



December 24, 2022

Melville United Church

300 St. Andrew Street West, Fergus, ON N1M 1N9

Mailing address: PO Box 41, Fergus, ON N1M 2W7

519-843-1781

Team Ministry

Minister of Worship, Pastoral Care & Outreach

Rev. Lynda Goy-Flint

Youth Faith Formation

Naomi Flint

Ministry of Music Team

Suzanne Flewelling, Colleen Weber

Office Administrator

Lynda Rivet

Custodian

Robert Mitchell, Suzanne Flewelling

Chair of Church Council

Allan Hons

Chair of Pastoral Care & Prayer Chain Captain

Alison Rainford, Rev. Lynda Goy-Flint

Office hours

9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. T., Th. & F.

E-Mail

secretary@melvilleunited.com

Web Site

www.melvilleunited.com

Pastoral Care Numbers

709-682-8756, 519-843-3841

Melville United Church
December 24, 2022
Christmas Eve – Family Service

Presiding today - Rev. Lynda Goy-Flint

Welcome

I greet you in the name of the One born among us:
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

We gather in community today – December 24, 2022 virtually and in person. We will continue to offer both in-person and on-line services with printed copies being distributed to those without internet access who are unable to attend in person. We encourage people to come out to worship in the sanctuary. There is ample room to socially distance, and you are welcome to wear masks or not as is comfortable for you.

Announcements

- **Upcoming Services:**
Christmas Eve at 8pm – Communion Service
Christmas Day – no service
New Year’s Day – 11am
- **Mitten Tree** – Tonight you have one last opportunity to decorate our mitten tree with mitts, hats, scarves and socks to keep folks in need warm during the winter.
- **Memory Angels:** Our Memory Angels will be displayed in the Sanctuary through Advent and ending January 8/23. Those who have had Angels in the past, can renew your Angel with a minimum donation of \$5, by contacting Lorna Bevcar. Those who are new to this, can have a handmade paper Angel, with an inscription on the skirt, dedicating this Angel in memory of your loved one, from you, for a minimum donation of \$5. The Angels stay at Melville safely packed away, throughout the year. These Angels bring comfort and meaning to the Melville families throughout Advent, knowing we are remembering our loved ones.
- **“MID-DAY MUSIC AT MELVILLE” presented and performed by pianist BRAD HALLS**
Our “*Mid-Day Music at Melville*” concerts will take a two-week break over Christmas and New Year’s, and so there will be no performances on December 28 or January 4. The program returns on Wednesday, January 11, 2023 from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m. at Melville United Church in Fergus, when pianist Brad Halls will present a selection of music by celebrated Oscar and Tony Award winning composer Jule Styne. Enjoy his enduring songs “*Time After Time*”, “*Three Coins in the Fountain*”, “*I’ll Walk Alone*”, “*I’ve Heard that Song Before*”, “*People*” and many more.
- As more and more people find their dollar shrinking, and having to decide between rent and three meals a day, the demand for food bank assistance rises. We ask you to prayerfully consider if you are able to **support the Food Bank**, either with a donation of food, or financially. Items most needed as of Dec 21/22:

| | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Pasta Sauce | Rice Side Dishes | Pasta Side Dishes | Canned Vegetables |
| Small Canned Soup | Canned Kidney Beans | Canned Six Bean Blend | Peanut Butter |
| Chunky Soup (Habitant) | Juice | Juice Boxes | Toilet Paper |
| Cookies | Canned Salmon | | |

The Food Bank is well stocked with:

| | | |
|-------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Pasta | Tomato Soup | Canned Chickpeas or Lentils |
|-------|-------------|-----------------------------|

