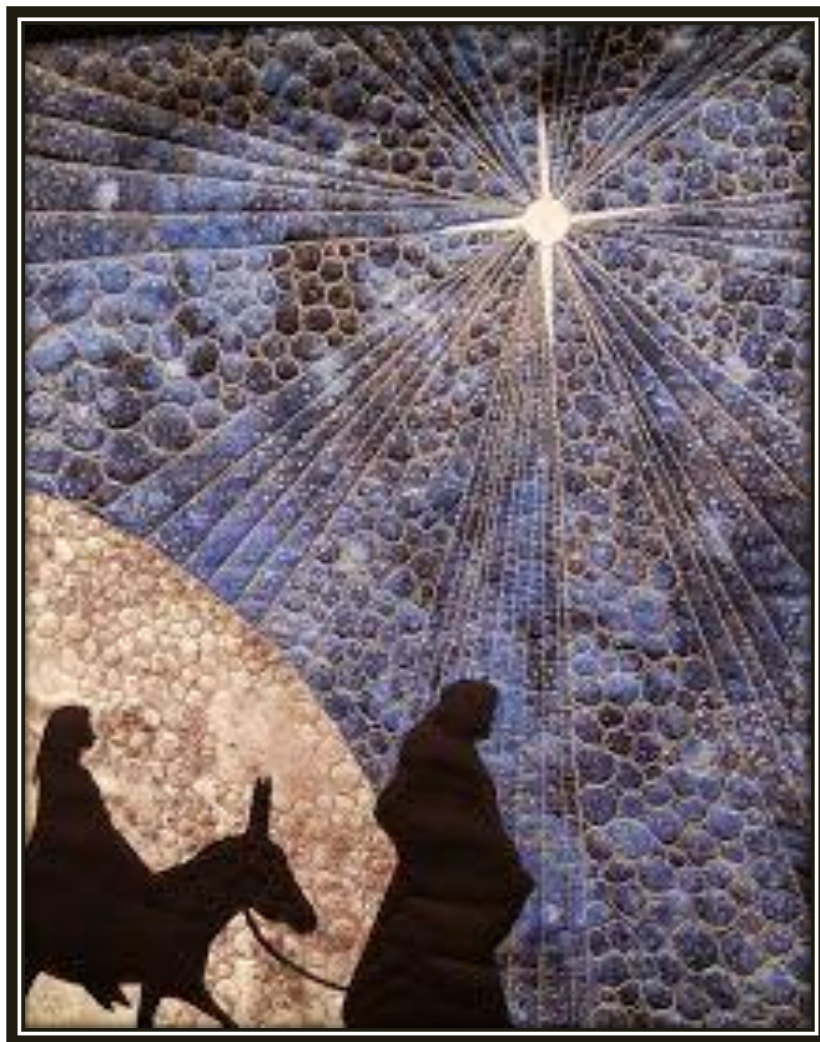


Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

December 24, 2019

7:00 PM



A Just Peace Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation
A God is Still Speaking Congregation

Our faith is 2000 years old; our thinking isn't

A compassionate community, intentionally inclusive,
openly searching, joyfully serving in the way of Christ.

Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
A Just Peace, Open & Affirming, & God Is Still Speaking Congregation

"An inclusive spiritual family shaping a better you for creating a better world.
A place to make a difference."

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

December 24, 2019

Sacred Fellowship 7:00 PM

We are delighted that you are here today! We hope you will find us an affirming, uplifting, and committed family of faith. Here we work to make everyone, without any exceptions, to feel accepted, inspired, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. In dialogue, we seek to understand. In encouragement, we seek to heal. In all things we yearn to live by love, for peace, with joy. This is a place where your intellect will be challenged, your heart will be nurtured, and your spirit refreshed. Varying beliefs are expressed openly and freely, and your doubts will not be suppressed. We trust that we are all, every person and part of creation, continuing to be blessed by God's grace; and that in community we can help each other to see this grace alive in our lives and relationships. We hope to share our gifts with you, even as we pray that you will want to share your gifts with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to be a part of our lives and our spiritual home. Welcome!

