



**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

**December 24, 2023 - 10:30 AM**

**Advent 4**

**Prelude**

**Lighting the Christ Candle**

*First three candles are lit*

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light this candle symbolizing love-

**We come to lean into one another-even when it is difficult. Jesus demonstrated that every person is worthy of love, a flame of purpose that should not be extinguished.**

*The fourth candle is lit.*

Love is most fully lived in relationships that are mutual, life-giving, and self-giving.

**We come, learning how to love with kindness and compassion.**

Let us sing as we celebrate the good news embodied in love alive among us.

VU 7

Love is a flame that burns in our heart,  
Jesus has come and will never depart.

When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong.  
And none shall be afraid.

Let us join together in prayer, inspired by everlasting love:

**Teach us, O God, to hear the cries of those impoverished. Show us how to care for others with loving-kindness. Communicate with us so that we, too, may communicate the good news with love.**

**Encourage us to move toward those who need us. Open our perceptions to discover Christ's face in one another, setting our hearts on fire with passionate self-giving. Amen.**

**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

## Angles from the Realms of Glory

VU 36

1 Angels, from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
ye who sang creation's story,  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:  
come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King.

2 Shepherds in the field abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
yonder shines the infant Light:  
come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King.

3 Sages, leave your contemplations;  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great desire of nations;  
ye have seen his natal star:  
come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King.

## Call to Worship

In drama and dress-up,

**The ancient story comes to life.**

Mary and Joseph receive divine messages and travel to Bethlehem.

**Shepherds leave their flocks at night.**

Wise royals follow a star.

**Let us journey to the manger in heart and mind.**

May imagination, faith and joy be our guide.

**Let us worship God!**

## Life and Work

## Opening Prayer

Emmanuel, come to us this Advent season.

**We rejoice, O God, that you are with us.**

Come to us, O holy wisdom.

**Show us the path of knowledge and teach us your ways.**

Come to us, O Dayspring from on high.

**Disperse the shadows of night and lead us into the light of dawn.**

Come to us, desire of nations.

**Bind us together with one heart and mind.**

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

**Amen.**

## RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

**Opening 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.

**ELLEN:** A child is born!

There is an optimistic ring to that powerful proclamation - even under the worst of circumstances.

I have been told that in Europe during World War II families sought refuge from shelling in unfilled open graves in cemeteries.

In these graves, women gave birth. As awful as life seemed at the time, when word was passed around the graveyards that "a child is born!" hope was mended for a moment in the hearts of those who heard.

In the Jewish tradition, any child might be the Messiah, even if born in a graveyard.

"You never can tell . . ." we say, and "Who knows what might happen because of this child?"

In every tradition, a child is born of the seed of hope.

## Hymn

## There's a Voice in the Wilderness (v. 1, 2, 4)

VU 18

1 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,  
a call from the ways untrod:  
prepare in the desert a highway,  
a highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted,  
the lofty hills brought low;  
make straight all the crooked places  
where God, our God, may go!

2 O Zion, that bringest good tidings,  
get thee up to the heights and sing!  
Proclaim to a desolate people  
the coming of their King.  
Like the flowers of the field they perish,  
like grass our works decay;  
the power and pomp of nations  
shall pass, like a dream, away.

4 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,  
a call from the ways untrod:  
prepare in the desert a highway,  
a highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted,  
the lofty hills brought low;  
make straight all the crooked places  
where God, our God, may go!

## Rescued from the Scrapheap

**RANDY:** Perhaps you can recall going out to get a Christmas tree late in the holiday season. Maybe you were too busy or too preoccupied, but the time slipped away.

Finally you made it to the tree lot, but there wasn't much left. You ended up with a scraggly looking tree that wasn't very straight, but because you refused to pay the big prices they wanted

for the pretty trees, that was it. Oh well, you thought maybe you could hide the bare spots in the corner and make it do.

When the family saw the tree everyone complained about how bad it looked.

But then you decorated it: the strings of lights, the beautiful balls and angels and the shiny tinsel. Then all the lights were turned out and the tree lights plugged in. "Wow!" Everyone was hushed at the transformation that had taken place. "It's beautiful."

God's grace is like that.

It picks us up off the discard heap, covers us with the robe of righteousness and presents us spotless before God, magnificent in the splendor of gifts sparkling with the light that reflects His love.

**Hymn**

**It Came Upon a Midnight Clear (v. 1, 2, 4)**

**VU 44**

1 It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth  
to touch their harps of gold,  
'Peace on the earth, good will to all,  
from heaven's all-gracious King!'  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
to hear the angels sing.

2 Still through the cloven skies they come  
with peaceful wings unfurled;  
and still their heavenly music floats  
o'er all the weary world;  
above its sad and lowly plains  
they bend on hovering wing,  
and ever o'er its Babel sounds  
the blessed angels sing.

4 For, lo! the days are hastening on,  
by prophets seen of old,  
when with the ever-circling years  
shall come the time foretold,  
when peace shall over all the earth  
its ancient splendours fling,  
and the whole world send back the song  
which now the angels sing.