- **Save your Used Stamps from Incoming Mail:** The holiday season is coming and you'll be receiving cards, etc. Cut off your used stamps, leaving a 1/2" border around them and give them to Marlene Tosh or put them in the Stamp Box on the shelf in the Cloak Room, where the Lift is on the main floor of the church. Marlene tidies them up and takes them to the Bible Society, to buy bibles. You can do this year-round!
- **Gifts with Vision: A Giving Catalogue from The United Church of Canada**
 - Give meaningful gifts that make a difference with [Gifts with Vision \(opens in a new tab\)](#)! Each year's gift catalogue gives a glimpse of the breadth of our Mission & Service ministries and programs.
 - *Gifts with Vision* has gift ideas to suit every interest, budget, and person. It's a great way to celebrate special occasions and honour loved ones!
 - The gift catalogue is updated online regularly and is fully refreshed every fall. It is also distributed in print with *Broadview* magazine and mailed to each pastoral charge.
 - **To order gifts, be inspired, or learn more, visit [GiftsWithVision.ca \(opens in a new tab\)](https://GiftsWithVision.ca) today!**
- **Melville council has commissioned a Halo study in conjunction with the Trinity Centres Foundation.** This study will look to anchor Melville in Centre Wellington and determine our value to the community, as event and program space, volunteer time and effort and community well being. This will serve as a snapshot of the value Melville brings to the community in terms we can share with local governments, charitable organizations and current partners. This will serve as the foundation for further efforts to make Melville a sustainable, energetic, and integral part of Centre Wellington. Please ask a council member if you have any questions.

I invite you to join us now for a time of worship and contemplation.

Land Acknowledgement *Peter Chynoweth, Gathering: Pentecost 1 2022, p.33. Used with permission.*

We acknowledge that this land on which we gather for worship is the traditional land of the people of Petun,

Haudenosaunee, (Hoe-day-no-show-nee)

Anishinabewaki,

Mississaugas of the Credit,

Odawa and

Mississauga nations. We acknowledge that we live on this land as people who have agreed to share the care and use of this land as a result of treaties—the Simcoe Patent-Treaty 4, 1793 and the Haldimand Treaty, 1784—that outline the rights and responsibilities associated with our place in this land. May we be people who remember this with thanksgiving and respect.

Lighting the Christ Candle *Laura J. Turnbull, Gathering: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2022-2023 p.33, alt. Used with permission.*

Three purple and one pink candles are lit.

The God of Promise came into the world

as light in the birth of Jesus.

Into a frightened world, Jesus came as hope.

Into a trouble world, Jesus came as peace.

Into a sorrowful world, Jesus came as joy.

Into a divided world, Jesus came as love.

**We praise God that Jesus Christ
continues to be born anew into our lives.**

May this Christ light illumine the way we follow faithfully,
trusting in God's grace. **Amen.**

The white Christ candle is lit.

All Sing: Hope Is a Star v.5 *Kent Chown, Gathering: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2016-17, p.54. Used with permission.*

Christ is the Light that lightens the earth,
guiding and saving us all since his birth.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.

Opening Words:

Blessed are you, O Christ child,
**that your cradle was so low
that shepherds, poorest and simplest of earthly people,
could yet kneel beside you,
and look, level-eyed, into the face of God.**

We pray that as we look into the cradle where you lay,
we to might look and see and know the face of God.

Blessed One, we come to you in worship. Amen.

Hymn: There's a Star in the East **VU70**

1 There's a star in the East on Christmas morn,
rise up, shepherd, and follow;
it will lead to the place where the Christ was born;
rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow, follow, rise up, shepherd, and follow,
follow the Star of Bethlehem,
rise up, shepherd, and follow.

2 If you take good heed to the angel's words,
rise up, shepherd, and follow,
you'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds;
rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow, follow, rise up, shepherd, and follow,
follow the Star of Bethlehem,
rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Prayer of Illumination *Laura J. Turnbull, Gathering: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, 2022-2023, p.38.*

Used with permission.

Challenging God,
Your good news is announced in many ways.
We discover it lived out by caring folk.
We receive it through the media.
We experience it as we listen to orators.
May we encounter it this night
as we receive the story of scripture, O Gracious God. Amen.

