

Christmas Eve Worship 2023

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Date: 24 December 2023

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] We're glad that you all are here to celebrate Christmas Eve with us. As we get started, we are grateful for those of you who are visitors with us. We'd love to get a record of your time with us.

You can do that the analog way with the visitor card on the seat back in front of you. So do it the digital way. If you look on the very back of your worship guide, you'll see our church website. And if you go there, there's a banner at the top of every single page with a link to our digital visitor card.

And that just helps us to connect with you and to connect with our community. You'll also see on pages 9 and 10 what's happening in the life of our church. And I do want to highlight on page 9, the Ladies Come and Go Fellowship is not resuming on Friday, January the 5th.

So if you go on Friday, January the 5th, you may be able to do a good ring doorbell recording. With that, Paul and Molly Bishop are going to lead us in the lighting of the Advent candle.

Thank you. John 1, 10-14.

[1 : 5 3] John 1, 10-14. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son, from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Thank you. To stand and to join me for our call to worship.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

[2 : 5 3] You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you, as the joy at the harvest, that they are glad when they cry before you.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Luke 1, 26-38 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her, and he said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled, and was saying, and trying to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

[4 : 11] And he will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son.

And this is the sixth month with her, who is called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. You may be seated. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

[5 : 15] When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man, and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

For he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not, until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

[6 : 47] Jesus. Luke 2, 1 through 7.

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

[8 : 08] And they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, that you will be for all the people.

For you unto is a born, this day, in the city of David, a savior, wrapped in swaddling clothes, cloths, and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was, with an angel, a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child.

[9 : 19] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told to them. Friday, that's the biggest shopping day, but Christmas Eve.

And I certainly hope that's not true of you. But we give gifts to one another at Christmas. And we do that as just a small token of the greatest gift that we've received from Christ, a gift of our salvation.

And tonight we have another opportunity to show Christ's love, which is to take an offering that goes to our Deacons Mercy Fund. And this is a fund that the deacons of our church use to support those who are in need in very tangible ways, whether it's paying a utility bill or helping out someone with rent.

And so we're going to celebrate that now as a chance to bless others as God has blessed us. Good evening. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Shine Mountain Presbyterian Church.

[10 : 28] And we're just delighted that you've joined us this evening for your Christmas Eve. I always forget to mention something at the beginning and I forgot to mention, of course, that on our last hymn, we have our candles.

And the way to light these is just to turn them clockwise. Don't do it now. I'm just doing that for demonstration purposes, okay? So we'll turn out the big lights and we'll have little lights together.

And we'll talk about that in a minute. The year that I turned, nine years old, I started violin lessons and I was given this practice book to make a way of checking off if I practiced every single day of the week.

And on the front of the book, there was this little illustration of this pig sitting in front of a plate and he had a knife and a fork. And it said, only practice on the days you eat.

Then I became a teacher and I gave my students sort of a similar sheet for their homework. And at the top, it had this Latin phrase that meant repetition is the mother of memory.

[11 : 39] And the point is practice is ongoing, right? It's something that has to be done every week and every day. We have sung songs tonight that we sang last year.

We read all of the same readings that we read last year on Christmas Eve. And no one, at least I hope none of you would say, well, I don't understand why we're singing Silent Night.

We sang that in 2022. We've been there. We've done that. And repetition is the mother of memory. It's not just the mother of memory for students who need to learn their homework.

Repetition is what we do as Christians. Memory is what we do as Christians. We're a religion of remembering. In the Old Testament, God tells his people over and over and over, remember what I did for you.

Remember I brought you out of slavery in Egypt. That's how the Ten Commandments start. I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

- [12 : 44] And the New Testament is a book of remembering, telling us over and over, remember Christ's death and his resurrection. Remember what God's done for you in the past.
- Remember what that means for you now. So why do we have Christmas every December? I mean, we could treat it like a leap year, you know? We could have it just every few years.
- And the reason is that same simple reason. We are doing it to remember. Remember, we come back year after year to remind ourselves of the story.
- And what is it that we're remembering? Well, we're remembering a lot of things. One of them is what Paul and Molly read for us at the very beginning from John chapter one. There is real darkness in the world.
- And there is also real light. It's the same thing we saw in our call to worship in Isaiah chapter nine.
- [13 : 44] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. It's what we sang in, Lo, how a rose, ear blooming. It came, a flower it. By the way, a flower it is a tiny flower, okay?
- It came, a flower it bright, amid the cold of winter. And that's why at the very end of this service, in just a couple minutes, we're gonna turn off the big lights and we're gonna use our little lights as another reminder that Christ is coming.
- He has come as the light in the darkness. He's the light of hope, whether it's strained or broken relationships.
- He's the light of hope for our anger and our misunderstandings. He's the light of hope for addiction and war and famine and terrorism.
- We are screwing on these lights to turn them on as a small sign, a small reminder that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
- [15 : 03] Now our remembering, it's not just darkness out there in the world. Part of the remembering we do as Christians is that there's real darkness in us as well.
- The light of hope is not simply for the world outside the walls of the church. The light of hope is also for the people who are inside the walls of the church.
- It's the light of hope for our own battles against our own pride and fear and selfishness and lies and wounds and pain and abuse.
- Jesus is the light of the world. If you were here this morning, we talked about Mary's song from Luke chapter 1 and Mary tells us, verse 50, His mercy is for those who fear Him.
- So this is not just some vague feel-good light about there being goodness in the world. No, this is a very specific, direct hope for a specific people.
- [16 : 13] the people who have faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the people who embrace Him as the light of the world and know that outside of Him they have no hope.
- Those are the people who experience the light. Those are the people who no longer have to walk in darkness. It's those who confess that they need the light and that they cannot produce it on their own.
- In 2008, Time magazine had an interview with then-presidential hopeful John McCain and they asked him about his faith.
- And he told them a story about his time as a prisoner in a POW camp during Vietnam. There were times at night where they would tie him up with ropes into these very cruel positions so that he'd be filled with pain.
- And he had a guard at one point who was the night guard and this guard came along one evening and loosened his ropes so that he could have some relief. And then later as his watch ended he came back and tightened the ropes again so that no one would know the mercy that he had shown Senator McCain.

[17 : 26] McCain then goes on to say a month or so later it was Christmas Day. He said, I was standing in the dirt courtyard when I saw that same guard approach me. He walked up and stood silently next to me not looking or smiling at me.

Then he used his sandaled foot to draw a cross in the dirt. We stood wordlessly looking at the cross remembering the true light of Christmas even in the darkness of a Vietnamese prison camp.

Brothers and sisters, we are not in a prison camp. we do live in a dark world. And we come together to sing and to read to remember the light that's true.

The true light of Christmas that shines no matter how dark things are outside. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you and we praise you for the light that you have brought into the world.

We thank you that you give us not an abstract pie-in-the-sky hope but you give us a real flesh-and-blood hope that you sent your Son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus, who lived the life that we should have lived and died the death that we should have died.

[18 : 52] That he obeyed on our behalf and he was punished on our behalf so that we could walk in the light. We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You all have a very Merry Christmas.