



**Birchcliff Bluffs United Church**

**Ministers:** All the People – wherever and however they gather

**Minister of Word & Sacrament:** Rev. Dr. Ellen Redcliffe

**Music Director:** Randy Vancourt

**Reader:** Randy Vancourt

**December 24th, 7:30 PM 2023**

**Christmas Eve / Communion**

**WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE**

**Sing-along:**

**Santa Claus is Coming to Town**

You better watch out  
You better not cry  
You better not pout  
I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town

He's making a list,  
He's checking it twice  
He's gonna find out  
who's naughty or nice  
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping  
He he knows when you're awake  
He knows if you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake

You better watch out,  
You better not cry  
You better not pout,  
I'm telling you why  
'Cause Santa Claus is coming to town

**Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**

You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen  
Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitze  
But do you recall The most famous reindeer of all?

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer had a very shiny nose  
And if you ever saw it You would even say it glows

All of the other reindeer  
Used to laugh and call him names  
They never let poor Rudolph  
Join in any reindeer games

Then one foggy Christmas Eve  
Santa came to say, Rudolph,  
with your nose so bright  
Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?"

Then how the reindeer loved him  
As they shouted out with glee  
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer  
You'll go down in history"

### **White Christmas**

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas  
Just like the ones I used to know  
Where the treetops glisten and children listen  
To hear sleigh bells in the snow  
I'm dreaming of a white Christmas  
With every Christmas card I write  
May your days be merry and bright  
And may all your Christmases be white

### **Handel's Christmas Masterpiece**

The aging composer, bowed by misfortune, wandered the lonely streets of London nightly in hopeless despair. Only memories of his past glory, when the brilliant man was touted by the court society of London and Europe, were left to him and now it seemed his musical genius was gone forever. George Frederick Handel, once the favourite of kings and queens, had been forced into bankruptcy and had become a pauper.

One bitterly cold morning during the winter of 1741 Handel returned to his lodgings to find a thick packet on the table. It contained a text made up of scripture verses from the librettist, Charles Jennens. Dazed by the cold and hunger, Handel listlessly leafed through the pages.

Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God ... Behold! A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us ... the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light ... for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ... and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God ...

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped ... He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them into His bosom....

Excitedly, he read on. “He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... he looked for some to have pity on him, but there was no man; neither found he any to comfort him ... but thou didst not leave his soul in hell....”

He hurriedly read on. “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ... King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!

The words burned into Handel’s soul and struck a responsive chord within him. He rushed to the piano with pencil in hand and began to write the music to the immortal *Messiah*. For two weeks he laboured incessantly.

Handel saw no one and refused food and sleep. At last he finished the great oratorio and a friend was admitted to his room. Tears were streaming down his face. “I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God himself,” he declared at the completion of the glorious “Hallelujah Chorus.”

The composition was first heard in Dublin where it was an overwhelming triumph. Several weeks later it was again a tumultuous success in London. During the performance the King, carried away by the glory of the great “Hallelujah Chorus,” rose to his feet and the audience followed his example! Today, audiences all over the world still rise and remain standing during this Chorus.

In succeeding years, George Frederick Handel became blind, ill and poor. But the composer of the great masterpiece never again permitted his misfortune to overcome his spirit.

One evening in April, at the age of seventy-four, Handel collapsed during a performance of the *Messiah*.

He joined the great Chorus in the sky on April 13, 1759.

### **Hallelujah Chorus**

#### **Lighting the Christ Candle**

This one candle is powerful. Its fragile flame is worth great pomp and circumstance. This light heralds the coming of Christ.

**This candle’s tiny glow declares the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. This one candle is powerful. It is the candle of Christ!**

*The candle is lit.*

## Land Acknowledgement

We now take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which Birchcliff Bluffs United Church stands. It has been a site of human activity for many thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently the Mississaugas' of the Credit and Scugog, all part of the Williams Treaty. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory and we seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

## Opening Hymn

### Once in Royal David's City (v. 1,2,4)

VU 62

- 1 Once in royal David's city  
stood a lowly cattleshed,  
where a mother laid her baby  
in a manger for his bed.  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little child.
  
- 2 He came down to earth from heaven  
who, with God, is over all,  
and his shelter was a stable,  
and his cradle was a stall.  
There among the poor and lowly  
lived on earth our Saviour holy.
  
- 4 And our eyes at last shall see him,  
through his own redeeming love;  
for that child who seemed so helpless  
is our Lord in heaven above;  
and he leads his children on  
to the place where he is gone.

## Call to Worship

We are here tonight to celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ, the light of the world.

**He is called Emmanuel, God with us. Today and all days we join the angels in singing and praying for peace and goodwill towards all. May our hearts be prepared as God comes near.**

## Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we come to celebrate the birth of a tiny babe. We marvel at the story when love came down to bring us into glorious light.

**We celebrate that you join us where we are, just as we are, in joy, in sorrow, in pain, in tragedy. You experience with us the way and the truth. We know you are with us now and forever and so we declare: Come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.**

**Hymn**

**O Come all Ye Faithful (v. 1, 3, 4, 5)**

**VU 60**

1 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.

