

Aldersgate United Methodist Church

December 24, 2023
Christmas Eve

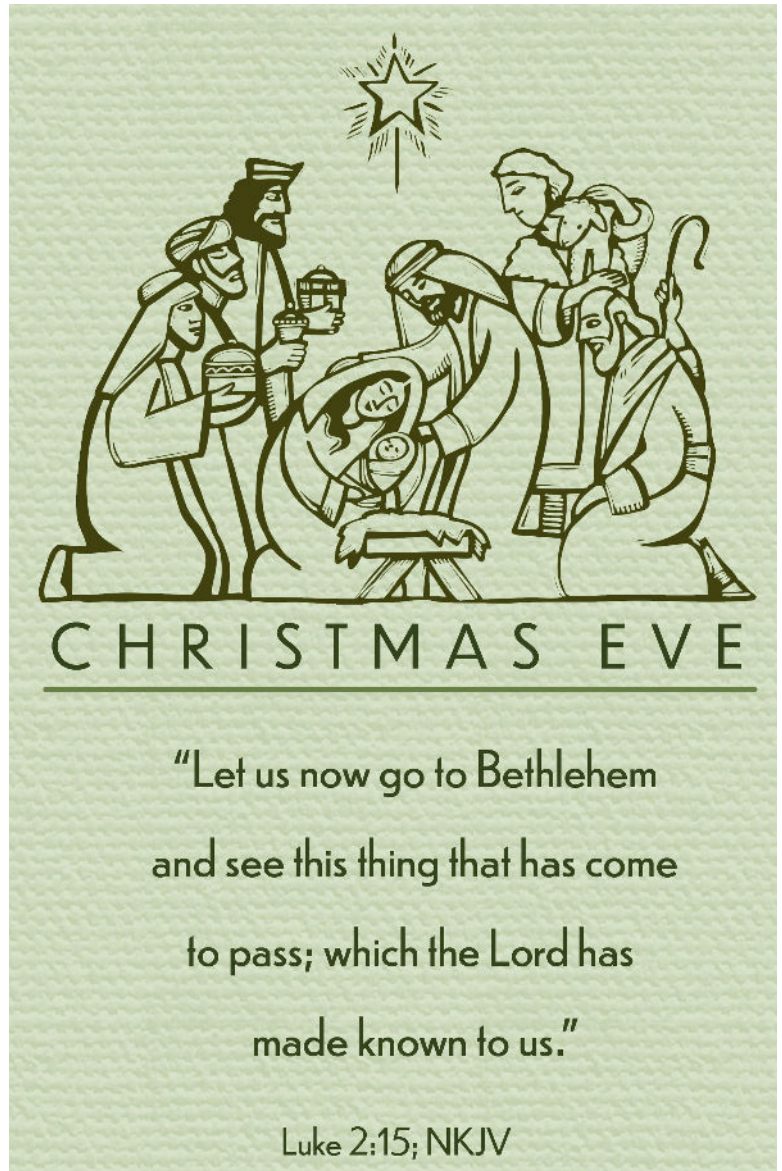
7:00 p.m.

With Pastor John Goldrich serving
Newman U.M. Church

Videographer: Nancy Taylor

Usher/Greeter: Larry & Pat Ruth

Ministers: All of Aldersgate's Members
Pastor: Joseph Rafique
Director of Music: Julie Clopper-Smith
Keyboardist: Deanna Steward
Organist: Jan Malone
Digital Media Specialist: Nancy Taylor
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*Worshippers are welcomed to use their own terminology for God.
If you are considering membership, please contact our pastor, 402-489-1510.*



December 24, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

Greeting and Announcements (*John*)

Music for Centering Prayer

“The Holly and the Ivy” — English Carol

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Hymn #2090 (black, vs. 5)

“Light the Advent Candle”

Light the Christmas candles, now: sing of donkey, sheep and cow;
birthday candles for the King, let the alleluias ring.
Candle, candle, burning bright, shining in the cold winter night;
candle, candle, burning bright, fill our hearts with Christmas light.

WORDS and MUSIC: © 1975 Mary Lu Walker

Call to Worship (*John*)

PASTOR: The splendor of God has been revealed among us. A child has come to change all our ways.
ALL: **We who have walked in the shadows have seen the light. We have given up the unnecessary burdens we carry.**
PASTOR: Authority has been assigned to the Wonderful Counselor. Peace and justice will prevail through eternity.
ALL: **We will leave judgment to God, whose equity we trust. We are free to rejoice in the beauty God reveals.**
PASTOR: Worship the One who breaks yokes and frees us. Great is our God, and greatly to be praised.
ALL: **Let the heavens be glad and let earth rejoice. We are ready to declare God’s marvelous works.**

Opening Prayer (*John*)

PASTOR: You keep surprising us, gracious God. Just when we get settled into our routines, you offer us a transforming birth. While we focus in greatness, you appear in humble circumstances among ordinary people, in out-of-the-way places. Amid the noise of our busyness, the angel song suddenly penetrates our dulled awareness, and we must listen again.
ALL: **O God, keep us from fear or cynicism, lest we miss this opportunity to hear good news that is meant for us, and for all this hostile unbelieving world in which we live. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, our Savior eternal. Amen.**

Hymn #234 (red, vs. 1-3)

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

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.

2. True God of true God, Light from Light Eternal, lo, he shuns not the Virgin’s womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created;
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; O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

WORDS & MUSIC: John F. Wade, ca. 1743;
trans. by Frederick Oakeley, 1841, harm. from *Collections of Motetts or Antiphons*, 1792

Prayer of Confession and Words of Affirmation (Joseph)

PASTOR: The coming of Christmas challenges all our pretensions. We who have sought to organize and manage the world through our finite understandings are confronted with the wonder of Bethlehem. A baby carries God's revelation, and we are convicted of our neglect. Let us seek to reclaim God's mercy.