A Christmas Eve Candlelight Service of Carols & Readings

"BY THE TENDER MERCY OF OUR GOD,
THE DAWN FROM ON HIGH WILL BREAK UPON US,
TO GIVE LIGHT TO THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS
AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
TO GUIDE OUR FEET INTO THE WAY OF PEACE." -- Luke 1.78-79

Ringling the Bells of Christmas

Choir Members

Prelude "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lighting the Light of Christ

Pastor Bret

Christ is a True Light to the world! In Christ there is no darkness, but only the light that shines through the darkness. We are called by Christ to walk in the light of God's love, and to let that light shine through us that it might brighten our path and lead us to that place where we are at peace with God and all of God's creatures.

We come on this holy night to search through the darkness in our lives in hopes of coming to the Light. May each of us on this Christmas Eve find the True Light that comes from God, and may we share that Light with each other and pass it on to all whom we meet.

"And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw that the light was good."
-- Genesis 1.3-4A

Welcome

***Hymn of Faithfulness** "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

#135, vss. 1, 3

***Centering Our Souls**

Bill Torrey

O Loving, Creator God, we gather to remember the birth of the holy infant, Jesus, who was a gleaming beacon to point the way out of spiritual darkness, and a burning ember in our consciences to prod us to virtuous action.

Let the guiding star of hope light our hearts and minds so that we may faithfully be brilliant rays of love and peace that shine on all whom we meet. Help us to walk joyfully together as your children, and as each other's brothers and sisters.

May we learn to accept each other's foibles, encourage understanding of our differences, forgive each other's indiscretions, inspire compassionate thoughts and actions, and nurture friendships with all who are not yet our friends.

May this be our Christmas gift to You, to each other, and to ourselves. Blessings be.

Advent Wreath Ceremony

"The Christ Candle"

Walker, Megan, Rohan, Tucker, and Leif Magrauth

Prayers

Silent Meditation

Pastoral Prayer

Collective Christmas Prayer

Georgene Fabian

We await the birth of new life into the world, and into our lives. On this Christmas Eve, our hearts are warmed by the hope and promise of Christ's incarnation. And our spirits are inspired by the love and peace which beckons us so silently and gently. We are encouraged to let your image live ever more fully in us so that we might help justice to arise in the lowliest of circumstances, and that we may spread kindness and gentleness to all whom we meet – not only on this night and in the year to come, but for all our lives long.

We are thankful for Jesus' birth, life, and teachings and what they mean to us...for prospects of peace in the world...for confidence in the power of love...for those who generously give...for those who graciously receive...and for the Church that nurtures us in faith.

Nurture our hearts to offer a hospitality that welcomes all your children. Especially we pray for -- those who have not felt your good news...the sick and suffering...those who know no laughter, only tears...those who govern and lead...those enslaved by tyranny...prisoners of addiction or abuse...those persecuted for being peacemakers...and the Church as a refuge for those in need. May we help make it so.

The Gospel Announcement of the Advent of the Light

Sue Gontarz

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." -- John 1.9, 3c-5

***The Star that Announced the Light** "The First Nowell" #139, vss. 1-3

Reading of the Word Luke 2.1-20 Kayla Gontarz

***Hymn of the Angels' Song** "Angels We Have Heard on High"
#125, vss. 1-2

Reading of the Word Matthew 2.1-11 John Anderson

***Hymn of the Magi** "We Three Kings" Tune: Kings of Orient
Words/Music: John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1857

We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

Chorus: O, star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to your perfect light.

Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns a Deity nigh; prayer and praising, voices raising, worshipping God on high.

Chorus

A Light to be Shared

Megan Magrauth

God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Whenever we respond to God's Word and bear testimony as to how it has influenced our lives, we become God's lights of the world. God has given us "Love's Pure Light". Christ Jesus told us to share that light with one another, reminding us not to hide our light under a bushel basket but to let it shine out through our days and nights, from our valleys and from our mountaintops. We share that light through both our attitudes and our actions. Let us act with generosity and an attitude of joy as we bring light to a world in need by our offerings.

Offerings of Christmas Cheer & Generosity

Offertory Music "Away in a Manger

This evening's offering will go to Habitat for Humanity.

One half of Offering received will help build a home in the Plymouth area.

