



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE WITH CAROLS & HOLY COMMUNION

AS WE GATHER... Matthew writes a Christmas pageant that includes four of the most forlorn people who ever lived on the planet! Why does he do that? To demonstrate that *Jesus is the Son of Sinners*.

WELCOME

CHORAL ANTHEM:

Gentle Mary Laid Her Child

By Joseph S. Cook & Joel Raney

*Gentle Mary laid her Child lowly in a manger,
there he lay, the undefiled, to the world a stranger.
Such a Babe in such a place, can he be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race who have found his favor.
Angels sing about his birth; wise men sought and found him;
heaven's star shone brightly forth, glory all around him.
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, heard the angels singing,
all the plains were lit that night, all the hills were ringing!
All the hills were ringing.*

*Ring, Ring! All the hills were ringing!
Gentle Mary laid her Child lowly in a manger.
He is still the undefiled, but no more a stranger.
Son of God, of humble birth, beautiful the story, beautiful the story.
Praise his name in all the earth, hail the King of glory.
All hail the newborn King!*

CHRISTMAS EVE CAROL CELEBRATION

Luke 2

P: We hear again the Good News from the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter 2. Following each section of the reading, we sing songs of Christmas joy, echoing the sounds of the angels on that first Christmas night.

Reader: 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. A Christmas visit to the little town of Bethlehem by Rev. Phillips Brooks of Pennsylvania in 1865 led to his writing one of the most beloved of all Christmas hymns. We reflect on the importance of that special place.

CAROL: *“O Little Town of Bethlehem”*

LBW 41

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in the dark streets shineth The ever-lasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

O holy child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!

Reader: 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.

P: Although “Away in a Manger” has been called “Luther’s Cradle Hymn” by some people, its actual Lutheran connection comes from the fact that it was first published in a Lutheran Sunday School hymnal in Philadelphia in 1885. It was not translated into German until 1934, but since then has become as well-loved by Christian people in the “Old World” as it is here in the “New World”.

CAROL: *“Away in a Manger”*

LBW 67

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care
And fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Reader:

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, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”

P: There are many Christmas songs and carols that include references to angels and the angelic hosts. Now more than two centuries old, “Angles from the Realms of Glory” was written by English poet James Montgomery, who is the author of a number of hymns we sing throughout the year. We invite the angels to join our worship of the Christ Child as we sing.

CAROL: “*Angels from the Realms of Glory*”

LBW 50

Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o’er all the earth;
Once you sang creation’s story;
Now proclaim Messiah’s birth:
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn king.

Shepherds, in the fields 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.

Reader: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”

P: Some of the Christmas songs we cherish have deep historical roots. “Now Sing We, Now Rejoice” dates back to the thirteenth century so it would have been known by Martin Luther and his family in Wittenberg. Originally, the lines of the song alternated between Latin and German. Together we raise our voices to heaven as we join the “multitude of the heavenly host” in holy song.

CAROL: *“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”*

LBW 55

Good Christian friends, rejoice
With heart and soul and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before him bow,
And he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
With heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave;
Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all
To gain his everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!

Reader: When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over 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 the manger.

P: Almost a century old now, the text of “Gentle Mary Laid Her Child” was written by Joseph C. Cook for a carol-writing competition in 1919. It won the competition and was printed in the Christian Guardian magazine the following year and then, about ten years later, it appeared in a Canadian hymnal. The words, which have been set to a melody from the sixteenth century, create for us a vision of that marvelous birth, complete with the shepherd and angels.

CAROL: “*Gentle Mary Laid Her Child*”

Gentle Mary laid her child Lowly in a manger;
There He lay, the Undefined, To the world a stranger,
Such a babe in such a place, Can He be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race Who have found His favor.

Angels sang about His birth, Wise Men sought and found Him;
Heaven’s star shone brightly forth Glory all around Him.
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, Heard the angels singing;
All the plains were lit that night, All the hills were ringing.

Gentle Mary laid her child Lowly in a manger;
He is still the Undefined But no more a stranger.
Son of God of humble birth, Beautiful the story;
Praise His name in all the earth; Hail the King of glory!

Reader: And when the shepherds saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

P: Each generation adds to the list of favorite Christmas songs as different nations and cultures enrich the repertoire. The spiritual “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” for many years limited to African American songbooks, has become a treasured addition to hymnals not only in the United States but worldwide. The shepherds glorified and praised God as they returned to their fields and their

lives. We shape our worship and lives with praise to God for the gift of the Savior, the baby Jesus born in Bethlehem.

Carol: *“Go Tell It on the Mountain”*

LBW 70

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and ev’ry where;
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching
O’er silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and ev’ry where;
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

The shepherds feared and trembled
When, lo, above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior’s birth.

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and ev’ry where;
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

SERMON

OFFERING

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

P: Let us pray for God's great mercy, asking that He would hear our petition and grant them according to His gracious will.

P: As we recall the first Christmas, Lord, we thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to never forget the magnitude and importance of His sacrifice for us in coming to earth to be our Savior, our Brother, and our Friend. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we remember Mary and Joseph, we thank You for the gift of family. Give us hearts to fully appreciate the gifts we receive through them and seek to be those who cherish and nourish our family associations. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we echo the song of the angels, we thank You for the gifts of poetry and music and for all of the writers and composers who have enriched our celebration with their devotion and creativity. Give us eagerness to ever seek to bring You all that is the best and most beautiful in our worship. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we think of the shepherds to whom the angel brought the greatest news, we thank You for those who serve in the various vocations of life, including those whose daily work often goes unnoticed. We commend to Your special care, Lord, those in the military, our first responders and medical personnel, and all whose labor on our behalf is specially challenging or hazardous. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we consider those who were at the inn surrounding Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, we pray for all situations and conditions of people, especially those on our hearts at this time (moment of silence). Be with them and bless them according to their needs, Lord, and give us opportunities to be of comfort and assistance in Your name. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: As we pray, gracious God, we remember our dear ones who have completed their earthly lives and now are in Your eternal keeping. As the brightness of the light of Christ shines on them, may we follow their footsteps in ways of peace and love throughout our lives as we live to Your glory. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: These and any other things You would have us ask of You, heavenly Father, grant to us for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

**ALL: Our Father 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
Forever and ever. Amen.**

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THE DISTRIBUTION

CLOSING

P: Luke writes that Mary “treasured up all these things in her heart.” That phrase “all these things” includes her personal experience of that first Christmas night with the angels and the shepherds and the promise of God coming true. God has kept His covenant with His people, and we are blessed by it. With renewing faith, growing hope, and expanding love on this most holy night, we sing.

CLOSING CAROL: “*Silent Night, Holy Night*” **LBW 65**

(Individual candles will be lit during the singing and extinguished after the Benediction. Those with lit candles remain still as those without lit candles bend their candles to receive the light.)

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,
Heav’nly 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 your holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

CLOSING PRAYER

P: Let us pray. O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that light on earth we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

POSTLUDE

Have a wonderful
Christmas!