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# St. James'-Rosemount United Church

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## *United Church Women*



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December 14, 2021

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UCW Candlelight & Communion Service

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Welcome

Hymn: **All Earth is Waiting** VU 5

**1 All earth is waiting to see the Promised One,  
and open furrows await the seed of God.**

**All the world, bound and struggling,  
seeks true liberty;**

**it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.**

**2 Thus says the prophet to those of Israel,  
'A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel.'**

**One whose name is 'God with us',  
our Saviour shall be,**

**through whom hope will blossom once more  
within our hearts.**

**3 Mountains and valleys will have to be made plain,  
open new highways, new highways for our God,  
who is now coming closer, so come all and see,  
and open the doorways as wide as wide can be.**

**4 In lowly stable the Promised One appeared.  
Yet, feel that presence throughout the earth today,  
for Christ lives in all Christians and is with us now;  
again, on arriving, Christ brings us liberty.**

Call to Worship:

One: Say to those who are of fearful heart:

**All: Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.**

One: Then the eyes shall be opened,

**All: And the ears unstopped.**

One: Then the sick shall leap like a deer,

**All: And the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.**

One: For the waters shall break forth in the wilderness

**All: And streams in the desert.**

One: And we shall come to Zion with singing.

**All: We shall obtain joy and gladness,  
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

*(written by Wanda Winfield, Gathering Advent/ Christmas/ Epiphany, 2016-2017, page 29, used by permission)*

Opening Prayer:

One: Without you, God, our joy is a bit like a messed up recipe for Christmas cookies.

It is something we try to make for ourselves and by ourselves.

But we do not know all the ingredients and we do not get the mix right.

Visit us now in this place

fill our hearts; occupy our minds;

guide our feeling and our thinking

until we learn how to rejoice, filled with true joy, always in your goodness and love.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen

*.(written by John Moses, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2017-2018 page 28, used by permission)*

Scripture: **Isaiah 40:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her

that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,



**I believe in the smell of the stable-  
I believe there is no place God will not go.  
I believe in the shepherds,  
those simple ones open to hear the angel's song.  
I believe in the Magi, the ones outside the faith,  
outside the community, who searched out the Holy.  
I believe in Jesus, born in poverty,  
soon a refugee, raised in faith,  
lived seeking justice, died speaking forgiveness,  
rose with a love that could not be stopped.  
I commit to use this season to seek out the Holy  
both in God among us, and God beyond us.  
I open myself to an Advent journey of great joy  
that will change my life**

*(written barb Jones, inspired by "I believe in Jesus Christ" by Walter Russell Bowie, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2010-2011, page 32, Used by permission)*

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Reflection: Joseph's Dilemma

It's amazing, frightening, really, how quickly life can turn around. Joseph's life had been turned upside down in an instant, with just three words. Until two weeks ago he had been the happiest man in Nazareth. He was engaged to Mary-a beautiful vibrant kind woman. Both of the families seemed pleased with the match. On top of that, his carpentry business was flourishing. Until two weeks, ago, he had been humming songs of praise as he worked on various pieces of furniture. As he hummed, he day-dreamed and prayed for a day in the

future, maybe in a dozen years or so, God willing, when he would begin to teach his son the skills of his trade.

And then two weeks ago, Mary spoke those words that changed his prayer in to lament and his daydream into a nightmare. “I am pregnant,” she told him. Joseph knew that Mary’s child wasn’t his. But he didn’t know who the father was. When he asked Mary, she wouldn’t tell him. All she said was that he wouldn’t believe it if she told him. She asked him to trust her. She asked him to trust that God would make everything work out.

Music: **A Baby Changes Everything**

Scripture: Isaiah 7:13-16

<sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Reflection

How do you trust when trust has been broken? That was just one of the questions that kept Joseph awake at night. Every night for the past two weeks sleep had eluded him. As soon as he closed his eyes, the questions and the conflicting emotions swirled in his mind. He tossed and turned throughout the night as he considered his options.

Scripture: Galatians 4:4-5

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Reflection

Because Mary was carrying someone else's child, Joseph was obligated by the law to dismiss her as his betrothed. At first he felt so betrayed and angry that he wanted to do more than dismiss her. He wanted to get even. If he knew who the father was, Joseph would see that the no-good scoundrel got what was coming to him. He considered telling his next door neighbour, the town gossip, that Mary had cheated on him. He could imagine his neighbour, at sunrise standing at the well in the town centre whispering in the ears of all the women as they came for water. By mid-morning, Mary's reputation would be in tatters. By mid-morning Mary, and maybe even her guilty lover, would be dragged to the gates of the town for sentencing. What if someone decided that Mary should be punished according to the law of Moses? What if someone threw a stone and hit her as the law demanded? What if others followed suit? By noon, Mary could be lying in a broken and bloody heap-dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

No, as upset as he was, Joseph couldn't let that happen to Mary. His churning stomach helped him realize that he loved her deeply.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;

and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 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 onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

### Reflection

But what could he do? Even though his heart was breaking, he couldn't bear to see Mary hurt. Maybe he would just break the engagement quietly. He didn't have to tell; anyone the reason. Yeah, that's what he could do. Her wouldn't humiliate her or expose her to a public stoning. He would do what he could to protect her. He tried not to think about what would happen when Mary's belly started to swell. But in the dead of night he kept seeing her standing alone, using her bare hands to try to deflect the rocks being hurtled at her. Joseph kept tossing and turning all night long. The next morning he was so tired his eyes stung as if he had been in a sandstorm. In the middle of the day, he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer, so he sat on his bench in the shade of a tree and immediately fell asleep and began to dream.

