



St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Seeking to see and serve Christ in all persons

Sacred Space Pilgrimage Christmas Eve, 2020

The primary purpose of your pilgrimage inside the nave of St. Paul's is for prayer and meditation in our sacred space. It is not intended to be a worship service, but instead a time for individual prayer and reflection as you are surrounded by the music of the season.

Readings, prayers, and poems are provided for your silent reflection or you may use your own. However, because it is Christmas Eve, Jesus's birth narrative according to the Gospel of Luke will be read aloud.

Luke 2:1-20, King James Version

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

*May God, who in the Word made flesh joined heaven to earth
and earth to heaven, give you his peace and favor.*

COLLECTS FOR CHRISTMAS

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

POETRY

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas by Ann Weems

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas is a star...
Brilliance in a package,
something you could keep in the pocket of your jeans
or in the pocket of your being.
Something to take out in times of darkness,
something that would never snuff out or tarnish,
something you could hold in your hand,
something for wonderment,
something for pondering,
something that would remind you of
what Christmas has always meant:
God's Advent Light into the darkness of this world. But
stars are only God's for giving,
and I must be content to give you words and wishes
and packages without stars.
But I can wish you life
as radiant as the Star

that announces the Christ Child's coming,
and as filled with awe as the shepherds who stood beneath its light. And I
can pass on to you the love
that has been given to me,
ignited countless times by others
who have knelt in Bethlehem's light.
Perhaps, if you ask, God will give you a star.

The Boy Shepherds' Simile. by David Bottoms

Wind rose cold under our robes, and straw blew loose
from the stable roof.
We loved the cow tied to the oak, her breath rising in
the black air, and the two goats trucked
from the Snelling farm, the gray dog shaking with age
and weather.

Over our scene a great star hung
its light, and we could see in the bleached night a
crowd of overcoats peopling the chairs.
A coat of black ice glazed the streets.
This was not a child or a king,
but Mary Sosebee's Christmas doll of a year ago.
We knelt in that knowledge on the wide front lawn
of the First Baptist Church
while flashbulbs went off all around us
and a choir of angels caroled from their risers.
This was not a child wrapped in straw
and the ragged sheet, but since believing was an easy thing we
believed it was like a child,
a king who lived in the stories we were told.
For this, we shivered in adoration. We bore the cold.

Joseph by U.A. Fanthorpe

I am Joseph, carpenter,
Of David's kingly line,
I wanted an heir, discovered
My wife's son wasn't mine.
I am an obstinate lover,
Loved Mary for better or worse.
Wouldn't stop loving when I found

Someone Else came first.
Mine was the likeness I hoped for
When the first-born man-child came
But nothing of him was me, I couldn't
Even choose his name.
I am Joseph who wanted
To teach my own boy how to live.
My lesson for my foster son:
Endure. Love. Give.

What The Donkey Saw. U.A. Fanthorpe

No room in the inn, of course
And not that much in the stable
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,
Joseph, the heavenly host –
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in
For love or money.
Still, in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together.

REFLECTIONS

The Rev. John Buchanan told this story one Christmas Eve when he was serving at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago: Ted Wardlaw used to be a pastor in Atlanta; now he's the president of Austin Theological Seminary. His kids are nearly grown now, but back when his two girls were about eight and five they cleared off a table in the living room to display a precious family heirloom, a crèche, hand painted by one of their great-grandmothers. All the characters were there, shepherds, sheep, wise men, Mary and Joseph and the baby; they sat resplendent in the center of the house for a few weeks. And then Ted and Kay started to notice some additions to the manger scene. First, next to a wise man, a blue-green pony appeared with a fluorescent mane fashionably swept to one side. A day later a reindeer showed up then another animal. Finally, close to Christmas, a purple Styrofoam hand-made ornament all covered in glitter found its place right beside the manger.

Ted, who is a serious New Testament scholar, was about this close to calling his daughters in and giving them a biblically accurate and detailed explanation of the nativity she, when he had a flash of insight into their child's hearts. These things weren't distractions at all, but "one [small] person's longing to connect her life to the story." vii

We are all there, grownups and kids alike; we share the same longing -- we all long to be at home among those who are closest to the truth. Whether you have wandered far or spent your whole life in one place it is the same. Emmanuel comes to you. Place yourself in his story. Receive him in your heart this night and follow him all the rest of your days. Join him as he feeds the hungry and clothes and shelters those in need. Accept the home he provides, his peace, where there is shelter, for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and for every one of us.

Another from **John Buchanan**

Even the words of this evening's text have the feel of a warm, familiar embrace of home. They are among the most beloved in the English language. We know them by heart:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled And while they were there the time came for her to be delivered 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.

Homecoming. On this all-important night we sing songs and light candles to remind us that God came to our home, that God came to be what we are in order to bring us home. It is a mind-bending idea and one that is better remembered in story and song, than any reasoned theological explanation that I could give.

On this night we recall that God-with-us, Emmanuel was born to a young family uprooted and displaced from their own home. I never want to forget that the story of Jesus is an immigrant story, the story of One who came:

He came to his own, and his own knew him not.iv

He came to bring us home, though he had no home of his own. He said that Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. I think of that verse most every time I visit Resurrection House, our church sponsored day shelter for the homeless.