



**December 15, 2024**

Melville United Church  
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**Melville United church**  
**Sunday December 15, 2024**

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*Presiding: Rev. Tom Watson*  
*Ministry of Music: Suzanne Flewelling*

**Prelude**

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Land Acknowledgement**

Let us take time to acknowledge the peoples who have lived on and stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

God, help us to be thankful, and to become better neighbours and stewards that we might continue to honour these lands.

**Lighting the Advent Candle (Advent III)**

Our Advent journey continues our time of celebration. We celebrate the coming of the Christ child who turns the world upside down.

**We come to dance joyfully in anticipation of this season of new life, new life that challenges and guides, comforts and confronts.**

Out of pain comes possibility; out of anguish comes transformation; out of loneliness comes community; out of labour comes birth. We come in joy but not to distract us from life's pains; instead, joy emerges out of each disruption and within each disappointment.

**We come to heal one another in the midst of all life's challenges.**

We light the first candle reminding us of the way of hope.

*(The first Advent candle is lit.)*

We light the second candle reminding us of Christ's path of peace.

*(The second Advent candle is lit.)*

We light our third candle, which dances in JOY even as it burns.

*(The third Advent candle is lit.)*

**Sung Response: "A Candle is Burning" verse 3 (VU #6)**

A candle is burning, a candle of joy,  
A candle to welcome brave Mary's new boy.  
Our hearts fill with wonder, and eyes light and glow  
As joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.

Let us join as one community of faith in prayer:

**As we come to worship we hold images of the baby Jesus in our mind's eye, O God. We imagine the boundless love pouring out for this child, just as we imagine the colicky nights and the diapering days. Teach us to stop drawing boundaries between joy and labour, allowing us to lean into the wholeness and complexity of life. Bless us, this morning, with an openness to all of life's realities, knowing we are never alone in the struggle, nor in the celebration. Amen.**

**Reflection** *(adapted from the writings of Ann Weems)*

In each heart lies a Bethlehem...

**An inn where we must ultimately answer whether there is room.**

When we are Bethlehem-bound...

## **We experience our own Advent in his.**

When we are Bethlehem-bound...

**We can no longer look the other way, conveniently not seeing stars, not hearing angel voices.**

So, this Advent, let's go to Bethlehem,

**And see this thing that the Lord has made known to us.**

## **Hymn —All Poor Ones and Humble VU 68**

1. All poor ones and humble and all those who stumble

Come hastening, and feel not afraid.

For Jesus, our treasure, with love past all measure

In lowly poor manger was laid.

Though wise men who found him laid rich gifts around him,

Yet oxen they gave him their hay,

And Jesus is beauty accepted their duty,

Contented in manger he lay.

(refrain) Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him,

Our service he ne'er can despise,

whose love still is able to show us that stable,

where softly in manger he lies.

2. The Christ Child will lead us, the Good Shepherd feed us

And with us abide till his day.

Then hatred he'll banish, then sorrow will vanish,

And death and despair flee away.

And he shall reign ever, and nothing shall sever

From us the great love of our king.

His peace and his pity shall bless his fair city,

His praises we ever shall sing. (refrain)

## **Children's Time**

**Ministry of Music — Advent Hymn** by Christy Nockels (*Suzanne Flewelling with Men's Chorus — Chris Hopewell, Barrie Rawn, Don Grant, Tom Watson*)

## **Gospel Reading — Matthew 2:1-12 (selected verses)**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Sermon — Life in Our Town...Christmas Brings Out the Best In Everyone**

I must tell you that this story is from one of my books, but it's the only time I'll have the opportunity to tell you a Christmas story. In fairness, the setting is a week after Christmas, but I think we can work with that.

Well, it's been a busy week in our town. Seems that's always the way with Christmas and then the week after. Casey over at the hardware always runs some Boxing Day specials, and that attracts a bit of a crowd. Al over at the Café puts on a special Boxing Day buffet lunch, and that's always a hit with the locals—most folks enjoy all the get-togethers over the holidays but those responsible for the cooking get a bit worn down, and come Boxing Day are glad to eat out.

The Everything Else store was buzzing with activity on Boxing Day...and the day after as well. In keeping with its name, the Everything Else store guarantees that you can find everything else that you can't find at other local stores.

And that may well be the case; there's a lot of stuff in there. The very best in offshore merchandise from Upper Gorm and Eastern Muldavia.

They didn't have to throw a Boxing Day special...their prices are low to begin with...but people went in anyway—stocked up on wrapping paper, ribbons and bows, tinsel, and Christmas cards so they'll have all that stuff ready ahead of time come next Christmas.

Now, back in the fall, Hank Vickers went in to Casey's Hardware looking to buy a wood chipper. In a bad windstorm, mid October, a big tree in their back yard came down, and it bothered Hank seeing Mildred out there, working as hard as she did to cut up those big limbs with an axe and a saw, so he thought a wood chipper would make the clean-up job a lot easier for her.

