

GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER
(*Please stand as you are able)

WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

WE ENTER WORSHIP

THE MEANING OF THE BELLS (Amanda Weldon)

Bells have been used throughout the centuries to call people to worship or to bring them good news. Good news and bad news have been heralded by bells. When heirs to royalty were born in European countries, bells rang, and bells rang when Christians died. They ring to call us to God's house. Today's bells will ring to call us to remember the birth, which is soon to be celebrated among us: that of the King's Heir, Our Lord, the Christ.

PRELUDE Come, All Ye Shepherds arr. Warner

INTROIT He Is Exalted FWS # 2070

LIGHTING THE PEACE LAMP/PRAYER FOR PEACE

*EXTENDING PEACE TO EACH OTHER

(L): May the peace of Christ be with you.

(P): And also with you.

(L): Let us welcome one another in the name of Christ.

The peace of Christ is passed

*HYMN Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus # 196

MISSION MOMENT

GOD SIGHTINGS/JOYS/CONCERNS/THE LORD'S PRAYER # 895

HANGING OF THE GREENS SERVICE

RESPONSIVE READING: ISAIAH 11:1-6; 10 (Dave Simmons)

(L): A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

(P): The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

(L): And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears;

(P): But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

(L): Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

(P): The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

(L): In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples;

(P): the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

THE MEANING OF ADVENT – Pastor Penni

Advent is a time of preparation, a time of penance, and a time of waiting. As we make ready for Christ's coming, we prepare our homes with the symbols of Christmas, and we prepare our hearts by opening them to God's promise and by showing our repentance. Then, in awesome anticipation, we wait, focusing our homes and hearts on God's greatest gift to the world – God's son, born as a tiny babe in a humble manger in Bethlehem. As the prophet Isaiah foretold so long ago, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, as we decorate this building, adorn our hearts and minds with your love and peace. Help us to focus with joy on the true meaning of Christmas. May the hope, peace and joy of this season clothe us in your bountiful grace and love as we witness to the world your gift of salvation through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ISAIAH 9:2

(Krista Juzack)

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF THE ADVENT WREATH

The origin of a burning wreath is found in the traditions of pre-Christian Germanic people who burned the greens in the hope of spring following a long winter. In the 16th century throughout Germany, the Advent wreath became a traditional symbol for many Christians. The circle of evergreens, having no end and bearing four candles, reminds us of the eternal Christ, the light of the world. Each Sunday in Advent, a new candle is lit until all four glow on the fourth Sunday.

The three purple or blue candles represent the darkness of a sinful world. The pink candles represent the coming of the light. On the first Sunday of Advent, the first dark-hued candle represents hope, reminding us of God’s promise that Christ is our hope and our salvation. On the second Sunday of Advent, the candle symbolizes peace, reminding us that Jesus is the “Prince of Peace.” The third Advent candle represents joy, reminding us of the angel’s message, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. The pink Advent candle symbolizes love, reminding us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

PENNI: Let us pray: Holy One, you have given us hope in the promise of your Son. Today we pray that you guide us in our preparation for Christ’s birth. Fill our minds with peace and our hearts with joy. We thank you, Lord, for the gift of love you have given us in your Son. Amen.

HYMN:

People Look East

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PSALM 92:12-15

(Barbara Simmons)

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the

courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock.."

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF EVERGREENS

Hanging greenery goes back to ancient Rome. Evergreen roping and wreaths hung in homes and on buildings as a sign of victory. Evergreens include not only fir, cedar and pine, but also ivy, holly and rosemary. Christians continued to follow the practice of hanging greens as a symbol of Jesus' victory over death.

