**“The Light Shines in the Darkness”**

**A Service for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day**

***Suitable for Virtual Delivery or Physically***

***Distanced In-Person Worship***

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**Production Notes and Suggestions**

*This service is designed around four monologues offered by symbols related to the Christmas narratives. These symbols can be represented by four objects (or photos of these objects if you are producing an online service): a lamp or candle on a stand, a wooden manger, a wooden staff or shepherd’s crook, a wrapped Christmas present.*

*You need a minimum of three voices to lead the script well: a scripture reader, a monologue reader and a prayer leader, but it will be more effective if each monologue is delivered by a different voice. A different reader could also be assigned for each scripture passage.*

*If you produce the script in a church sanctuary, each person who delivers a monologue can carry in the symbol and set it centrally. You can create a tableau of the symbols as the service unfolds. The individuals do not interact so it will be easy for them to maintain physical distance.*

*If you are using photographs of the symbols for an online service, consider having a photo of the symbol on its own for the first section of the monologue and a photo of hands (or a person) engaging the symbol for the second section. For the final photo in the fourth monologue, create a tableau of all four symbols.*

*The carols suggested are all very familiar. Anyone participating online will be able to sing along. Other songs which highlight the symbols or the different scenes of the narrative could be substituted. If congregational singing is not permitted by local health protocols, soloists or good choral recordings could present the songs.*

*The short prayers which follow the monologues were written to be said in unison. If this proves difficult for online participation, have a different voice lead these prayers, creating a little pause after each monologue.*

*The longer prayer toward the end of the service has optional markings to add the sound of wind chimes or a bell as each theme of that prayer concludes. Or add a sung response or a short instrumental line from a carol at these places instead, to draw listeners into the prayerful themes.*

*Scripture readings are taken from the NRSV. The readings are broken up to fit with the monologues, not necessarily according to paragraphs common in the Bible itself.*

**The Light Shines in the Darkness**

**The Christmas Story for the Cosmos According to John**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Then the Word became flesh and lived among us,

and we have seen God’s glory, full of grace and truth.

What has come into being in Christ was life,

and the life was the light of all people.

This light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness did not overcome it.

*(If it is your custom to the light the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve, light it here.*

*If the service is delivered virtually, invite those participating online to light a Christ candle too.)*

Carol: O Come, all ye Faithful

***First Monologue: “The lamp speaks”***

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

A lamp shines into the darkness, a pinpoint of light in a dark night.

We know how our eyes will find even the tiniest spark of light

when everything else around us is dark.

For light *is* stronger than the darkness.

At night, when a lamp is burning, open the door on the darkness and see what happens.

The lamp light shines out and takes over a bit of the darkness.

*Never* does a piece of the darkness fall into a lighted room and take away some of the light.

Even a simple lamp enjoys the power of light.

Its flame allows the light to shine where we need it—

into the darkest corners of house or stable.

A single lamp can show us the pathway on the darkest night,

so no one stumbles while carrying a precious gift.

A lamp shining in the doorway welcomes us in from our wandering.

Its warmth pushes away our worries

just like its light pushes away the dark.

**The Christmas Story According to Luke begins**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Carol: O little town of Bethlehem

***The First Monologue continues: “The lamp speaks again”***

But what is a lamp without hands to strike the match and light the wick?

A lamp cannot light itself.

What is a lamp without hands to hold it up so its light shines into those dark corners?

A lamp cannot lift itself high.

What is a lamp without hands to open the door

and let the lamplight shine out into the darkness?

A lamp cannot open the door.

A lamp needs a life to look into the darkness

and see who needs light to brighten their path.

A lamp needs a life to light the wick and set the light shining.

A lamp needs a life to open the door and hold it up high,

a life that will welcome a stranger into the light, into the warmth,

into a heart and a hearth.

**Prayer**: *(can be said in unison or led by a different voice)*

**O God, shine your light into our lives on this dark night. Warm our hearts so that we will open our doors to your love. May ours be the lives that shine light into the dark corners of your world. May ours be the lives that welcome you to be born again in our midst this Christmas. Amen.**

***The Second Monologue: “The manger speaks”***

What is a manger?

Just a few pieces of wood, nailed together, to serve a good purpose.

That’s all a manger is.

Just a set of wooden arms, strong enough to hold a new bundle of hay each day.

Still, a manger protects its bed of hay, keeps it clean and dry, keeps the mice away.

A manger stands guard to offer its food, its source of life,

to animals who rely on its steady footing.

That manger always stands ready for whoever needs its nourishing cargo.

That manger will open its wooden arms to welcome the hungry lives which gather round it,

lives that trust the manger holds what they need for the future.

**The Christmas Story According to Luke Continues**

**The Birth of Jesus**

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Carol: Away in the manger

***The Second Monologue continues:******“The manger speaks again”***

But how can a manger become a cradle for more than a bundle of hay?

Can it be a cradle without hands to prepare the bed and welcome more precious cargo?

Can a manger become a cradle without hands to lay a newborn to rest,

hands which settle and sooth and tend new life?

Can a manger be a cradle without hands, tiny and perfect, reaching up,

reaching out for attention, for warmth, for love?

A cradle needs a life to smooth the bed and smooth the forehead.

A cradle needs a life to rock the baby and sing the soothing lullaby.

A cradle needs a life to shelter, resting its tiny head,

trusting itself to the manger’s wooden arms and the mother’s willing arms.