Scripture: Jesus Is Born Luke 2:1-7 *The Family Story Bible by Ralph Milton*

Mary could feel the baby growing inside her. "It won't be long now," she said to Joseph, her husband.

Then one day Joseph came with some bad news, "We have to go to Bethlehem," he said. "There are orders from the Roman emperor. Everybody has to go to the town that their grandparents came from. The emperor wants to count how many men he can get to fight in his army."

"But the baby is almost ready to be born," Mary said. "It's hard for me to walk very far. Do I have to go too?"

"That's what the emperor ordered," said Joseph. "He wants to count all the people. Because we are part of the family of King David, we have to go to Bethlehem. Bethlehem is King David's city. It doesn't make any sense, but we have to go."

Mary and Joseph were very tired when they reached Bethlehem. They needed to rest for a while, but they couldn't find any place to stay. They tried to get a room in an inn, but all the rooms were taken. Finally, someone said, "You can stay where they keep the cows and donkeys."

It was not a nice place. It was smelly and dirty and cold. But it was the only place Mary and Joseph could find. Joseph felt very angry. "A baby should not be born in a place like this."

That night, in that smelly stable, Mary's baby was born. It hurt when the baby came out of Mary, and she cried. Joseph cried too. He tried his best to help.

Joseph rubbed the new baby dry. Then he wrapped the baby Jesus in some clothes Mary had brought. Joseph and Mary made a soft bed in the straw, and all three of them lay down to rest.

"The angel said this was going to be a very special baby," said Mary. "It doesn't seem very special to be born in a place like this."

"Jesus is a very special baby," said Joseph. "But I don't understand either why he should be born here. Maybe someday we'll understand."

Both of them smiled at the tiny, red-faced baby with his eyes so tightly closed. Joseph laughed when the baby closed his tiny hand over Joseph's finger.

Mary and Joseph cried together too. Jesus was so tiny, and the world seemed such a cruel place.

Then Mary and Joseph said "thank you" to God for the gift of their beautiful child.

"Now let's all try to get some sleep," said Mary.

Scripture: The Shepherds Visit Jesus Luke 2:8-20 *The Family Story Bible by Ralph Milton*

Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus were sound asleep. They woke up when they heard voices outside.

“Who is it?” called Joseph. The night was very dark. He was afraid someone might want to hurt them.

“It’s all right,” said a kind voice. “We’re shepherds. We’ve come to see the baby.”

“Who told you there was a baby here?” said Joseph. Now he was really worried.

One of the shepherds came inside. “I think it was an angel,” said the shepherd. Then all the other shepherds came inside too.

“There was a bright light in the sky,” said another shepherd. “And music. Beautiful music.”

The shepherds carried bright torches so they could see in the dark. They all stared at the baby Jesus.

“What did the angel say?” Joseph asked.

“First the angel told us not to be afraid,” said a shepherd, “But we were scared anyway. None of us had ever seen an angel before. Then the angel told us some good news.

“The angel said a saviour had been born, a person who would show us what God is like. And the angel said we could find the baby in a place where they feed cows and donkeys. It doesn’t seem like much of a place to have a baby. Especially a baby that’s going to be the saviour of the whole world.”

“It’s not a nice place for *any* baby to be born,” said Joseph. “What else did the angel say?”

“Nothing,” said the shepherd. “Suddenly the whole sky was full of music. There was singing everywhere. The words of the song were something like, ‘Glory to God, and peace to all people everywhere.’ Then, just as suddenly, the angels were gone.”

The shepherds came a little closer. They wanted a good look at Jesus.

“He looks like an ordinary baby to me,” said one of the shepherds.

“He *is* an ordinary baby,” said Mary. “But he is also special. He is *very* special.”

On the way back to their sheep the shepherds told everybody what they had seen and heard.