Evergreens offer a variety of symbols and traditions. Holly has become a sign of Christ's Passion. The prickly leaves suggest the crown of thorns and the red berries, the blood that Jesus shed for our sins. A legend says the rosemary shrub is fragrant because Mary laid the Christ child's garments on its branches. In the Middle Ages, rosemary was spread on the floor of homes at Christmas, and as people walked on it, a pleasant aroma filled the air. The evergreen also serves as a symbol of eternal life – always green, always fresh and alive, everlasting. Thus, the evergreen is a symbol of the eternal promise of salvation and the everlasting God. The hanging of the greens has become a tradition of preparation for Christmas.

RESPONSIVE READING: 1 PETER 1:23-25

(L): "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

(P): All are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

(L): the grass withers and the flowers fall,

(P): but the word of the Lord stands forever."

ANTHEM

In the Fullness of Time

ISAIAH 60:1-2

(Cathy Mowers)

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF THE POINSETTIA

The poinsettia is known in Central America as the “Flower of the Holy Night.” This blossom is a newer Christmas tradition beginning in the early nineteenth century when Dr. Joel Poinsett, our first ambassador to Mexico, introduced it to the United States. Its star shape reminds us of the Bethlehem star. Two legends have evolved from this flower. The first explains its origin. A little boy, having nothing to give the baby Jesus, prayed, and as he did, the flower grew at his feet. He picked the blossom and gave it to the Christ child. The second legend tells us that the poinsettia was white, representing the purity of Christ, but when Jesus died on the cross, the blossom changed to blood red. So, the star-shaped poinsettia reminds us of the holy night pointing us toward Good Friday.

RESPONSIVE READING: ISAIAH 35:1-2

(L): The desert and the parched land will be glad;

(P): the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

(L): Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;

(P): it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

HYMN: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming # 216

LUKE 2:15-16 (Karen Hill)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF THE NATIVITY SCENE

In the Middle Ages, when few people could read and church services were in Latin, carved figures were used to tell Bible stories, especially the story of Jesus' birth, the Nativity. This scene bears many names: Nativity scene, Christmas manger, manger scene, and Crèche, to name a few.

St. Francis of Assisi is given credit for popularizing the manger scene in 1224 when he used a cave outside a small Italian town and set up a

manger scene with live animals and real people. Jesus, the Christ child, was life-size and was made of wax. Our manger scenes today include camels – a common animal in the East. They were called “Ships of the Desert”. The camel’s presence reminds us of the wise men from the East who came seeking the Christ child.

RESPONSIVE READING: MICAH 5:2-5

(L): "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

(P): Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth...

(L): He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

(P): And he will be their peace."

***HYMN**

Away in a Manger

217

GALATIANS 3:13; ISAIAH 53:5

(Peter Mowers)

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

In ancient times, trees and all nature were held in great reverence as a symbol of rebirth. During the season of Yule, trees were brought indoors and decorated as part of pagan worship. Because of this, trees were banned in many Christian churches until the church leaders studied the words of Isaiah 60:13, “The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet.”

Many legends have evolved about the Christmas tree. One of the oldest is said to have happened nearly one thousand years ago when St. Boniface, in protest to tree worshipers, cut down an oak tree, and to his

amazement, a fir tree sprung from its roots. Another legend from the 16th century tells the story of Martin Luther, a German church reformer, who was inspired by the beauty of an evergreen tree lit by the stars on Christmas Eve. He cut down the tree, dragged it home, and lighted the limbs with candles to simulate the stars in the sky above Bethlehem.

However, modern researchers believe the Christmas tree evolved from the Paradise tree, which was part of the ancient “mystery plays” banned by the church in the 15th century. The Paradise tree, decorated with apples, told the story of Adam and Eve. No longer found in the church, people took the custom of the Paradise tree into their homes. During this same time, wooden Christmas pyramids were used on Christmas Eve, decorated with candles. In the late Middle Ages, glass bulbs and the Bethlehem star were added. These two customs seem the logical origin of our Christmas tree, reminding us of the tree on which Christ was crucified. It serves as a wonderful symbol of our salvation and forgiveness through Jesus.

