



**December 22, 2024**

Melville United Church

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**Melville United Church**  
**December 22, 2024**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

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*Presiding today - Rev. Felicia Urbanski*  
*Music Director – Colleen Weber, with the Melville United Church Choir*

**Prelude**

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Land Acknowledgement**

Let us pause for a moment and consider our role in reconciliation.

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 of the Advent Wreath**

Our Advent journey is nearly complete, yet the waiting continues with anticipation. We pause to ponder, to proclaim, and to prepare for what has come but is not yet fulfilled.

**We come to gaze into each other's hearts as companions along the way, discovering the love that transforms from the inside out.**

We come to discover love lived into a world too focused on division. We come to turn away from polarization to perceive the Christ in one another.

**We come to take up the challenge of affirming each person as worthy of love.**

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 the third candle reminding us of spirited joy.

*(The third Advent candle is lit.)*

We light our fourth candle to mark how love abides by God's grace.

*(The fourth Advent candle is lit.)*

**Sung Response: A Candle is Burning VU 6 verse 4)**

**A candle is burning, a candle of love,**

**a candle to point us to heaven above.**

**A baby for Christmas, a wonderful birth,**

**for Jesus is bringing God's love to our earth.**

Let us join as one community of faith in prayer:

**We come to worship welcoming you, O God, into the centre of our living. Where you live in our hearts, we make room for strangers and for friends;**

**we make room for enemies and for allies; we make room for our neighbours.**

**We make ever more room for the power of your love. We thank you for the blessing of grace-filled love, knowing better each day how to share widely of the love you shower among us. Amen.**

## **Call to Worship**

The excitement of Christmas is building.  
We have only 3 days to go! We are waiting.  
Waiting for gifts and surprises, for parties and treats.  
Yet, we are also waiting for meaning.  
We seek a reassurance that lasts longer than candy canes or wrapping paper.  
We are waiting for belonging. We crave community,  
and a place to feel accepted, just as we are.  
The fulfillment of Christmas is awe-inspiring, every day of the year.  
It is a gift for us without limits. God's love is always ready for us.

## **Children's Time: What is one thing you hope for this Christmas?**

### **Hymn: Mary, Woman of the Promise**

(words of VU 16, vs. 1,2,3,5; sung to the tune of VU 399 with added Hallelujah's)

**Mary, woman of the promise, bearer of your people's dreams,  
through your open, willing spirit, waters of God's goodness streamed.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, waters of God's goodness streamed.**

**Mary, song of holy wisdom, sung before the world began,  
faithful to the word within you carried out God's wondrous plan.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, carried out God's wondrous plan.**

**Mary, morning star of justice, mirror of the Radiant Light,  
in the shadows of life's journey, be a beacon for our sight.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, be a beacon for our sight.**

**Mary, woman of the Gospel, precious home for treasured seed,  
help us to be true disciples, bearing fruit in word and deed.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, bearing fruit in word and deed.**

### **Opening Prayer: An Advent Prayer VU 26 (in unison)**

**Who are we, O God, that you should come to us?**

**Yet you have visited your people and redeemed us in your Son.**

**As we prepare to celebrate his birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your word,  
and move us by your spirit to bless your wonderful works.**

**We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near,  
ever your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### **Presentation of "Bethlehem's Child" – a Christmas Cantata**

By Victor C. Johnson and Lloyd Larson (Part 1)

Colleen Weber and Melville United Church Choir

Music: "Come and Worship"

Narration 1 & 2:

We gather to worship Christ, the newborn King; Jesus, the One foretold by prophets hundreds of years before his birth. One of the prominent themes of the Christmas story is that of hope. It was this hope that sustained the chosen people of God, the nation of Israel, as they awaited the promised Messiah.

Isaiah once said that God's ways are not our ways; God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Never is that more evident than it is in the Christmas story. Rulers, kings, and anointed leaders typically arrive from places of prominence, with royal announcements and pedigrees. But in the birth of Christ, nothing follows normal protocol. The prophet Micah foretold of the tiny village of Bethlehem from which this promised Messiah would come. But until that day arrived, Israel impatiently waited in darkness and despair, longing for an end to the seemingly endless night.

