music in the background, the camera silently cuts across many scenes - from their return journey to the town where the mayor was hospitalized, and only enough spurts of dialog here and there so we know that all the main characters of the show were getting the news of the mayor's accident and were moving to go

there. While all these scenes are going on, the surviving father gives a voiceover on all this actions that are taking place:

The [father who died] was committed to finding his child, but it wasn't just commitment that made him willing to die for it. There was love too. The word commitment becomes something different when you add love to it. Humans call it devotion. This feeling of devotion is not just for families. If there is enough love, anybody will feel it. I was surprised by the feeling of love I had when I saw my baby... why does love surprise humans? Love is like air -- even if you cannot see it you have to know it is there.

(Resident Alien, "Best of Enemies" S2:Ep 15)

He said this as they show a steady stream of townspeople entering the hospital to see the mayor. I guess the mayor's assessment of how at least some people felt about him was wrong. Sometimes we need that visible expression.

On the one hand, love is like air – Peter said, we've seen him, but you haven't seen him, yet you love him, and believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. (1 Peter 1:8) Christmas is about us putting a face on God – not a physical one – but knowing that love is in the air, and in us, because Jesus helps us clearly see God's true character -- what we could not have otherwise seen.

Music So let's go back to the see him through song – the beginnings of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. As you recall, the angels were singing to the shepherds about their promised hope who was lying in a manger and if we jump to another plot line, we also hear the Wise Men heard the message through a star -- we'll hear more about that later, but we want to get them into the story now... Let's sing [Title]

The First Noel

Words: Trad. English Carol Music: Trad. English Carol; harm 1871

1. The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

5. Then entered in those Wise Men three,
 full reverently upon the knee,
 and offered there, in his presence,
 gold and myrrh and frankincense.
 (Refrain)

Music Now all the world is invited, along with shepherds and sages, to join the angels in praise of God has come to be with us and save us. Let's sing [Title].

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!"

Music And now we come with the shepherds and sages to see and greet our hope, the hope of the world, our love and our salvation and to worship him. Let's sing [Title].

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.

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)

6. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
 Jesus, to thee be all glory given.
 Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
 (Refrain)

Music We've made our way to the stable in Bethlehem, where we imagine the animals expressing how they can serve the Lord of all. The donkey had carried the mother, the cow offered his feeding trough (manger), the sheep gave his wool for the blanket, and the doves coo the baby to sleep... Let's sing this scene now as we sing The Friendly Beasts

The Friendly Beasts

Words: 12th c. French Carol, tr. anon.

Music: Medieval French Melody, harm Carlton R Young, 1987
 harm © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House

1. Jesus, our brother, strong and good was humbly born in a stable rude,
 and the friendly beasts around him stood, Jesus, our brother, strong and good.
6. Thus all the beasts, by some good spell, in the stable dark was glad to tell
 of the gifts they gave Emmanuel, the gifts they gave Emmanuel.

Special Instrumental Music

Of course, we don't know, historically, what kind of night atmosphere the stable contained. It could have been loud and noisy as the animals talked about these people who were in their space, or it could have been, if any animals were there, that they were all bedded down and quietly sleeping. This is the take of our next composer who envisioned a holy hush in the place. Listen as James Sharlow plays on the cello **Silent Night**



Music And now our focus turns to the manger and we see the child king. It is easy to be in awe of any newborn, but with all we have heard to get to this point of the story, we must be wondering in awe just who and how special this child is. Let's sing [Title].

What Child is This?

Words: William C Dix, 1863 Music: 16th c. English melody

1. What child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?

Refrain:

This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.

Music And as we continue to watch the baby and it sinks in just how special he is, we pray that this child king would stay with us and bless us on our journey to eternal life. Let's sing [Title].

Away in a Manger

Words: Anon. Music: James R Murray, 1887

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

3. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Special Music Now it is time to return to that alternate plot line that is going on out east. Charles is going to get us moving on this part of the story...

Follow That Star

by Paul Baloche, Words-Music: Rita Baloche, © Integrity Music, 2013

In the quiet of the night under the wide expanse of sky
I am alone and asking questions... why
What's this longing in my heart, What's the reason for my life
And this solitary light is shining, calling

Chorus

Follow that star, follow that star
uncover the mystery of Who You are
I've searched for a lifetime, I've come from afar
And discovered my destiny is to follow that star

Like the light of early dawn
I see the promise there beyond
And a hope within begins to rise
Love is calling to my heart
reaching deep into my soul
And reveals to me the reason for living

Chorus

What joy, what hope, what good news
he brings to me and you, (yeah).

Chorus

So I Chorus

Follow that star, follow that star
Follow that star, follow that star



Music Wise ones see the sign of the rising king in the sky and come to see God's sign of salvation in the manger, presenting gifts representing his kingship, his divinity, and his sacrifice for all. Let's sing [Title].

We Three Kings

Words & Music: John H Hopkins, Jr., 1857

1. We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

5. Glorious now behold him arise; King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies.

(Refrain)

Music And now that this has sunk in, each in their turn, the shepherds, the wise ones, ourselves, are called to go and proclaim the story of salvation that came in the birth of Jesus. Let's sing [Title].

Go Tell it on the Mountain

Words: John W Work, Jr., 1907

Music: Afro-American Spiritual ad., arr. by Willilam Farley Smith, 1986
ad, arr © 1989 The UM Publishing House

Refrain

Go, tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere;
go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

3. Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
and brought us all salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

Refrain

Prayer

And so we have heard the story of Jesus' birth through the songs this congregation has requested last year. Let's pray. Lord, we latch on to the sign of the baby in the manger and know that God is with us -- always. He will never abandon us. He will always have a people who form his kingdom. A people who receive -- and offer -- hope, peace, joy and love because you, God, you became physically present with us, beginning in a town called Bethlehem. Amen.

Music So if comfortable, let's stand and sing the joy of our hope – the ultimate victory that will be won by this humble, newly born Son of God. Let's sing [Title].

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.

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, that the love of Christ may touch us all, and through us – everyone we meet. Amen.