3 Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
glory to God in the highest:  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

4 See how the shepherds summoned to his cradle,  
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;  
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

5 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

### **RECEIVING GOD'S WORD**

**Scripture**

**John 1:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The Word of God for the People of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn**

**Jesus Ahatonhia**

Have courage people of the world  
for Jesus, he is born,  
The spirits in the sky arrive

with news for everyone.  
They bring a message to the earth:  
"Rejoice for Mary's given birth!"

Jesus has come to us, Jesus is born.  
Jesous Ahatonhia.

Three elders left to find the place  
this special baby lay,  
The star above would seize the path  
to guide them on their way.  
It stopped just past the sacred ground,  
and said, "Come here, the child is found!"

Jesus has come to us, Jesus is born.  
Jesous Ahatonhia.

They greeted him with reverence  
and with oil they blessed his head.  
"Behold, he comes to love us  
so we praise His name," they said."  
Through his compassion we will be  
adopted to one family"

Jesus has come to us, Jesus is born.  
Jesous Ahatonhia.

### **Sermon      I Like Christmas      The Gift of Preparation**

It had to be the most bizarre nativity anyone had ever seen. For a stable he had opened an old Dukes of Hazzard lunch box. Half walls were built out of Legos. There was even an arched doorway. The thermos was sitting next to the open lunch box like the turret of a castle. And on top of the thermos was none other than Darth Vader, arms spread out as the Angel of the Lord.

Along one side, behind the fence from his farm set, all neatly spaced and set in as reverent an attitude as he could were: Frankenstein, the Wolfman and the Mummy as the Wise Men from the East. Each with a small gift box in front of them.

On the other side, behind a Lego fence with a gate, surrounded by several Furbies, beanie babies, care bear figurines and assorted other stuffed animals as the sheep and livestock were: a Wookie, the Cat in the Hat, the Hulk and Batman as the shepherds.

On the lid of the lunch box sat his sister's Barbie in a classic Rapunzel outfit, as Mary.

Standing behind Mary, leaning against the side of the lunch box for stability and playing Joseph was G.I Joe, in full battle gear.

And the piece de resistance was Bart Simpson in a shopping cart as the Baby Jesus. Surrounding this entire scene were California Raisins, Disney, McDonalds, Toy Story and other characters as well as all the rest of his action figures. They were either spectators or they were the Host of Heaven, come to sing Hallelujah to the newborn King, I'm not sure.

It was a site to behold. Mom and Dad had to do everything in their power to keep from laughing. It was obvious by the look on the young boy's face, that he had spent hours designing and picking just the right toy for each of the characters.

Everything about the nativity was wrong or out of place. Who would have thought of Bart Simpson as the baby Jesus. And putting him in a shopping cart as a manger.

But at the same time, it was almost perfect, too. Not because of the characters, but because of this boy's love for God and Jesus and Christmas that went into building the scene out of materials at hand and wanting to share it with his parents.

That's the way we feel when John the Baptist shows up in our Christmas celebration. And here he is again. "Prepare the way of the Lord."

God through John the Baptist helps prepare us for the birth of Christ and the celebration of Christmas. John reminds us of the important message: to care for the least of these: the poor, the downtrodden, the homeless, the broken hearted, John is God's gift of preparation. We need John to get our attention: "as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him."

He very pointedly says, "I'm not the light. I'm just telling you to get ready, to open your hearts and your eyes, so when the Light does appear, you won't mistake it for something else."

## **Hymn**

## **Angels We Have Heard on High**

**VU 38**

1 Angels we have heard on high  
sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
and the mountains in reply,  
echoing their joyous strains.  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

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

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

3 Come to Bethlehem and see  
Christ whose birth the angels sing;  
come, adore on bended knee  
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

4 See him in a 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!

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

### Communion

God is with us!

**We are not alone!**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to God.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

you are with us; your presence never fails us,  
**your gifts of hope and new life transform us.**

We praise you for Jesus Christ,  
eternal as your love, our bond to one another.  
We rejoice with all your people of every time and place,  
In this meal we remember Jesus, his promises,  
and the price he paid for who he was, what he said, and what he did.

On the night before Jesus died,  
he took a loaf of bread,  
gave thanks, broke it, and said,  
“Take and eat; whenever you do this, remember me.”  
After supper, Jesus took the cup, and poured, saying,  
“This is the new covenant, remember me.”

We do remember.

We remember his life of love, his friendship, his teaching, his dying, and his rising to life again.



In sharing this meal, we live out the mystery of our faith: as you continually transform the world around us.

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup  
the bread of life, the cup of blessing.

**The gifts of God for the people of God.  
Thanks be to God!**

**Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever, Amen.**

*People come forward here  
Receive the elements  
Take a candle  
Form a circle  
Light is passed as we sing Silent Night.*

**Closing Hymn**

**Silent Night**

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.

## **We Wish You a Merry Christmas**

We wish you a merry Christmas  
We wish you a merry Christmas  
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year  
Good tidings we bring to you and your kin  
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year!

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