Music: "Waiting and Longing"

Narration 3:

A young couple from the small village of Nazareth, Joseph and Mary, were engaged to be married when they had an unexpected encounter with God. Angelic visits to each of them individually confirmed the unimaginable: they had been chosen by the Creator of the universe to become the earthly parents to the long-awaited Messiah. Once this child was born, they were to name him Jesus, for he would save his people. Initially overwhelmed at this unexpected news, they willingly accepted the call of God to be his humble servants.

Music: "My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord"

Narration 4:

When Mary was nearing the end of her pregnancy, Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census to be taken of the entire Roman world. Each family was to return to their ancestral home for registration. Joseph, taking Mary, returned to his hometown of Bethlehem, the city of David. Upon arrival, they took up temporary residence in a stable because they had been unable to find a place to stay. While they were there, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger. On that night, the Holy Child, Heaven's Child, the Son of God had come to earth.

Music: "Christ is Born in Bethlehem"

**Scripture: Luke 1:39-55**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

### **Brief Reflection: Mary's Song of Praise**

#### **Hymn: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming VU 8**

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming, from tender stem hath sprung,  
of Jesse's lineage coming, as seers of old have sung.  
It came a blossom bright, amid the cold of winter,  
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind,  
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.  
To show God's love a-right, she bore for us a Saviour,  
when half spent was the night.

#### **Presentation of "Bethlehem's Child" – a Christmas Cantata**

By Victor C. Johnson and Lloyd Larson (Part 2)

##### **Narration 5:**

It was an ordinary night on a Judean hillside just outside of Bethlehem where there were shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. Shepherds were unlikely candidates for earth-shattering news. But this as a night like none other! Suddenly, the blackness shone with extraordinary light as an angel proclaimed to them the news of Christ's birth: "Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born! He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." The skies were instantly filled with a great company of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" The shepherds immediately went with haste to Bethlehem to see this newborn Child.

Music: "Run, Shepherds!"

##### **Narration 6:**

Upon arriving at the stable, the shepherds did indeed witness what the angel had told them: a young mother and father, a humble manger stall, and the newborn Holy Child. All who heard the story of what the shepherds had witnessed were amazed! The young maiden Mary, chosen mother of God, treasured all of this in her heart. As Bethlehem slept, the King of the Ages had

come into the very world his tiny hands had once helped create. Earthly parents and shepherds could only marvel at the miracle before them.

Music: "Cradle Carol"

Narration 7:

The story of Christmas – God becoming human – is filled with the unlikeliest of elements. Only God could conceive such a plan. He chose an unlikely setting for this story: the tiny village of Bethlehem; an unlikely couple as supporting characters in this story: Joseph and Mary. God chose an unlikely audience through which to broadcast the news of Christ's birth: common shepherds; and he chose a newborn infant as the lead character in this life-changing story of redemption, love, and grace: Jesus, the Holy Child of Bethlehem. This is the compelling story of Christmas. This is the miraculous story of Bethlehem's Child!

Music: "Bethlehem's Child"

### **Joys and Concerns**

- **Birthdays**
  - Cecily Ricketts celebrates on Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup>
  - Doreen Broome celebrates on Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup>

### **Prayers of the People**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Offering Invitation**

There are opportunities to give every day, certainly through gifts of dollars and cents, but also through courageous action, faithful service, and loving devotion. Let us share of ourselves and of what God has so graciously given.

#### **Offering Hymn: In the Bleak Midwinter VU 55 (Verse 4)**

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.  
Yet what I can I give him – give him my heart.

#### **Offering Prayer**

#### **Hymn: Angels We Have Heard on High VU 38 (verses 1 & 2)**

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

**Glo – ria, in excelsis Deo!**

**Glo – ria, in excelsis Deo!**

**Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heavenly song?**

**Glo – ria, in excelsis Deo!**

**Glo – ria, in excelsis Deo!**

## Commissioning and Blessing

**Postlude: Joy to the World** by George Frideric Handel arranged by Albin C. Whitworth

### Household Prayer

“A Christmas Prayer” (VU 39)

Generous God, you gave your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him,  
and be born of your chosen one, Mary.

Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may  
daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit.

Through our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God  
now and forever. Amen.

**Welcomers:** Doreen and Larry Broome

**Counters:** Norm Porritt, Phil Brown

### Worship Schedule

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