

A Celtic Christmas Service

December 24, 2023 -- 5.00 pm

Come as you are, for God's embrace is wide.
A warm welcome to you. We are delighted that you are here.
As you arrive, please enjoy the silence.

Welcome – The Rev. Michael Bradley

Bell at the Opening

Prelude: I Wonder As I Wander

The Opening Word -- A Christmas Poem -- Mary Oliver (1935-2019)

Says a country legend told every year: Go to the barn on Christmas Eve and see what the creatures do as that long night tips over. Down on their knees they will go, the fire of an old memory whistling through their minds!

I went. Wrapped to my eyes against the cold I creaked back the barn door and peered in. From town the church bells spilled their midnight music, and the beasts listened – yet they lay in their stalls like stone.

Still they drowsed on – citizens of the pure, the physical world, they loomed in the dark: powerful of body, peaceful of mind, innocent of history, even their own.

Brothers! I whispered. It is Christmas! And you are no heretics, but miracles, immaculate still as when you thundered forth on the morning of creation!

As for Bethlehem, that blazing star still sailed the dark, but only looked for me. Caught in its light, listening again to its story, I curled against some sleepy beast, who nuzzled my hair as though I were a child, and warmed me the best it could all night.

All stand

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come, and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Child, for us sinners poor and in the manger, we come to greet thee, with love and
awe; Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly? R.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation; sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God, glory in the highest! R.

All are seated

Bell at the Prayer for the Evening

silence is kept before the prayer

Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness. Let us be still in the presence of God. It is night
after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not
been done; let it be. The night is dark. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of
our own lives rest in you. The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all who are dear to us, and all who have no peace. This night, this Holy Night, heralds a
new dawn, a stretching out to what is ahead as your Christ comes into our world.

Amen.

Music for Meditation – The Wexford Carol

A moment of silence is kept

The Birth of Jesus Christ According to Luke

After the reading: Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's People. **Thanks be to God.**

A moment of silence is kept.

Music for Meditation – Coventry Carol

The Reflection

After the reflection, all stand.

May the deep peace of Christ which passes all understanding be with you this night
and in all the days to come. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

*The ministers and the people greet one another in the name of God's Peace.
After exchanging the Peace, all are seated for a moment of silence.*

Bell at the Offertory.

During the hymn, ushers will receive your offering for the work and ministry of St. Michael's Church. Please stand and sing:

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?

**This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.**

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?

Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading. R.

**So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant, king, to own him;
the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him. R.**

The Holy Communion, a Time for Blessings

We now come forward for a moment of grace. We come to a place of grace and a place of hospitality. Here we each are invited to be blessed, either by ancient words of blessing made new, or by the sharing of bread and wine, ordinary things in which God's love is somehow made present. If you wish to receive a blessing place your hand on your shoulder and it will be joyfully given you. If you wish to receive bread and wine place your open hand outward. All will be blessed at this table; none will be sent away hungry. We have begun a new way to know God's grace. We come to a place of grace and hospitality. We now come forward for a moment of grace.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

O God of mystery and promise, you invite us to discover you in the intimate places of ourselves and our lives. You invite us to discover you within the complexities of our humanity, in passionate and tender loving, in struggle and pain, in confusion and unknowing, in flashes of insight and wisdom. You also call us beyond ourselves to places of imagination, beyond the silent stars, in the deep rhythms of the ocean, in the unending cycles of day and night, seasons of life and death.

With all those who have come before us, with our friends and those still unknown to us, with all creation we join with angels and archangels who sing this song of your unending love:

1 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of power and might,
2 Bless - ed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

heaven and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
Ho - san - na in the high - est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

Text: English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988, alt. © 1988 ELLC.
Music: Kenneth George Finlay, adapt. Gordon Appleton. © Broomhill Hyndland Parish Church. GLENBENLAS

We praise you that in Jesus you make known to us the wonder and richness of our humanity. We give thanks for his birth, and life-giving love, for his healing touch, for his vulnerability and for his truth-telling. Before he gave up his life, he shared his humanity, his flesh and blood with his friends.

He took bread, gave thanks for it, broke it and gave it to them saying:

Together: **This is my own body given for you. Do this to remember me.**

After they had eaten, he took wine, gave thanks for it and gave it to them saying:

Together: **This is my blood, poured out in love for you. Do this to remember me.**

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

Come now, Spirit of God, and as we eat and drink these ordinary things made sacred, make us one body, one food for the world, one blood to be poured out for the life of all. Touch us with your gentle creativity and fire us with longing and imagination for a new age of justice and peace. We ask this through Jesus, that we might find new life with him and through him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, be to you, O God, all honor and glory forever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

Amen.

Friends, this is the table, not of the Church, but of a Gracious God. It is made ready for those who love seek to know God, and for those who want to love God more. So come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been here long, you who have tried to follow and you who have stumbled. Come, because it is the Lord Jesus who invites you to the blessings of this place. It is his hope that you might meet him here.