Reflections & the Singing of the Carols of Christmas

Donna Castor

All people seek to be free from that which imprisons their souls and alienates them from that which they love. And so the hope of liberation is always a present and future reality.

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

#116, vss. 1, 7

John Anderson

In the midnights of our lives, we can lay with the world in solemn stillness as we listen for a song of the angels that whispers peace to us. When we have let peace penetrate the darkness of our lives, we can be witnesses of that peace to others as we are inspired to promote good will between all peoples.

“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”

#131, vss. 1, 3

Bev Newton

In some of the most unseemly places, great things can happen. In silence, we are able to receive the wondrous gifts that cannot be perceived in the busyness of our lives.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

#133, vss. 1, 3

Carol Stewart

Grace is all around us. When we pause to meditate on what is available to us without cost, our hearts are warmed. We are filled with awe at the grandeur of God's love for us. And when we consider how well we are doing at being agents of God's love in this world, we see the need for personal humility. We offer praise for that which is mightier than ourselves. We become connected to the divine, and that which is holy abides in us -- through our days, and through our nights.

“O Holy Night”

Alison Thatcher, Soloist

Georgene Fabian

That which is holy is always among us. We often do not recognize the image of God in our neighbor because of our preconceptions of what we picture God to be. It is hard sometimes for us to imagine God being revealed in those who do not have the "right" appearance or who reside in a place that is unseemly. Sometimes only those as lowly as shepherds, or those with the understanding of wise men, are able to see the divine in places like a livestock stable. Like them, we need to train ourselves to look beyond the external conditions to see the beauty that lies within.

“What Child Is This”

#148, vss. 1-2

Rob Stewart

All of creation is a gift to us, and we are a gift to all of creation. God created us all so that we might live in harmony together, seeing the beauty of God's grace in each and every living thing. The lessons we can learn from others include the rest of creation, not simply the rest of humanity. We remember God's presence in all things as we recall the “friendly beasts” in that stable long ago.

“Jesus, Our Brother, Strong and Good”

#138, vss. 1-3, 6

Troy Tedeschi

The dream of being reconciled with all humanity and with all creatures would be impossible without the grace of God. But through God, all things are possible. When we are reconciled with one another and all the earth, we then become truly reconciled with God. God's peace will then reign in every heart and in every land. Light and life will be the blessing of us all,

and we shall rise with healing with Christ who came to give us this second birth.

Choir Anthem "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"

Neil Harmon

Sabrina Tedeschi

The joy we celebrate at the birth of Christ in the world and in our hearts can be overwhelming – making us feel that all of heaven and nature sings with us of the anticipated coming of peace, justice, love, and joy forevermore. What could be more wonderful! Our hearts, minds, and souls resound together with all creation to repeat the sounding joy!

"Joy to the World" #132, vss. 1-2

Sharing the Light of Christ: Letting Our Light Shine

Sue Gontarz

Christ was born in the infant, Jesus. And that child whose birth we remember on this evening grew up to show the world the way to salvation...becoming a light to the world. Christ lived in Jesus, and Christ can live in us. Christ inspires our hope, nurtures our faith, encourages our love, enkindles our peace, and sustains our joy. Christ has shown us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Christ gives light in the midst of darkness, and passes that light on to us so that we may be a shining light in the night...a light of hope, a light of faith, a light of love, a light of peace, and a light of joy - - for all the world to see.

Pastor Bret

When we are lit by love's pure light, we respond with acts of generosity and spiritual grace. Our individual lights shine like flames of a candle. But when we shine together as a community of the faithful, our collective light is able to radiate like a lighthouse's beacon to a world in need. Let us as that community affirm our commitment to help heal a world in need of Christ's light of love as we let our lights shine.

(As we sing the following hymn, the pastor takes the flame from the Christ Candle and lights the candle of the 1st person in each section, who then lights the candle of the person next to them, repeating the pattern till the end of each row. The last person on the row will then pass the flame on to the row behind them, and thus the flamed is weaved throughout the congregation from front to back until everyone's candle is lit. Symbolically, we all receive and pass on the light of Christ. Please tip only unlit candles to receive the flame from those lit.)