Reflection: *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski, illustrated by P.J. Lynch

I want to share a story with you tonight that tells the Christmas story in another way - ***The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*** by Susan Wojciechowski, illustrated by P.J. Lynch

Part 1

The village children called him Mr. Gloomy.

But, in fact, his name was Toomey, Mr. Jonathan

Toomey. And though it's not kind to call people names,

this one fit quite well. For Jonathan Toomey seldom

smiled and never laughed. He went about mumbling and grumbling, muttering and sputtering, grumping and griping. He complained that the church bells rang too often, that the birds sang too shrilly, that the children played too loudly.

Mr. Toomey was a woodcarver. Some said he was the best woodcarver in the whole valley. He spent his days sitting at a workbench carving beautiful shapes from blocks of pine and hickory and chestnut wood. After supper, he sat in a straight-backed chair near the fireplace, smoking his pipe and staring into the flames.

Jonathan Toomey wasn't an old man, but if you saw him, you might think he was, the way he walked bent forward with his head down. You wouldn't notice his eyes, the clear blue of an August sky. And you wouldn't see the dimple on his chin, since his face was mostly hidden under a shaggy, untrimmed beard, speckled with sawdust and wood shavings and, depending what he ate that day, with crumbs of bread or a bit of potato or dried gravy.

The village people didn't know it, but there was a reason for his gloom, a reason for his grumbling, a reason why he walked hunched over, as if carrying a great weight on his shoulders. Some years earlier, when Jonathan Toomey was young and full of life and full of love, his wife and baby had become very sick. And, because those were the days before hospitals and medicines and skilled doctors, his wife and baby died, three days apart from each other. So Jonathan Toomey had packed his belongings into a wagon and traveled till his tears stopped. He settled into a tiny house at the edge of a village to do his woodcarving.

One day in early December, there was a knock at Jonathan's door. Mumbling and grumbling, he went to answer it. There stood a woman and a young boy.

"I'm the widow McDowell. I'm new in your village. This is my son Thomas," the woman said.

"I'm seven and I know how to whistle," said Thomas.

"Whistling is pish-posh," said the woodcarver gruffly.

"I need something carved," said the woman, and she told Jonathan about a very special set of Christmas figures her grandfather had carved for her when she was a girl.

"After I moved here, I discovered that they were lost," she explained. "I had hoped that by some miracle I would find them again, but it hasn't happened."

"There are no such things as miracles," the woodcarver told her. "Now could you describe the figures for me?"

"There were sheep," she told him.

"Two of them, with curly wool," added Thomas.

"Yes, two," said the widow, "and a cow, an angel, Mary,

Joseph, the baby Jesus, and the wise men."
"Three of them," added Thomas.
"Will you take the job?" asked the widow McDowell.
"I will."
"I'm grateful. How soon can you have them ready?"
"They will be ready when they are ready," he said.
"But I must have them by Christmas. They mean very much to me. I can't remember a Christmas without them."
"Christmas is pish-posh," said Jonathan gruffly, and he shut the door.

Hymn: Jesus, Our Brother VU56 OneLicense #A-740237

- 1 Jesus, our brother, kind and good,
was humbly born in a stable rude,
and the friendly beasts around him stood,
Jesus, our brother, kind and good.
- 2 'I,' said the donkey, shaggy and brown,
'I carried the mother uphill and down,
I carried his mother to Bethlehem town;
I,' said the donkey, shaggy and brown.
- 3 'I,' said the cow, all white and red,
'I gave him my manger for his bed,
I gave him hay to pillow his head;
I,' said the cow, all white and red.
- 4 'I,' said the sheep with curly horn,
'I gave him my wool for his blanket warm,
he wore my coat on Christmas morn;
I,' said the sheep, with curly horn.
- 5 'I,' said the dove, from the rafters high,
'I cooed him to sleep that he should not cry,
we cooed him to sleep, my mate and I;
I,' said the dove, from the rafters high.
- 6 Thus all the beasts, by some good spell,
in the stable dark were glad to tell
of the gifts they gave Emmanuel,
the gifts they gave Emmanuel.

