

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Christmas Eve December 24, 2020



MEDITATION

“We are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child again at Christmastime.” —Laura Ingalls Wilder

Welcome and News of the Church

Statement of Welcome

**No matter who I am, No matter where I am on life’s journey, I am welcome here.
No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, You are welcome here!**

Statement of Purpose

One: Who are you?	All: I am a beloved child of God!
One: What does that mean?	All: I am a person of worth to be valued!
One: Then what will you do?	All: I will live a life of Love and Acceptance of myself and all God’s people!

PRELUDE

Sandy Wentzloff

THE CALL

John 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it

GATHERING HYMNS

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

vs 1, 3, 4 NCH #135

O come, all you faithful, Joyful and triumphant; O come now, O come now to Bethlehem. Come and behold the ruler of all angels, O Come in adoration, O come in adoration, O come in adoration; Christ is Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation; sing, all you messengers of heavenly love! Glory to God, all glory in the highest; O Come in adoration, O come in adoration, O come in adoration; Christ is Lord!

Amen, Lord, we greet you, born this happy morning; Jesus to you shall all glory be given; Word of our God now in flesh appearing; O Come in adoration, O come in adoration, O come in adoration; Christ is Lord!

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

vs 1, 2, 3 NCH #129

Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice; now give heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today. Ox and ass before him bow, asleep within the manger now. Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice; now you know of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this! God has opened heaven's door, and you are blessed forevermore.

Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice; now you need not fear the grave:

**Jesus Christ was born to save! Calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!**

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

vs 1, 2, 3

NCH #144

**Hark, the herald angels sing, “Glory to the Christ-child bring; Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinner reconciled!” Joyful, all you saints arise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angel host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem”
Hark! The herald angels sing “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”**

**Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord! Late in time the Savior comes,
offspring of the Virgin's womb: veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
pleased on earth with us to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”**

**Hail the Bearer of God's Peace! Hail the Son of righteousness! Light and life our Savior brings,
risen with radiant, healing wings. Mildly laying glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us all from earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing “Glory to the Christ-child bring!”**

CALL TO WORSHIP

Isaiah 9

One: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

All: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named,

One: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,

All: Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

One: His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

All: He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness,

One: from this time onwards,

All: and for evermore.

INVOCATION

O Word made Flesh, You have come into our midst as light and wisdom, desiring to be known to us in our lives and to be found in the world around us.

Open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to recognize you where you dwell—in our midst—Challenging, heartening, lighting the way to truth, peace, justice.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Tonight we light the four Advent candles. The first candle is the **Hope** shining for those worn thin by times of waiting. The second candle is the **Peace**, shining for those worn down with wearied souls. The third candle captures **Joy**, the expectation of those eagerly watching for God's glory in our day. The fourth candle is the **Love** of a new tomorrow shining for those seeking freedom from the wounds of this world.

**Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, Shine through the darkness
Christ be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.**

Verse: Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

**Refrain: Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, Shine through the darkness
Christ be our light! Shine in your Church gathered today.**

CONFESSING OUR HUMANNESS

One: When we close our eyes to the Light of the World
Struggling to illuminate the lives of everyone, especially those who are poor and
oppressed:

All: Lord, have mercy.

One: When we close our ears to the Wisdom of God,
Struggling to be heard above hate-filled words and fear-filled rhetoric:

All: Christ, have mercy.

One: When we close our hearts to the Glory of God,
Which is known fully only in a world of peace where all creation thrives,

All: Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: In Christ, the Light, the Word, the Glory of God's love shines in our hearts, and we are
forgiven and given strength to go forward into a new future. Beloved People of God,
Let us give thanks that in Jesus, Emmanuel, God is truly with us.

HYMN

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

NCH #125

**Angels we have heard on high, Sweetly singing o'er the plains. And the mountains in reply,
Echo back their joyous strains. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

**Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be, which inspire your heavenly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

**Come to Bethlehem and see, Christ whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee
God, our world now entering. Gloria in excelsis Deo. Gloria in excelsis Deo.**

**See the babe in 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!**

LECTIONARY TEXT

Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:[1-7] 8-20

Isaiah 9:2-7 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land
of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its
joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have
broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled
in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this

Luke 2:1-20 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

MEDITATION

"Emmanuel: God is With Us"

Pastor Dennis

It is a joy to gather together on this Christmas Eve! We are glad to be together and to celebrate the greatest news of all- that God chose to come to our world in Jesus and to live in our midst.