Hymn of Love's Pure Light

"Silent Night, Holy Night"

1) 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, Child 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, cast your glow, on our soul; make us ready to do your will, fearless of all that tempts us still, heal our wounds from within, heal our wounds from within.

5) Silent night, holy night, virtuous life, gives us light; we can forgive the one whose done wrong, with compassion oh so strong; this, the gift of God's grace, give the gift of God's grace.

6) Silent night, holy night, beauty lives, Spirit gives; grateful we give to those in need, so they need not continue to plead; justice, mercy, and care, Christ asks us kindness to dare.

7) Silent night, holy night, Earth awakes, for our sakes; creatures all in harmony, interdependent through history; made to live and let be, by this we all can be free.

8) Silent night, holy night, Christ is here, joy is near; sing with hope from the depth of your heart, faith that nothing can tear us apart; love's a gift of God's grace, peace is a gift of God's grace.

--- Tune: Stille Nacht by Franz Gruber;
Words: vss. 1-3, Joseph Mohr; vss. 4-8, Bret S. Myers

Committing Your Life to the One True Light

Kayla Gontarz

"It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

-- II Corinthians 4.6

Megan Magrath

God has shone the light of love and peace upon each of our hearts and minds this blessed evening. Do not let that light fade as Christmas Eve turns to Christmas Day, and as Christmas Day turns to the new year, and as the new year turns to all the years to come. God's gift of love to the world is the greatest gift we could ever receive...and the greatest we could ever give. It is what makes life glorious and meaningful.

Pastor Bret

The One True light is God...and God is Love...and we are each made in the image of God – Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Taoist, Confucian, Shinto, all other believers and also every unbeliever. We, like the Christ child, are born into this world for the same purpose: to love and be loved, so that the whole world might be filled with the love of God. We are to love God, ourselves, our families, our friends, our acquaintances, and even our enemies. We are to love men, women, children, abled & disabled, gays & straights, warriors & peacemakers, and sinners & saints. We are to love people of all colors, of all nationalities, of all ethnic backgrounds. We are to love all creatures on this blessed earth, and even love all creation – animate, or inanimate. We are called to love – not in part, but

wholly...not just to some, but to all...not just with our own strength and will-power, but with that which God gives us when we truly trust in the power of God living through us.

John Anderson

In an age when we find it increasingly difficult to keep commitments, and troubling to even consider making commitments, let us not turn away from God's call to make and keep a commitment to live for the very purpose of why we are here. God is speaking to each one of us to make a deeper commitment to let the light of love be our guide throughout our daily lives -- in all that we perceive, think, feel, say, and do.

Donna Castor

Please respond now to God's attempt to let that light of love be born in you. Commit your life to God's Loving Light. As you now extinguish the flame from the candle in your hands, let the Light of Christ light the candle in your heart so that you may in truth and life go forth with hope, faith, love, peace, and joy.

***Benediction**

Pastor Bret

May Christ be born in you anew as you go forth in peace with love's pure light shining brightly. May it dispel the darkness in your own life, and be a beacon for others to follow as they get to know the beauty of the divine Christ child through you and in you. Amen

***Postlude**

For Your Faith & Sustenance

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Creator in heaven." -- Matthew 5.14-16

God's gift of Christ reveals to us that God not only is present with us, but that God walks beside us and guides us on our journey. As dark as our individual journeys may get, they can be lit not by the matchlight of how we try to manipulate the world around us, but by the sunlight of our trust in God's grace to keep us on the honorable and virtuous path.

This evening we thanks:

Soloist: Alison Thatcher

Readers: The Magrath Family, John Anderson, Donna Castor, Georgene Fabian, Kayla Gontarz, Sue Gontarz, Megan Magrath, Bev Newton, Carol and Rob Stewart, Sabrina Tedeschi, Troy Tedeschi, Bill Torrey

You, for celebrating the birth of the Light of the World!

Merry Christmas!

If you ordered a poinsettia, please take it tonight.

The Rev. Bret S. Myers, Interim Pastor
Deborah Healey, Church Office Administrator
David Williams, Director of Music
Ashley Paine, Organist/Accompanist
Larry Spencer, Church Treasurer
Celia Woolverton, Grace Counseling

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