Part 2

The following week there was a knock at the woodcarver's door. Muttering and sputtering, he went to answer it. There stood the widow McDowell and Thomas.
"Excuse me," said the widow, "but Thomas has been

begging to come and watch you work. He says he wants to be a woodcarver when he grows up and would like to watch you since you are the best in the valley."

"I'll be quiet. You won't even know I'm here. Please, please," piped in Thomas.

With a grumble, the woodcarver stepped aside to let them in. He pointed to a stool near his workbench. "No talking, no jiggling, no noise," he ordered Thomas.

The widow McDowell handed Mr. Toomey a warm loaf of corn bread as a token of thanks. Then she took out her knitting and sat down in a rocking chair in the far corner of the cottage.

"Not there!" bellowed the woodcarver. "No one sits in that chair." So she moved to the straight-backed chair by the fire.

Thomas sat very still. Once, when he needed to sneeze, he pressed a finger under his nose to hold it back. Once, when he wanted desperately to scratch his leg, he counted to twenty to keep his mind off the itch.

After a very long time, Thomas cleared his throat and whispered, "Mr. Toomey, may I ask a question?"

The woodcarver glared at Thomas, then shrugged his shoulders and grunted. Thomas decided it meant "yes," so he went on. "Is that my sheep you're carving?"

The woodcarver nodded and grunted again.

After another very long time, Thomas whispered, "Mr. Toomey, excuse me, but you're carving my sheep wrong."

The widow McDowell's knitting needles stopped clicking. Jonathan Toomey's knife stopped carving.

Thomas went on. "It's a beautiful sheep, nice and curly, but my sheep looked happy."

"That's pish-posh," said Mr. Toomey. "Sheep are sheep. They cannot look happy."

"Mine did," answered Thomas. "They knew they were with the baby Jesus, so they were happy."

After that, Thomas was quiet for the rest of the afternoon. When the church bells chimed six o'clock, Mr. Toomey grumbled under his breath about the awful noise.

The widow McDowell said it was time to leave. Thomas sneezed three times, then thanked the woodcarver for allowing him to watch.

That evening, after a supper of corn bread and potatoes, the woodcarver sat down at his bench. He picked up his knife. He picked up the sheep. He worked until his eyelids drooped shut.

A few days later there was a knock at the woodcarver's door. Gripping and grumbling he went to answer it. There stood the widow and her son.

"May I watch again? I will be quiet," said Thomas. He settled himself on the stool very quietly, while his mother laid a basket of sweet-smelling raisin buns on the table. "The teapot is warm," Mr. Toomey said gruffly, his head bent over his work.

While Mr. Toomey carved, the widow McDowell poured tea. She touched the wood carver gently on the shoulder and placed a cup of tea and a bun next to him.

He pretended not to notice, but soon, both the plate and the cup were empty.

Thomas tried to eat the bun his mother had given him as quietly as he could. But it is almost impossible to be seven and eat a warm sticky raisin bun without making various smacking, licking, satisfied noises.

When Thomas had finished, he tried to sit quietly.

Once, he almost hiccupped, but he took a deep breath and held it till his face turned red. And once, without thinking, he began to swing his legs, but a glare from the woodcarver stopped him and he kept them so still they fell asleep.

After a very long time, Thomas whispered, "Mr. Toomey, excuse me, may I ask a question?"

Grunt.

"Is that my cow you're carving?"

Nod and grunt.

Another very long time went by. Then Thomas cleared his throat and said, "Mr. Toomey, excuse me, but I must tell you something. That is a beautiful cow, the most beautiful cow I have ever seen, but it's not right. My cow looked proud."

"That's pish-posh," growled the woodcarver. "Cows are cows. They cannot look proud."