**ELLEN:** A four-year-old worshipping was seeing for the first time a baby baptized by sprinkling. After the ceremony the pastor held the baby aloft as congregation members oohed and aahed approval.

Describing the experience, little Casey recalled, "We watched them advertise the baby."

## Hymn

## What Child is This

VU 74

1 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!

2 Why lies he in such mean estate  
where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here  
the silent Word is pleading.

This, this is Christ the King,  
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
haste, haste to bring him laud,  
the Babe, the Son of Mary!

3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;  
come, one and all, to own him.  
The King of Kings salvation brings;  
let loving hearts enthrone him.

This, this is Christ the King,  
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
haste, haste to bring him laud,  
the Babe, the Son of Mary!

**RANDY:** Our absent Lord has given special commendation to those who not only wait for his return, but also earnestly watch for him. The difference between those terms is illustrated by the story of a fishing vessel returning home after many days at sea. As they neared the shore, the sailors gazed eagerly toward the dock where a group of their loved ones had gathered.

The skipper looked through his binoculars and identified some of them:

"I see Bill's Mary, and there is Tom's Margaret and David's Anne."

One man became concerned because his wife was not there.

Later, he left the boat with a heavy heart and hurried up the hill to his cottage. As she opened the door, she ran to meet him saying, "I have been waiting for you!"

He replied with a gentle rebuke, "Yes, but the other men's wives were watching for them!"

**Hymn**

**While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks**

**VU 75**

1 While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
all seated on the ground,  
the angel of the Lord came down,  
and glory shone around.

2 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread  
had seized their troubled mind;  
'glad tidings of great joy I bring  
to you and humankind.

3 'To you in David's town this day  
is born of David's line  
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;  
and this shall be the sign:

4 'The heavenly babe you there shall find  
to human view displayed,  
all meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,  
and in a manger laid.'

5 Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith  
appeared a shining throng  
of angels praising God, who thus  
addressed their joyful song:

6 'All glory be to God on high,  
and to the earth be peace!  
Good will to all from highest heaven  
begin, and never cease.'

**ELLEN:** I imagine that every parent's nightmare on Christmas Eve is a certain box with those three scary words printed on top: Some Assembly Required.

There's a story about the father who had ordered a treehouse for his children for Christmas one year.

The time came to assemble the treehouse. He laid out all the parts on the floor and began reading the instructions.

To his dismay, he discovered that the instructions were for a treehouse. However, the parts were for a sailboat!

The next day he sent an angry letter to the company complaining about the mix-up. Back came this reply:

"We are truly sorry for the error and the inconvenience. However, it might help to consider the possibility that somewhere there is a man out on a lake trying to sail your treehouse."

The point is clear: To put something together, you have to have the right parts and the right instructions.

This is where faith comes in. The only way you can put life together is through faith.

Faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior... that's what makes it work.

That's the way to assemble your life, to root it in Jesus Christ through faith, to tie it to Jesus Christ, to ground it in Jesus Christ.

## Hymn

## Silent Night

VU 67

1 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.

2 Silent night! Holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight:  
glories stream from heaven afar,  
heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah,  
Christ the Saviour is born,  
Christ the Saviour is born.

3 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.



**RANDY:** If you are comfortable in this world, then I encourage you to ignore Advent. Christmas is the holiday for you.

Waiting and hoping are just not worthwhile, so jump to the fun stuff.

Advent only makes sense if you want something else to hold on to.

If you need to believe that as wonderful as the sun, the moon, and the stars may be, when they fall away it will be because a new, brighter, more perfect light has come and we no longer need those things.

Advent is a special time when we anticipate our favorite stories about Jesus' birth, but if we do it right, it's also a time when we look at ourselves and our world and decide that we shouldn't be comfortable.

We shouldn't be comfortable that people are starving a stone's throw away and that their starvation will last long past the holiday season when people are feeling generous with canned goods.

We shouldn't be comfortable that we stand on the brink of World War III - that's right, you heard it here first - and our own neighbours worship the flag of one aggressor and the oil of another.

The alternative is to trust in the kind of king who gets born in a feeding trough, who teaches that people who trust in God should not be concerned about their status or well-being in this world, and who gets strung up on a cross for telling the truth to people who were completely comfortable with the world as they knew it.

## Hymn

## The First Noel

VU 91

1 The first Nowell the angel did say  
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
in fields where they lay a-keeping their sheep  
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

2 They looked up and saw a star,  
shining in the east, beyond them far;  
and to the earth it gave great light,  
and so it continued both day and night.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

3 And by the light of that same star  
three wise men came from country far;  
to seek for a king was their intent,  
and to follow the star wherever it went.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest;  
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
and there it did both stop and stay,  
right over the place where Jesus lay.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

5 Then entered in those wise men three,  
full reverently upon their knee,  
and offered there in his presence  
their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

6 Then let us all with one accord  
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,  
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,  
and with his blood our life hath bought.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

**ELLEN:**

'Twas the beginning of Advent and all through the Church  
Our hope was dying - we'd given up on the search.  
It wasn't so much that Christ wasn't invited,  
But after 2,000 plus years we were no longer excited.