**Prayer:** *(can said in unison or led by a different voice)*

**O God, may our lives cradle your love this Christmas as we smile on the baby Jesus. May our love become a shelter for those who turn to us for protection. May our arms offer the welcome every stranger needs, in the name of Jesus who reaches out to us from the manger. Amen.**

***The Third Monologue:*** ***“The staff speaks”***

Not much goes into a staff.

It’s cut from a tree and carved to be useful out there in the wild.

A staff is just a walking stick, sturdy and dependable,

something to lean on if you’re weary.

A staff gives that extra footing when the path is slippery,

or your knee is stiff and sore, feeling the weather on a cold, damp night.

For a shepherd, a staff offers a bit of support along a rocky path.

That staff gives an occasional prod to remind a stubborn sheep

to move along to next green pasture.

And a staff with a bit of a curve comes in handy

when a wayward lamb gets stuck in a crevice or a muddy patch in the field.

**The Christmas Story According to Luke Continues**

**The Shepherds and the Angels**

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom God favours!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Carol: While shepherds watched their flocks

***The Third Monologue continues:******“The staff speaks again”***

But what is a staff without hands to grip it firmly?

What is a staff without hands to place it wisely for sure support?

What is a staff without hands to prod that sheep gently through the winding valley?

Hands to hook the crook around the silly lamb that got stuck and pull it to safety?

A staff needs a life to test is strength.

A staff needs a life to lean on its dependability.

A staff needs a life who knows the sheep and sees how they go astray.

A staff needs a life unafraid of the danger,

a life to kneel down and rescue the lamb, pulling it free, guiding it on the way.

**Prayer:** *(said in unison or led by a different voice)*

**Lord Jesus Christ, we have come to find you this Christmas. Be our staff to lean**

**on when we lose our footing. Be our guide when we cannot find our way. Pull**

**us free from danger. Saviour, rescue us with the light of your love. Be our**

**strength now and in the year ahead, so that we may walk with your courage**

**and compassion, come what may. Amen.**

*(If an offering is to be received, this is the place for it.)*

***The Fourth Monologue:******“A gift speaks”***

Christmas is a time of gift giving.

Think of all the gifts wrapped up and waiting under your tree.

Each gift is a piece of love chosen for someone special.

Each gift is a piece of hope waiting to change someone’s life.

A gift is that little piece of joy given to make someone smile.

**The Christmas Story According to Matthew**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped,\* they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Carol: What child is this?

***The Fourth Monologue continues: “A gift speaks again”***

Yet what is a gift without hands to present it?

What is a gift without hands to unwrap it?

What is a gift without hands to hold it up in wonder, to cherish it, to play with it,

to touch the love it bears and make that love your own?

A gift needs a life to give it.

A gift needs a life to receive it.

A gift needs a life to unwrap the love inside and share that love outside,

with all who wonder how love can give so much.

The Christ Child is a life born for us, born with us, to offer us God’s gift.

The Christ Child is a gift, with love for each one of us so wonderful

that we can share that love with others and never have the love run out.

Christ is the gift God gives tonight.

Christ is the gift we receive tonight.

Unwrap this gift for yourself and share this gift of love with everyone whose life touches yours.

Carol: Silent Night

**Prayers of Thanks and Request**

God of the starry heavens and the good old earth,

Eternal God, God with us,

You have come among us in the figure of a baby, a newborn reaching out to us,

to bring a smile to our lips and hope to our hearts.

Thank you for your tenderness with which you touch our lives.

(*Sound a chime or bell*)

This Christmas as we remember the baby lying in a manger, we pray for peace…

Peace in all the places where there is anger or war or fear…

Peace in all the hearts that know sorrow or stress…

We pray for people who will not sleep safely tonight because of conflict in their lives…

*(Silence)*

Cradle all these people and places in your love

so the world may sleep in heavenly peace this night.

*(Sound a chime or bell)*

This Christmas as we remember the mother Mary rocking her baby,

we pray for all children born this Christmas season…

Watch over mothers and fathers and grandparents,

hoping for the best for their newborns…

*(Silence)*

Help us create communities where every child is valued and every family has enough…

May families rejoice because Christ the Saviour is born for us,

for each of us and for all of us.

(*Sound a chime or bell*)

This Christmas as we remember the father Joseph protecting his little one,

we pray for all those watching over the helpless and the hopeless this season.

Be with all those who must work this holiday

to keep the world safe and to care for those in need…

Be with those who are sick or sad or lonely

So that each one will know your tender touch.

(*Sound a chime or bell*)

God of the starry heavens and the good old earth,

Eternal God, God with us,

This Christmas as we remember the shepherds coming in haste

and the wise men coming in wonder,

open our hearts to reach out to the Christ Child,

to receive the gift you offer us in Jesus,

even as we offer our love to you in his name.

Bless us in the year ahead so we can share your love with all the lives that touch ours.

(*Sound a chime or bell*)

May our hearts sing with the Christmas angels,

Glory to you, O God, and on earth, peace for all who wonder at your love. Amen

Carol: Joy to the World

**Blessing:**

**To you is born this day a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.**

**May the love of the Christ Child embrace you.**

**The joy of the Christ Child fill your heart.**

**May the peace of the Christ Child give you rest,**

**and the hope of the Christ Child guide you into the year ahead.**

**Amen.**