Music during Communion: Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)

*Words and Music by Chris Eaton and Amy Grant; Choral Setting by Lloyd Larson
Joseph and Mary – English traditional*

Hymn at the Candle Lighting

During the singing of the hymn, you are welcome to share the light given to you. In the silences that follow some may wish to speak their personal prayers aloud, while others may wish to pray silently. Together we pray that God will use us and all our prayerful intentions in support of one another and the world.

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 alleluia; 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.

In peace, we pray to you, Gracious God. *Silence*

For all people in their daily life and work;
For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.

For this community, the nation, and the world;
For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.

For the just and proper use of your creation;
For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;
For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.
The People may add their own petitions.

Hear us, Lord; **For your mercy is great.**

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.
The People may add their own thanksgivings.

We thank you, caring and living God
And praise your Name this holy night and at the dawn to come.

We pray for all who have died. Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord.
May light perpetual shine upon them.

The People may speak the names of their loved ones departed.

Let us pray. **God of abundance, you have fed us with blessing and with the bread of life and cup of salvation; you have united us with Christ and one another; and you have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit, that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world and continue for ever life of our new-born Savior, Christ, the Lord. Amen.**

Generous God, you have never ceased to care for us, and you make us glad with the yearly festival of the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Grant that we, who have glimpsed the revelation of that light on this earth, may now be your people, forgiven, loved and free. **Amen.**

A Celtic Blessing

Son of God, child of joy and peace, light that shines in the dark: Come to us this most holy night, that we may know you, and make you known to others, and give us peace. Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you. Deep peace of the Son of peace to you. And may God's blessing be yours, and well may it befall us all, this night and forever more. **Amen.**

Let us go out into the world in peace and joy, inspired by the birth of Jesus, and rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. **Thanks be to God.**

**Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing through the night,
and the mountains in reply echoing their brave delight.**

Gloria in excelsis Deo. Gloria in excelsis Deo.

**Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why these songs of happy cheer?
What great brightness did you see? What glad tidings did you hear? R.**

**Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the newborn King. R.**

**See him in a manger laid, whom the angels praise above;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, while we raise our hearts in love. [Refrain]**

The Bell is rung to send us on our way, taking the light of Christmas into the world. Please take your candles home as a remembrance of our worship this evening. Depart in quiet whenever you wish.

A Joyous and Beautiful Christmas to All!

Celebrant: The Rev. Michael L. Bradley
Organist and Choir Director: Renée Brown
Soloists: Stephanie Dean, Kaity Wiegand, Kellan Dunlap, Paul Hill

Our Mission:
We share the light of Christ by loving and serving
our neighbors in the world.

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Carol Texts

Wexford Carol

Good people all, this Christmastime, consider well and bear in mind what our good God for us has done, in sending his beloved Son. With Mary holy we should pray to God with love this Christmas Day; in Bethlehem upon that morn there was a blessed Messiah born. The night before that happy tide, the noble Virgin and her guide were long time seeking up and down to find a lodging in the town. But mark how all things came to pass: From ev'ry door repell'd, alas! As long foretold, their refuge all was but an humble ox's stall. With thankful heart and joyful mind, the shepherds went the babe to find, and as God's angel had foretold, they did our Savior Christ behold. Within a manger he was laid, and by his side the virgin maid, attending on the Lord of life, who came on earth to end all strife.

Sussex Carol

On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring. News of great joy, news of great mirth, new of our merciful King's birth. Then why should man on earth be so sad, since our Redeemer made us glad. When from our sin he set us free, all for to gain our liberty? When sin departs before his grace, then life and health come in its place. Angels and men with joy may sing, all for to see the newborn King. All out of darkness we have light, which made the angels sing this night. 'Glory to God and peace to men, now and for evermore. Amen.'

Coventry Carol

Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, by by, lully lullay. O sisters too, how may we do for to preserve this day; this poor youngling, for whom we do sing, By by, lully lullay? That woe is me, poor child for thee! And ever morn and day, for thy parting neither say nor sing: By by, lully, lullay! Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, by by, lully lullay.

Joseph and Mary

O Joseph being an old man truly, he married a virgin fair and free; a purer virgin could no man see than he chose for his wife and his dearest dear. They lived both in joy and bliss; but now a strict commandment is, in Jewry land no man should miss to go along with his dearest dear. Unto the place where he was born unto the emperor to be sworn, to pay a tribute that's duly known, both for himself and his dearest dear. And when they were to Bethlehem come, the inns were filled, both all and some; for Joseph entreated them, ev'ry one, both for himself and his dearest dear. Then were they constrained presently within a stable all night to lie, where they did oxen and asses tie, with his true love and his dearest dear. The king of all power was in Bethlehem born, who wore for our sakes a crown of thorn. Then God preserve us both even and morn, for Jesus sake, our dearest dear!