ALL: **Awesome God, we confess our fear to let down our guard, to feel the wonder, to believe the good news. Why would love choose to live among us, who are so unloving in our words and deeds? Why would you choose to place Trusting Innocence in the hands of sinners like us? We are afraid to bow down, lest we be accused of sentimental weakness. We hesitate to embrace the joy, lest it turn to disappointment in the cruel realities of this world. Forgive us, God, and awaken the child within us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

PASTOR: The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us for lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly. Jesus Christ has come to us as God's gift. In Christ, we are redeemed from iniquity and purified to live as God's own people. Glorify and praise God through your zeal for good works. Accept and live within the peace God provides. Amen.

ALL: **Amen.**

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer #895 (red, Joseph)

PASTOR: On a night like this as a child lies in a manger feeling the stiffness of hay itch on his bare back, we pray for all human flesh. For brown flesh and wrinkled flesh. For dimpled skin and for those who have given a pound of flesh. For those with thick skin and thin. For wandering skin and lost skin. For flesh that longs for human touch and skin that crawls with pain and frustration for what this fragile tissue can do. God incarnate,

ALL: **hear our prayer**

PASTOR: When we wander into this silent night having heard this good news sung again, we pray that we will catch our breath and dare to believe that this good news beats in our hearts and lives in our skin. We will come to see ourselves as a reflection of God's very being so that we will know, more than we did before, that the promise of salvation for all people will be known in the ways that we choose to love this world and all God's people. God incarnate,

ALL: **hear our prayer.**

PASTOR: We pray that we will have enough courage to use our hands and feet to make love known. We will touch and heal and by God's grace will smooth out the rough ways of justice and lift the lowly and lonely. God incarnate,

ALL: **hear our prayer.**

PASTOR: What prayer needs would you like to lift up? (pause)
For these and all our needs hidden in our hearts, we say: God incarnate,

ALL: **hear our prayer.**

PASTOR: Allow the story of this good news to change the story of our lives, O God. May we remember that we are a part of your story. As your Son is the reason for the season, so, in him are we the reason for the season. Grant that we not only love to tell the story but that our meek souls learn to share the amazing grace of your compassion and love as we continue to pray the prayer love incarnate, Jesus Christ taught his disciples saying:

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 this is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Hymn #230 (red, vs. 1-2)

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth!

Word of God Proclaimed (*John*)

Isaiah 9:2-7
Luke 2:1-7

Hymn #217 (red)

“Away in a Manger”

Away in a manger, no crib for a 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.

2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes;
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

3. Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

WORDS: Luke 2:7

MUSIC: James R. Murray, 1887

Word of God Proclaimed (*John*)

Luke 2:8-20

Hymn #230 (red, vs. 3-4)

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4. 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;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

WORDS: Phillips Brooks, ca. 1868

MUSIC: Lewis H. Redner, 1868

Sermon (*Joseph*)

“Joy to the World, a Savior Is Born”

Offertory (*Joseph*)

(I give because I have been given.)

We, who have known God's gracious hospitality, are invited to share together in ministry to the homeless, the forgotten, the weary, the lost of our world. Our offerings of gratitude remind us of God's claim on us and on all we possess. Let us make a generous response, in thanksgiving for all we have received.

"Carol of the Bells" — Ukrainian Carol

Doxology (to the tune of #95, red)

"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise God, all creatures here below;
praise God for all that love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.

MUSIC: attr. to Louis Bourgeois, 1551

Prayer of Dedication of Gifts and Self (*Joseph*)

PASTOR: Let us pray. Thank you, God, for all the gifts you have given us. Most of all, we are grateful for baby Jesus who became the embodiment of your love.

ALL: **With our offerings, we worship the babe of Bethlehem and recommit ourselves as disciples of the man of Nazareth whom he grew up to be. May the ministry and mission of this church be true to our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Hymn #246 (red)

"Joy to the World"

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 world, the Savior 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 world 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.

WORDS: Isaac Watts, 1719

MUSIC: arr. from G. F. Handel, 1741 by Lowell Mason, 1848

Commissioning and Blessing (*John*)

PASTOR: Carry a song on your lips and joy in your hearts. Let all the world observe the good news you convey.

ALL: **Glory to God, glory to God in the highest! May God's peace reign among all people!**

PASTOR: As shepherds praised God for all they saw and heard, we are commissioned to share Christmas joy.

ALL: **A baby has become our Wonderful Counselor. A child is pointing us to the way of peace.**

PASTOR: May the Christ who by his incarnation, gathered into one, things earthly and heavenly, fill us with the sweetness of inward peace and goodwill, and the blessings of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and the whole world both this day and forever. Amen.

ALL: **We join in glorifying and praising God. We welcome the Christ into our hearts and homes.**

PASTOR: Amen.

ALL: **Amen. Amen.**

Sing

“Happy Birthday Jesus”

Please come forward to light a candle and place it in the sand box.

Hymn #239 (red)

“Silent Night, Holy 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.

2. 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!

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.

4. Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

WORDS: Joseph Mohr, 1818; trans. by John F. Young

MUSIC: Franz Gruber, 1818

(You are invited to stay and listen or leave as you wish. Thank you to those who have participated in tonight's worship.)

Postlude

“Silent Night” — arr. C. Davis

(Parts of this liturgy have been taken from *Taught by Love* by Lavon Bayler.)