Prayer: *O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our doubt and enter in, be born in us today. Amen.*

It was the annual SS Children's Christmas program. The church was packed with people. Parents and grandparents were eager to see their children enact the Christmas story. Things got off to a good start. Mary and Joseph came down the aisle of the church- right on cue! The two kids that played the part of the donkey were actually cooperating for a change. And when Mary and Joseph reached the front of the sanctuary, they were met by a 9-year-old boy playing part of the innkeeper. He dutifully told them that though he would like to help them out, he could not. "Sorry," he said "like the sign says out front 'No Vacancy.'" And then just as Mary and Joseph were directed to do, they turned and walked slowly away with a sad and concerned look on their faces. But the innkeeper could not take his eyes off of them. As he watched the couple walk away, he shouted, "Hold on. Just a minute, there's a great hotel around the corner that has cable TV, HBO, free breakfast and a hot tub." Well, the program came to an end. The congregation loved the new twist to an old, old story. But the director of the program declared it was a shamble and said to anybody who would listen, "That's not the way things go. That's not the way it's supposed to be."

The director's words might describe for many people what they are feeling this Christmas of 2020. Perhaps you are alone this Christmas Eve and won't be with family and friends as you always are in previous years. Perhaps you won't be able to have the festive dinners and celebrations that are a

tradition for you at this time. Perhaps some won't be financially able to provide as much Christmas as they normally do, if at all. And perhaps for you a significant part of this night is attending Christmas Eve worship and singing the familiar carols, receiving Holy Communion and lighting the handheld candles as Silent Night is sung. Let's be honest, this Christmas is different. For our safety and the safety of others we need to keep distant from each other, we can't gather as we like and most everything is virtual these days.

And yet in the midst of this, we gather tonight to hear the Good News that God does not keep distant from us, God does not keep a safe distance away from us, God is not virtual with us. No, God is real. This is what Christmas is all about! God coming to us, becoming fully human- really human to us in Jesus. So many aspects of our life right now might be described as distant, virtual, isolated. But these words don't describe God. As Luke says, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Unto you...UNTO YOU! And in Matthew's version of the Christmas story he says, "...you shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us." We rejoice tonight because we have a God who is with us and for us!

A grandfather was visiting his daughter and her family one Christmas. This grandfather walked into the family room and saw his little granddaughter sitting in the corner and she was crying. The girl's face was red and tear-stained. But when she saw her granddad, her face lit up and her hands reached out for help as she pleaded "Out Papa, Out Papa!" Now, what grandparent could resist that? So, the grandfather went over to the corner and reached down to lift his little buddy up into his arms. But just then the girl's mother entered the room. She had a frown on her face and spoke, "Honey, you know better. You're being punished. Leave her right there, Dad." And with that she marched back out of the room!

Now the grandfather didn't know what to do. His granddaughter's tears and outstretched hands tugged at his heart, but he didn't want to interfere with his daughter's discipline, either. He couldn't stand being in the same room and not be able to do anything. But he couldn't leave without feeling like a traitor. What's a grandparent to do?

Well, this grandpa had an idea. Since he couldn't take his grandchild out of the corner, he walked over to the corner, bent over and sat down next to the girl. So, there was grandpa and granddaughter together in the corner- with grandpa's loving arms wrapped around this granddaughter.

This grandfather is a picture to us of God. God has heard our cries and knows our needs and loves us too much to just remain distant and leave us alone. Christmas is about a God who becomes real to us and with us.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent an entertainer. But our greatest is love, so God came Godself! "For UNTO YOU is born this day a savior who is Christ the Lord and you shall call his name Emmanuel- God with us.

In coming to us in Jesus, God assures you and me that we are not alone in the universe- we are not alone in this time of social distance and virtual communication, but God is with us. God is with us in the big moments and bad moments and every day moments, for that is God's very name: Emmanuel. That is what Christmas every year and especially this year is all about.