"My cow did. It knew that Jesus chose to be born in its barn, so it was proud."

Thomas was quiet for the rest of the afternoon. The only sounds that could be heard were the scraping of the carving knife, the humming of the widow McDowell, and the click-click of her knitting needles.

When the church bells chimed six o'clock, Mr. Toomey muttered under his breath about the noise. The widow McDowell said it was time to leave. Thomas shook first one leg, then the other. He thanked the woodcarver for allowing him to watch.

That evening, after a supper of boiled potatoes and raisin buns, the woodcarver sat down at his workbench. He picked up his carving knife. He picked up the cow. He worked until his eyelids drooped shut.

Hymn: Away in a Manger VU69

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

- 2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
 but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
 I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
 and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

- 3 Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
 close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
 Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
 and fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

Part 3

A few days later there was a knock on the woodcarver's door. He smoothed down his hair as he went to answer it. At the door were the widow and her son.

"May I watch again?" asked Thomas.

As Mrs. McDowell warmed the tea and put a plate of fresh molasses cookies on the workbench, Thomas watched the woodcarver work on the figure of an angel.

After a very long time, Thomas spoke. "Mr. Toomey, excuse me, is that my angel you're carving?"

"Yes. And would you do me the favor of telling me exactly what I'm doing wrong?"

"Well, my angel looked like one of God's most important angels, because it was sent to Baby Jesus."

"And just how does one make an angel look important?" asked the woodcarver.

"You'll be able to do it," said Thomas. "You are the best woodcarver in the valley."

After another very long time, Thomas spoke. "Mr. Toomey, excuse me, may I ask a question?"

"Do you ever stop talking?" asked the woodcarver.

"My mother says I don't. She says I could learn about the virtue of silence from you."

Under his beard, the woodcarver's face turned pink. The widow McDowell's face turned as red as the scarf she was knitting.

"Well, speak up, what is your question?"

"Will you please teach me to carve?"

"I am a very busy man," grumbled the woodcarver. But he put down the important angel. "You will carve a bird."

"A robin, I hope," said Thomas. "I like robins."

With a piece of charcoal, the woodcarver sketched a robin on a piece of brown paper. He handed Thomas a small block of pine and a knife. He showed him how to lop the corners from the block and slowly smooth the edges of the wood into curves.

Thomas copied the woodcarver's strokes, head bent, tongue working from side to side of his lower lip as he concentrated.

When the church bells chimed six o'clock, Jonathan Toomey was holding Thomas's hand in his, guiding the knife along the edge of a wing. He didn't hear them ringing. The widow McDowell said it was time to leave. Thomas brushed wood shavings from his shirt. Then he reached out and brushed two especially large pieces of wood shaving from Jonathan Toomey's beard. He thanked the woodcarver for teaching him how to carve. Later, after a supper of boiled potatoes and molasses cookies, Jonathan Toomey went to his workbench. He thought for a long time. He sketched drawing after drawing. Finally he picked up his carving knife. He picked up the angel. He carved until his eyelids drooped shut.

Hymn: Angels We Have Heard on High VU38 v. 1-3

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

- 2 Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heavenly song?
 Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
 Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

- 3 Come to Bethlehem and see
Christ whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.
 Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
 Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Part 4

A few days later there was a knock on the woodcarver's door. Mr. Toomey jumped up to answer it.

There stood the widow McDowell with a bouquet of pine boughs and holly sprigs, dotted with berries. And there stood Thomas, clutching his partly carved robin. While Thomas and Mr. Toomey carved, Mrs. McDowell put the bouquet in a jar of water. She scrubbed Mr. Toomey's kitchen table and set the jar in the center, on a pretty cloth embroidered with lilies of the valley and daisies, which she found in a drawer below the cupboard.

"Next, I will carve the wise men and Joseph," the woodcarver said to Thomas. "Perhaps, before I begin, you will tell me about all the mistakes I am going to make."