All she'd have to do would be to haul the limbs over to the chipper, feed 'em in, and the job would be done. The bonus was she'd end up with a good supply of mulch she could spread in the garden.

Hank hadn't realized how pricy the Canadian-made wood chippers in Casey's catalogues would be. One made by Wallenstein...BXT model...10 horsepower...Diesel motor...\$11,900 on sale. There were a couple of others—one by Vermeer, and one by Honda. A bit cheaper but not much.

Therefore Hank decided Mildred would have to make do without unless he could find one cheaper somewhere. So, just a couple of weeks before Christmas, on the off chance the Everything Else store handled a good imported one, he dropped in to see. But it turned out that, true to the store's name, they had pretty much everything else but wood chippers.

Hank did, however, spot one of those magnetic pick-up tools with the telescoping handle—he thought that would be handy for Mildred when, if she was fixing something, she dropped a screw or two down behind the refrigerator...all she'd have to do would be reach in with that magnetic tool without having to pull the fridge out.

He also got one of those head lamps—you know the kind...has a headband with a light that goes in the middle of your forehead...looks something like the thing that miners wear when they go down in the mines. Hank figured that Mildred might appreciate that if she was having to work in a dark corner of some kind. The headlamp, along with that magnetic pick-up tool, would be good stocking stuffers.

When he left the Everything Else store that day, Hank felt pretty good about things. He'd get a main gift for Mildred for Christmas, but part of his shopping was already done.

Come Christmas morning, Mildred was quite amused when she opened her stocking stuffer gifts from Hank. "Typical," she thought as she pulled out the magnetic pick-up tool with the telescoping handle, and the miner's headlamp, "he certainly has original ideas." She chuckled, looked at her husband and smiled.

Her mind ran back over the various gifts she had received over the years. The socket wrenches. The lawn edger. The laser level. The bottle opener with her name engraved on the handle—that had a nice personal touch to it.

Even more personal was the gift certificate for a tattoo from Alphonso's Body Piercing and Tattoo Parlour in Toronto from a few years back. "Actually, though," she mused, "he's getting better. I adore that set of sapphire earrings and matching necklace he gave me last year."

When she had finished with her stocking, Hank said, "Go ahead, Mildred, open those two boxes. They're both for you." Hank had put the two boxes under the tree a couple of nights before Christmas. Mildred had noticed them and wondered what might be inside. One was a very large box, the other quite small. Hank said, "If you don't mind, do the big one first."

So she did. She tore the wrapping paper off, opened it up, and inside was a second wrapped box. She unwrapped that one as well, and inside that was a third box. And then another. And another. In total there were 7 boxes. All inside one another like those Russian nesting dolls. Finally, she got to the last of the 7 boxes. Inside that was an envelope. She paused, looked at Hank. "Go ahead, Mildred," Hank said, "open it up."

In the envelope was a ticket. The ticket read:

Admit one. Row A, Seat 5.

High Seas Extravaganzas presents the 5th annual submarine race.

Thursday, January 23, 2014. Ten AM.

Weather permitting.

Mildred was puzzled. Her eyebrows furrowed. "Submarine race?" she mouthed. She looked at Hank. "Front row," said Hank. "Best seat in the house."

"Well," said Mildred, "in the category of all-time unique gifts, you've certainly outdone yourself this time, Hank. How in the world do you even see a submarine race? And where on earth did you manage to buy a ticket to one?"

"Shopping channel," replied Hank.

"I see," said Mildred, "but, Hank, there's only one ticket. You don't want to go?"

"Naw," said Hank, "submarine races aren't my thing, but I thought that you..."

Mildred cut him off in mid-sentence. "Hank, the ticket doesn't show where the races are!"

"Ah," said Hank, "that brings us to the second box. Maybe you'd better open it."

Mildred reached for the smaller box. As she did she was thinking, "What could possibly be in it that had anything remotely to do with a submarine race?" She unwrapped the box. Inside was another envelope. Felt like some kind of ticket in that one too. Well, more than one, actually. She opened it. Four tickets in this one. Two plane tickets to fly from Toronto to San Francisco on Saturday, January 11. And two tickets for a 10 day cruise to Hawaii, starting on Sunday, January 12.

Mildred's jaw dropped. She could hardly believe her eyes. It's the one place in the world she had always hoped to visit but never thought she'd get there. Tears started to come to her eyes. She looked at Hank. "Man, I love you," she said. "Same over here, Mildred," said Hank.

She wiped her eyes with a tissue. "And these submarine races? They off one of the Hawaiian islands?"

"Take a closer look at the ticket," replied Hank.

Mildred did. And then started to laugh. "You just made this up, didn't you, Hank? There's really no such thing as a submarine race, is there?"