Oh, we knew what was coming no doubt about that.  
And that was the trouble it was "old hat."  
November brought the first of a series of pains  
With carefully orchestrated advertising campaigns.

There were gadgets and dolls and all sorts of toys.  
Enough to seduce the most devout girls and boys.  
Unfortunately, it seemed, none was completely exempt  
From this seasonal virus that did all of us tempt.

The priests and prophets and certainly the kings  
Were all so consumed with the desire for "things!"  
It was rare, if at all, that you'd hear of the reason  
For the origin of this whole holy-day season.

A baby, it seems, once had been born  
In the mid-east somewhere on that first holy morn.  
But what does that mean for folks like us,  
Who've lost ourselves in the hoopla and fuss?

Can we re-learn the art of wondering and waiting,  
Of hoping and praying, and anticipating?  
Can we let go of all the things and the stuff?  
Can we open our hands and our hearts long enough?

Can we open our eyes and open our ears?  
Can we find him again after all of these years?  
Will this year be different from all the rest?  
Will we be able to offer our best?  
So many questions, unanswered thus far,  
As wise men seeking the home of the star.  
Where do we begin how do we start  
To make for the child a place in our heart?

Perhaps we begin by letting go  
Of our limits on hope, and of the stuff that we know.  
Let go of the shopping, the chaos and fuss,  
Let go of the searching, let Christmas find us.

We open our hearts, our hands and our eyes,  
To see the king coming in our own neighbours' cries.  
We look without seeking what we think we've earned,  
But rather we're looking for relationships spurned.

With him he brings wholeness and newness of life  
For brother and sister, for husband and wife.  
The Christ-child comes not by our skill,  
But rather he comes by God's holy will.

We can't make him come with parties and bright trees,  
But only by getting down on our knees.

He'll come if we wait amidst our affliction,  
Coming in spite of- not by our restriction.

His coming will happen of this there's no doubt.  
The question is whether we'll be in or out.  
"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."  
Do you have the courage to peer through the lock?

A basket on your porch, a child in your reach.  
A baby to love, to feed and to teach.  
He'll grow in wisdom as God's only Son.  
How far will we follow this radical one?  
He'll lead us to challenge the way that things are.  
He'll lead us to follow a single bright star.  
But that will come later if we're still around.  
The question for now: Is the child to be found?

Can we block out commercials, the hype and the malls?  
Can we find solitude in our holy halls?  
Can we keep alert, keep hope, stay awake?  
Can we receive the child for ours and God's sake?

From on high with the carolling host he sees us,  
He yearns to read on our lips: Come Lord Jesus!  
As Advent began all these questions make plea.  
The only true answer: We will see, we will see.

## Hymn

## Joy To The World

VU 59

1 Joy to the world! the Lord is come:  
let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth! the Saviour 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.

3 No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
nor thorns infest the ground:  
he comes to make his blessings flow

far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,  
far as, far as the curse is found.

4 He rules the earth with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.

### **Offering**

Hey, God! We offer our gifts of time, talent, treasure- wrapped in diversity, tied them with the strength of our relationships, and decorated them with bows of self-giving.

**May you bless them as our presence in the world, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

**We sing:**      What can I give him, poor as I am?  
                    If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
                    If I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
                    Yet what I can I give him – give my heart!

### **Prayers of the People**

You, O God, the one beyond all knowing, it is you we long to know, even as we know that you are more than we understand. Your spirit and presence, a being that transcends our ability to put you in a box.

**We know that as soon as we put limits around who and what you are, then it is no longer you. Help our unknowing so that we can grasp a portion, catch a glimpse, hold on to something of you, for we desire a deeper knowledge of you and your desires of us as your people.**

Help us in our search for justice that we can be led in discernment of what is right and just, help us recognize the kindness of compassion, as expressed in the diversity you bestow upon us.

**We pray these things with words, with the thoughts of our minds, and with the feelings of our hearts. We offer our prayers from the depths of our souls and with freshness of spirit, expressed in this time of silence ...**

### *Moment of silence*

May we be messengers of your love for the world; we ask in Jesus' name ...

**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.**

## BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Child Holy, Child Lowly

VU 58

Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall;  
oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Swift are winging angels singing,  
noels ringing, tidings bringing:  
Christ the babe is born for all.  
Christ the babe is born for all!

Flocks were sleeping; shepherds keeping  
vigil till the morning new  
saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
praises voicing greet the morrow:  
Christ the babe was born for you.  
Christ the babe was born for you!

### Commissioning and Benediction

May you discover waiting for you the shareable gift of God's love, joy, peace and hope, knowing we are not alone.

**May the joy God has given us radiate in our souls, warming all we meet.**

Go with God's blessing and share it with the world.

**Amen.**

### Choral Benediction

### Go Now In Peace

Go now in peace, never be afraid  
God will go with you each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,  
Know God will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love and show you believe  
Reach out to others so all the world can see.  
God will be there, watching from above  
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.  
Amen, amen, amen!

\* Permission to podcast/stream and reproduce the music and lyrics obtained from ONE LICENSE with license A-737645.

All rights reserved.