"Well," said Thomas, "my wise men were wearing their most wonderful robes because they were going to visit Jesus, and my Joseph was leaning over Baby Jesus like he was protecting him. He looked very serious."

It wasn't until the church bells had chimed and the widow and her son were preparing to go that Mr. Toomey saw the jar of pine boughs and the scrubbed table and the cloth embroidered with lilies of the valley and daisies.

"I found the cloth in a drawer. I thought it would look pretty on the table," the widow McDowell said, smiling.

"Never open that drawer," the woodcarver said harshly.

When the two had left, Jonathan put the cloth away.

That evening, after a supper of boiled potatoes, the woodcarver worked on Joseph and the wise men until his eyelids drooped shut.

A few days later there was a knock on the woodcarver's door. He dusted the crumbs from his beard and brushed the sawdust from his shirt. At the door were the widow McDowell and Thomas.

All afternoon Thomas watched the woodcarver work.

When it was time to leave, Jonathan said to Thomas, "I am about to begin the last two figures - Mary and the baby. Can you tell me how your figures looked?"

"They were the most special of all," said Thomas. "Jesus was smiling and reaching up to his mother and Mary looked like she loved him very much."

"Thank you, Thomas," said the woodcarver.

"Tomorrow is Christmas. Is there any chance the figures will be ready?" the widow McDowell asked.

"They will be ready when they are ready."

"I understand," said the widow, and she handed Jonathan two packages. "Merry Christmas," she said. Jonathan folded his arms across his chest. "I want no

presents," he said harshly.

"That is exactly why we are giving them," answered the widow. She put them down on the table and left.

Jonathan sat down at the table. Slowly, he opened the first package. Inside was a red scarf, hand-knit, warm and bright. He tied the scarf around his neck.

The other package held a robin, crudely carved of pine.

A smile twitched at the corners of Jonathan's mouth as he ran his fingers over the lopsided wings. He dusted the fireplace mantel with his sleeve and placed the robin exactly in the center, so he could look at it from his chair.

Hymn: What Child Is This VU74

- 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?
 This, this is Christ the King,
 whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 haste, haste to bring him laud,
 the Babe, the Son of Mary!

- 2 Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
 This, this is Christ the King,
 whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 haste, haste to bring him laud,
 the Babe, the Son of Mary!

- 3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
come, one and all, to own him.
The King of Kings salvation brings;
let loving hearts enthrone him.
 This, this is Christ the King,
 whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 haste, haste to bring him laud,
 the Babe, the Son of Mary!

Part 5

The woodcarver did not eat supper that day. Instead he began to sketch the final figures, Mary and Jesus. He drew Mary, then wadded the sketch into a ball and tossed it on the floor. He drew the baby, wadded the sketch into a ball and tossed it with the first. He sketched again. Once more he crumpled the paper. Soon there was a small mountain

of crumpled papers at his feet. He picked up a block of wood and tried to carve, but his knife would not do what he wanted it to do. He hurled the chunk of wood into the fireplace and sat, staring into the flames.

When he heard the church bells announcing the midnight Christmas service, he got up. Slowly he opened the drawer beneath the cupboard, the drawer he had told the widow never to open.

From it he took the cloth embroidered with lilies of the valley and daisies. He took out a rough woolen shawl and a lace handkerchief. He took out a tiny white baby blanket and a little pair of blue socks. He placed each piece gently on the floor. From the bottom of the drawer he lifted out a picture frame, beautifully carved of deep brown chestnut wood.

In the frame was a charcoal sketch of a woman sitting in a rocking chair, holding a baby. The baby's arms were reaching up, touching the woman's face. The woman was looking down at the baby, smiling. Jonathan sat down in his rocking chair and held the picture against his chest. He rocked slowly, his eyes closed. Two tears trailed into his beard.

When he finally took the picture to his workbench and began to carve, his fingers worked quickly and surely. He carved all through the night.