Hank laughed too. "Guess you got me on that one, Mildred."

They got up from their chairs in the living room, walked out to the kitchen arm in arm, to get some breakfast. Part way there, Mildred said, "Hank, these tickets for that cruise to Hawaii, they'd be pretty expensive, wouldn't they? You sure we can afford it?"

Hank gave his wife a hug and said, "Well, let's just say they're not cheap. But you know what..." Hank paused and looked off in the distance and then continued ... "I've decided you're worth it, Mildred."

Mildred reached for a tissue, "Aw, Hank. Maybe we're both worth it!"

It was Hank's turn to reach for a tissue. Then he said, "Besides..." He paused.

"Besides what?" asked Mildred.

"Well, besides," said Hank, "now that I've decided not to get you that wood chipper, we can afford this cruise."

"What?" exclaimed Mildred. "Wood chipper?"

"I'll tell you all about it over breakfast," said Hank.

They walked on toward the kitchen. Mildred had hung some mistletoe in the archway. She paused and pulled Hank towards her. They stood there for more than a few moments. Held in each other's embrace. Just like a couple of teenagers.

The radio was on in the kitchen. Mildred had turned it on when she started the coffee maker to make coffee for breakfast. Christmas music had been playing softly. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus was just finishing. Both Hank and Mildred laughed. "Seems fitting," said Hank.

Then a recording of Sarah Brightman singing O Holy Night began.

Oh holy night!

The stars are brightly shining

It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!

Long lay the world in sin and error pining

Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

"Well, Hank, this is a new and glorious morn, isn't it? Kinda lucky us two, aren't we?" said Mildred.

"Sure are, Mildred. We sure are," replied Hank. "Just think...this is the 47th Christmas we've spent together."

"Yep," said Mildred, "and they get better every year!"

Hank looked at his wife again, and then said, "Aw, get on with ya, Mildred, and make the toast, or we're gonna get all sappy again. Meanwhile, I'll whip up some bacon and eggs!"

Well, that's the news from our town for this week. At least, from the stories that I've heard.

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Know what I was thinking? I was thinking that there's something about Christmas that, every year, seems to bring out the best in old Hank Vickers.

But maybe it's not only with Hank; maybe with all of us. There's just something about this wonderful season that brings out the best in everyone.

Hank Vickers...you and I...everybody...it's just as if we, like the Magi of old, are led by some strange star...and we all find our way to that special holy place.

### **Hymn — VU 74 What Child Is This?**

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?

*(chorus)* 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. (*chorus*)

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. (*chorus*)

**Men's Chorus – We Three (Swingin') Kings** by John H. Hopkins, arr. Larry Shackley

### **Sharing Our Joys and Concerns**

- **Birthdays**
  - Eleanor Johnston celebrates on Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>
- **Condolences**
  - We extend our deepest condolences to the family of Shirley Mulvey who passed away on Sunday, December 8, 2024.

### **Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus**

#### **Minute for Mission**

#### **Offering Invitation**

#### **Offering Hymn: Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow VU 541**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures high and low;  
Give thanks to God in love made known,  
Creator, Word and Spirit One.

#### **Offering Prayer**

#### **Hymn —Angels We Have Heard on High VU 38**

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.



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.  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo.  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

### **Benediction**

Each year the child is born again.

**Each year some new heart finds love.**

Each year, even in the midst of all our busyness of the season...

**God bursts into our lives, and there is much joy.**

Go...make the best of this season. Go in peace!

**Amen.**

### **Hymn — Go Now in Peace**

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.

God will go with you each hour ev'ry day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know God will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there watching from above.

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

**Postlude — For the Sake of Our Brother** by Paul O'Neill. Performed by Suzanne Flewelling and Rev. Tom Watson

### **Household Prayer:**

Wondrous God, I am in awe that you would choose to be born among us, revealing your divineness enlivening the ordinary things of my life.

I thank you for the gift of Jesus who walked among us, wept with the suffering and raged in anger at the injustices of his day. I thank you for the vision you etched in his heart, a fullness of righteousness for all the world.

I thank you that he called others to follow that they too might know the joy of new life. As Jesus' disciple, help me to walk in the way. Help me to carry the vision in my heart, however discouraged I get. Help me to see through eyes of faith, my life, my relationships, the world you so love. Help me day by day, in my words and deeds to reflect your light.

Through your wisdom and Spirit, may I grow in my capacity to love you, my neighbour, and myself, as you so love. Amen.

**Welcomers:** Barb Gregory, Lorna Ziegler

**Counters:** Chris Hopewell, Kaillie Rawn

### Worship Schedule

December 22	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
December 24	Christmas Eve Service 7pm	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
December 29	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
January 5	Epiphany Sunday	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
January 12	The Baptism of the Lord	Rev. Felicia Urbanski