In his dream, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and spoke. He couldn't really see the angel. It was bathed in a beautiful light. But he heard every word when the angel spoke in a voice of calm and gentle authority: "Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child being knit together in Mary's womb is God's child.

This child is God's gift to you and Mary and the whole world. Joseph, God needs you to love this child as your own son. This child needs your love and devotion. He needs the example of your obedience and faithfulness. He needs you to name him Jesus - God saves. He needs you to claim him as part of your family, for you come from a long line of faithful descendants who have known God's steadfast love in difficult circumstances. Your family, like every family, has known tragedy and brokenness and sin. Your family, like every family, needs to know the forgiving, healing love of God. Joseph, Mary's child will help you to know God's love in a way you have never known before. Joseph, you need this child in your life. Joseph, Mary needs you. Her baby needs you. God needs you. Don't be afraid. God will give you the strength and wisdom to do the right thing."

Joseph woke with a start and he knew what he would do. He went back to work, but not on the shelves he had been making for a customer. Instead he chose some fine olive wood and began cutting narrow strips that he would fashion into a cradle - a cradle for his son, Jesus. As he worked he began to hum.

Scripture: Luke 2:7

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.

Hymn:

**Still, Still, Still**

VU47

**1 Still, still, still: the night is calm and still.  
The Christchild in his crib lies sleeping,  
angels round him watch are keeping.  
Still, still, still: the night is calm and still.**

**2 Sleep, sleep, sleep: sweet Jesus, softly sleep,  
while Mary sings and gently holds you,  
safely in her arms enfolds you.  
Sleep, sleep, sleep: sweet Jesus softly sleep.**

**3 Joy, joy, joy; glad tidings of great joy!  
For through God's holy incarnation  
Christ is born for our salvation.  
Joy, joy, joy; glad tidings of great joy!**

## OFFERING

Invitation to the Offering

One: God's Word of hope is coming into the world,  
Hope for the lowly, the broken, and the fearful.  
Hope for a better world. In anticipation of God's  
Hope- let us offer our gifts preparing for the coming  
of Christ among us.

*(written by Frances Flook,  
Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, 2016-2017 page 31, Used by permission.)*

Prayer of Dedication

**All: Loving God, we present these gifts as well as  
the gifts we cannot put on an offering plate:  
our hearts and lives. Amen.**

*(written by Beth Johnston, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/ Epiphany 2010-2011)*

Music: Light of the World

## COMMUNION

One: We wait in the darkness,  
expectantly, longingly, anxiously, thoughtfully.  
In the darkness of the womb,  
we have all been nurtured and protected.  
In the darkness of the womb the Christ-child was  
made ready for the journey into light.

In the darkness of the stable, Joseph made space for Mary, creating comfort amidst the chaos.

It is only in the darkness that we can see the splendour of the universe – blankets of stars, the solitary glowings of the planets.

It was the darkness that allowed the Magi to find the star that guided them to the Christ child.

In the darkness of the night, people in desert regions find relief from the cruel relentless heat of the sun.

In the blessed desert darkness

Mary and Joseph were able to flee with the infant Jesus to safety in Egypt. In the darkness of sleep, we are soothed and restored, healed and renewed.

In the darkness of sleep, dreams rise up.

God spoke to Joseph and the wise men through dreams. God is speaking still.

Sometimes in the solitude of the darkness our fears and concerns, our hopes and visions rise to the surface.

We come face to face with ourselves and with the road that lies ahead of us.

Be bread for us as we share the gifts of this life, on this journey we share together.

Nurture us. Feed us. Give us new life we pray.

### *Breaking the Bread and Sharing the Cup*

One: And in that same darkness we find companionship for the journey. And then, in the darkness we know that you are with us, O God, still we await your coming. In the darkness that contains both our hopelessness and our hope, we watch for a sign of God's hope.

For you are with us, O God,  
in darkness and in light.

*Adapted from a prayer from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand*

## LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

One: Come now, light your candles from the source of all light, and may our lights shine so brightly that all who see them may know that we worship the Christ, the Light of the World.

*Minister & assistant light their candles from the Christ candle and go to foot of stairs. Ladies come forward to light their candles and form a circle of light in the dimmed sanctuary while singing "Silent Night".*

Hymn

**Silent Night**

VU 67



Silent night, Holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin, mother and child  
Holy infant, 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  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord at thy birth Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

***Thank-you to all who participated in and attended  
this service.***