BLESSING OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE Pastor Penni

Let us pray: Holy Lord, we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son, who rescued us from the darkness of sin by making the cross a tree of life and light. May this tree, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF CHRISMONS (Frances Goutremont)

Chrismons (a contraction for Christ monograms) are Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them. Frances Spencer and the women of the Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia first developed Chrismons in 1957. Chrismons help Christians remember that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus's birthday. Chrismons are traditionally colored white and gold. White is the liturgical (or Church) color for Christmas and symbolizes that Jesus was pure and perfect. Gold symbolizes His Majesty and Glory. They are found on Christmas trees in Churches and Christians homes.

HYMN

Like a Child

FWS # 2092

Chrismons placed on tree by Sunday school children

MATTHEW 2:1-2 (Lindsay Webb)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTMAS STAR

The star serves as a symbol of Christmas in many ways. First, we remember the star of Bethlehem and the Magi following the star to find the Christ child. Revelation 22:16 also refers to Jesus as the Morning Star: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." As well, the starlight is universal, its rays are seen everywhere, and so stars have become a symbol of peace throughout the world.

PRAYER – PENNI: Let us pray: Loving and giving God, like the Magi, we follow the Christmas star waiting to worship the newborn King. As we decorate our Christmas trees, may you decorate our hearts and light our spirit, as we prepare for the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*HYMN: There's a Song in the Air # 249

MATTHEW 2:10-11 Pastor Penni

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF GIFT-GIVING

Gift giving is an ancient practice. During the midwinter, giving gifts was practiced by the ancient German and Scandinavian tribes to celebrate Yule. St. Nicholas, born in Asia Minor, used his wealth to help the needy

with unexpected gifts and many legends grew about him and his generosity.

The biblical account of the Magi bringing gifts to the Christ child may also have been the origin of Christmas gift-giving. Always, Christians embrace the birth of Jesus as God's most precious gift to humankind. Others look to Christ's unselfish and generous nature and believe that gift-giving is an attempt to emulate Jesus. During the Christmas season, most people become more generous and charitable.

An ancient legend might also be the motivation for Christmas generosity. The tale relates that on Christmas Eve, the Christ child wanders the earth disguised as a beggar, seeking food and shelter. Any kindness or hospitality shown during this season is considered a gesture of love for Jesus. The Bible tells us: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

PASTOR PENNI: During the following hymn, let us reflect our love for Christ by showing our generosity for those in need as the Lord has done. Please bring your tithes and gifts to the altar and place in the offering plates.

HYMN: The First Noel - Vs. 1-3 # 245

RESPONSIVE READING: ROMANS 13:11-12 (Amanda Weldon)

(L): The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber,

(P): because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

(L): The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.

(P): So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

HYMN: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light # 206
Swags and window candles will be lit

PSALM 23:1-4 (Chuck Ames)

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores

my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

THE ORIGIN AND SYMBOL OF CANDY CANES

The shepherd’s crook is a common symbol of Christmas, reminding us of the humble shepherds who were the first to worship the newborn Christ child. The “candy cane” had its beginning in 1670 where a choir master in Germany handed out sugar sticks, bent as a shepherd’s crook to keep his young singers quiet during a Christmas pageant.

At the turn of the century, red and white stripes and peppermint flavoring became the norm. The white represents Christ’s purity and the red stripe, the Lord’s sacrifice for man. The candy cane can be seen as a “J” standing for Jesus or the crook of the Good Shepherd. No matter how plentiful and traditional the candy cane is at Christmas, it is a true symbol of Christ’s birth.

***HYMN:** O Little Town of Bethlehem – verses 1-2 # 230
 Candy canes given during the singing of this hymn.

SENDING FORTH – PENNI

(L): And now Lord, Creator of all there is – trees, flowers, and light – be with us through this Advent season as we wait with patience for the coming of the Christ child. As we have adorned this place of worship, let our hearts shine adored with your everlasting light. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem. **AMEN.**

BENEDICTION Love Came Down at Christmas # 242

POSTLUDE Carol of the Bells arr. Smith