And we believe that God who came to us that first Christmas and who is with us always is even more present to us during times in our lives that are difficult or frustrating for us. Even in times when it seems so dark and lonely for us, that is when God is most profoundly present with you and with me.

I love the story about two older sisters. I want you to imagine these two women both in their young 80's, they had never married and were living on a farm in ND. Their farm was in shambles. The chicken coop was falling down. The barn was falling down. The rusted machinery was falling apart, and even the older women were falling apart. But these two women were as tough as nails. They had weathered every storm for the past sixty years and they were tough. Well, it so happened that their nephew came to visit them one fall day from the city, and he took out his camera to take a picture of his weather worn aunts, with the barn and the chicken coop and rusted machinery in the background. The aunts just stood there, straight and stiff for the picture. The nephew took a picture and later sent them a copy. The old aunts just loved that photograph, and they decided to use it for a Christmas card that year. At the top of their picture, they put the words, "Merry Christmas", in bold, black letters. And at the bottom of the picture, in big bold letters were the words: "God is with us in our mess!"

Dear friend, this is the message of Christmas! Christmas 2020 is most likely different than any Christmas that we have ever experienced before. As we encounter life with a deadly virus, the need to keep distant from loved ones, a tough economy, social unrest and political turmoil, it may seem to us like a mess!

Yet, may you hear and know the good news of this night: God is with you, now and forever. God is here. If you are at the end of your rope with frustration, uncertainty, loneliness, God is here with you. Holding out his hand to you tonight! In faith, take hold of God's hand anew tonight. Trust God afresh with the future and all that weighs heavy on your heart tonight. And find in God your peace, your comfort, your joy and your all. For God, "Emmanuel" is with us. Amen.

HYMN

"Away in a Manger"

NCH #124

**Away in a manger, No crib for a bed, The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky look down where he lay, The little Lord Jesus, Asleep on the hay.**

**The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, But little Lord Jesus, No crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus, Protect me I pray, And stay by my side until night turns to day.**

**Be near me, Lord Jesus I ask You to stay Close by me forever And love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Your tender care, and fit us for heaven To live with You there.**

PRAYER OF CHRISTMAS

TIME OF GIFTING TO GOD AND THE CHURCH

Call to Gifting: The Love of God is born new in the world as often as we embody that love with works of compassion, peace and justice.
We offer gifts in a spirit of generosity and hope.

Receiving and Presenting our Gifts to God

**Tithes, Offerings, From the Heart Offering and Pledges can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ
P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. You can also donate on our website listen2god.org
or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.**

Christmas Doxology

**God's love incarnate now has come
God's glory on earth has now begun
Let now these gifts enable peace
And work to cause all discord to cease. Amen.**

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

All: With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let our gifts point to your presence in the world, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLE LIGHTING SERVICE

GIFT OF MUSIC

"O Holy Night"

Pauline Marlinski

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: In a world where so many wait in darkness, light comes into our hearts through a baby born in a manger! He is Immanuel, Christ the Lord! Hear the word of the Lord: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

All: The light shines, and the darkness cannot put it out!!

Hymn

"Silent Night, Holy Night"

NCH #134

**Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, All is bright.
Round yon virgin, Mother and child Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent Night, Holy Night, Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing hallelujah,
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.**

**Silent night, holy night! Child of God, love's pure light.
Radiant beams from your holy, face bring the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Christ at your birth, Jesus Christ at your birth.**

One: One candle is but a flicker, but together, we create a bright flame of Christ's light in the world. Consider the beauty of our lights shining together. Jesus is the light of the world! Jesus is the hope of all our tomorrows! May we be witnesses of the light Christ brings,

Benediction

One: Beloved People of God! Fear not! For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord!

Hymn

"Joy to the World"

NCH #132

**Joy to The world! The Lord is come. Let earth its praises bring;
Let every heart prepare Christ room.
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the earth! the Savior 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.
Christ rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove the
glories of God's righteousness,
And wonders of God's love, and wonders of God's love,
And wonders, wonders of God's love.

Postlude

Sandy Wentzloff

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Remember in Prayer: Jim Peterson, Bill Walsh, Greg Armstrong (Howard's brother), Dick Carlson, Bill and Nancy Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for health and healing for all people. Pray especially for those serving on the front lines caring for those with COVID-19. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