Ministry of Music: "Silent Night! O Holy Night! Based on *Silent Night, Holy Night* by Franz Gruber and *O Holy Night* by Alophe Adam arranged by Patrick M. Liebergen, duet sung by Martha Duncan and Valerie Brennehan, accompanied by Colleen Weber on piano and Mercedes Weber on flute

Part 6

The next day, there was a knock on the widow McDowell's door.

When she opened it, there stood the woodcarver, his neck wrapped in a red scarf, holding a wooden box stuffed with straw.

"Mr. Toomey!" said the widow. "What a surprise. Merry Christmas."

"The figures are ready," he said as he stepped inside. From the box, Jonathan unpacked two curly sheep, happy sheep because they were with Jesus. He unpacked a proud cow and an angel, a very important angel with mighty wings stretching from its shoulders right down to the hem of its gown. He unpacked three wise men wearing their most wonderful robes, edged with fur and falling in rich folds.

He unpacked a serious and caring Joseph. He unpacked Mary wearing a rough woolen shawl, looking down, loving her precious baby son. Jesus was smiling and reaching up to touch his mother's face.

That day, Jonathan went to the Christmas service with the widow McDowell and Thomas. And that day in the churchyard the village children saw Jonathan throw back his head, showing his eyes as clear as an August sky, and laugh. No one ever called him Mr. Gloomy again.

Hymn: Joy to the World VU59

- 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.

- 2 Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns:
let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

- 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 earth 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.

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Gracious God,
we pray this day
for all who have come with us to Bethlehem
We pray for all who are poor and cold
and hungry like the shepherds,
that they may hear good news.
We pray for all who are wandering and searching like the magi,
that they may find the place to leave their gifts
and their burdens.

We pray for all who are busy, hurried,
preoccupied like the innkeeper,
that they may know the peace
that comes from genuine acts of hospitality.
We pray for all like Herod who have power,
that they may use it with good will.
We pray for ourselves—we who need comfort, peace and joy,
even in this starlit season,
and all the days of our lives.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lord's Prayer Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Invitation *Elaine Bidgood Sweet, Gathering: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, p. 38. Used with permission.*

In our seeking Christ at Christmas,
we not only want to receive, but long to give.
Let us give this holy night to the glory of God.

Offering Hymn: In the Bleak Midwinter
What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise one, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him - give my heart.

VU55 v.4

Offering Prayer (in unison)
On this night of gift-giving
O God,
we thank you for the great gift of your son, the child Jesus,
and we offer our gifts,
to reach to the lowest, the least and the lost
and help them to the new life
Jesus' birth promises.
We ask you to bless and multiply our gifts
in the name of the babe in the manger, Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: Go, Tell It on the Mountain **VU43**

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

1 While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light.

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

2 The shepherds feared and trembled
when lo, above the earth
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Saviour's birth!

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 lonely manger
the humble Christ was born,
and God sent our salvation
that blessed Christmas morn.

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

Commissioning and Blessing *Spill the Beans Resources Team, spill the beans: worship and learning resources for all ages, Issue 33, p. 54. Copyright 2019.*

May we have eyes bright enough
to watch all the wonder tonight;

may we have skin tingling enough
to feel the breath of angels tonight;

may we have feet restless enough
to journey to the manger tonight;

may we have words magnificent enough
to tell stories of hope tonight;

because God has love big enough
to slip into human skin tonight;

so right in the middle of everything now
may we find Jesus born among us all tonight.

Household Prayer *Spill the Beans Resources Team, spill the beans: worship and learning resources for all ages, Issue 33, p. 52. Copyright 2019.*

In and between these familiar stories
shine your light to guide our way.
In and between these favourite hymns
send your spirit to flicker and dance.
In and between our unfinished lists
and unspoken angst
rest your peace in us and banish our fear.
So we may watch and wait
for your love born again and again into our lives.
Amen.