

12.24.24, 3:00 pm Christmas Eve Service
Meditation “A Most Important Message!”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

PASTOR: Welcome! And Merry Christmas! It is so good to see you, whether you come every Sunday or whenever you can. For our guests who’ve never been in our building, we welcome you! For those returning, we say “welcome home” to a sanctuary of beauty and calm in an otherwise anxious holiday season.

There are helpful hints about the service in the bulletin on the small side entrance table and be sure you have a white candle for later in the service. And for practical purposes, restrooms are in the back, down the hall. We no longer pass the offering tray, but we do invite you to give to our Church Ministries or to the Benevolence Fund; the brass collection plates are at the door and on the white column as you enter and exit if you are led to contribute. Thanks to your generosity, we served many new people in need this year; and those we serve and pray for often share their gratitude for your compassion.

On behalf of our congregation and guests, “thank you” in advance to all our instrumentalists and vocalists for rehearsing and performing beautiful music to enhance our seasonal worship; we thank our regulars who are committed every Sunday, and especially our volunteers who teach, greet, open/close, and help with the poinsettias, the garden, hospitality, and more. We also are blessed by David Evans, our Minister with Music, for his leadership, talents, and skills.

We gather this Christmas Eve to celebrate the wondrous miracle of tomorrow – the birth of Jesus – so please relax and open your hearts to receive the word of the Lord through Music and Scripture. First, let us pray:

Loving God and Giver of Life itself, as we worship this Christmas Eve, we are filled with anticipation, hope, and joy. We thank you for the precious gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate. May our faith in Him and relationship with Him deepen and mature as we reflect on His birth, life, and ministry. Bless this gathering, Lord, and may your presence be felt by each of us through music, Scripture, prayer, communion, and candlelight. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Music Presentation – Wind Quintet & Piano & Vocal Ensemble

Lighting the Christ Candle, Music (Hymn #83 “Arise, Your Light Is Come”)

Hymn #83: “Arise, Your Light Is Come” ~ Congregants

*** PASTOR: Let us remain standing for the *Litany of Light printed in your bulletin:**

Leader: In the beginning was the Word. And the Word came and dwelt among us. And the Word was the light of all peoples. Into the waiting night, the Christ child is born!

People: Into the silent night, songs of hope, peace, joy, and love ring forth. In anticipation, we wonder with curiosity and awe about this news.

Leader: Into the darkness of the world’s night, the light of the world has come. Let there be light.

People: Christ, our Lord, is born!

Leader: The flickering light of his candle burns before us.

People: The radiant light of his love burns within us.

Leader: May we share this love of God with a world longing for light, hope, beauty, peace, joy, and love. May our faith and generosity shine in a world of skepticism and despair. For Christ, our Lord, is born.

ALL: Let us rejoice and give thanks! Alleluia (*normal*)
Alleluia! (*loud*) **Alleluia!** (*louder*)

CHOIR: “When the Herds Were Watching”

PASTOR: The following Scripture gives us **Hope Assured:**

Titus 2:11-14 ^{NLT}

¹¹ For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, ¹³ while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. ¹⁴ He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds:

*Carol, Hymn #89

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” [*Verses, 1 & 2*]

Congregants

Latin Hymn, Wade

PASTOR: The Prophet Isaiah Promises **Peace:**

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 ^{GNT}

² The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light.

They lived in a land of shadows,
 but now light is shining on them.

⁶ A child is born to us!

A son is given to us!

And he will be our ruler.

He will be called, “Wonderful^[a] Counselor,”

“Mighty God,” “Eternal Father,”

“Prince of Peace.”

⁷ His royal power will continue to grow;

his kingdom will always be at peace.

He will rule as King David's successor,

basing his power on right and justice,

from now until the end of time.

The Lord Almighty is determined to do all this.

Carol, Hymn #108

“How Great Our Joy”

Congregants

Trad'l. German Carol, Jungst

PASTOR: Even in Mary's circumstances, she expected **Joy:**

Luke 1:26-38, 46-50 ^{NIV}

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

Choral Message

“Wake, Shepherds, Awake”

Carl F. Schalk

PASTOR: In the Christmas story, we see God’s Love Fulfilled:

Luke 2:1-20 NKJV

¹ And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, “Do **not** be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a **Savior**, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth **peace**, goodwill toward men!”

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

*Carol, Hymn #94

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory” [*Verses 1 & 2*]

Congregants

Montgomery, Smart

LAY LEADER: Offertory Prayer

Choral Proclamation

“He Is Born” (*Choir & Instrumental Ensemble*)

French Carol, arr. John Leavitt

PASTOR - MESSAGE:

Lessons from Advent: A Most Important Message!

Please pray with me:

Father of our Savior and Lord, Jesus, we come to you grateful for the time to prepare during Advent and for tomorrow to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. Thank you for the Christmas message; let us keep it in our hearts year-round. And help us to embrace and appreciate the gift of your Son. Speak now through this messenger. “**Amen**”.

Through Advent, we’ve heard from various messengers about Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the Prince of Peace coming to earth to save us from ourselves. We heard from the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, the Psalm writers, John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Jesus himself in Scripture, and today again from Isaiah, the angel Gabriel, and Mary his mother. We also heard from the Shepherds and a host of heavenly angels about this glorious event that had happened—God coming to earth in the form of a child who would become a man and suffer to save many. Soon, we will learn about the wise men or kings who saw the star in the East, the star being another messenger. These messengers are just a few of many in our Bible who point us to the living Christ.

As the beautiful music, prayers, Scriptures, fellowship, and decorations suggest, we celebrate Christ’s birth today and tomorrow. The light flurries of snow this morning brought us a little natural beauty to close out our theme this year of “Finding Beauty”. The Advent season is a time of hope, peace, joy, love, and expectancy. Ask any 5-year-old who can’t wait for Christmas morning! Like the shepherds, we have been on a journey travelling to Bethlehem (*so to speak*) to the manger to see the Christ-child. Yet like many years before, it has not been always a joyful journey; yes, there was a Middle East ceasefire, thank the Lord, but there is still war in the Ukraine, hostages in captivity, disruptive politics here in the U.S., wildfires, earthquakes, illness, death, starvation around the world, disease, poverty, unprovoked violence, sin, mental health issues, and other challenges of our day.

But today and tomorrow, we have a message of **Good News!** God did fulfill his promise. In preparation, we focused on the messengers, learned about them, and asked why they shared their news. The point of our celebration today is the **message** itself. All the messengers I listed

earlier are fascinating, especially the angels, but if we look only to the means of communication, we could miss the good news of our Lord and Savior. Let us focus on the Messiah!

Yes, his birth is a miraculous and important story that needs to be shared with others who don't know him; so, this is an easy time of year to do that – share your belief that shopping is not the only way to celebrate Christmas. Casual, non-judgmental comments are welcome this time of year, so it is a chance to invite people to church, or to say, “Merry Christmas” or “Feliz Navidad” rather than the generic “Happy Holidays.” If you shopped late this year (*in person, not online*), didn't you notice the anxious focus of purchasing or getting the best deal? Sure, that is often the case, but perhaps this year, the uncertainty of inflation, tariffs, and the economy may have created a more frantic atmosphere. What happened to giving gifts of time, love, talents, craft-making, playing games together, charity, or service?

The message we have to share with others is not just the babe in a manger, as beautiful and holy a message as that is. Our message for you and for others is coming at Easter. Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead as God's gift to us. He gave his Son, this baby Jesus, to grow, teach, and model for us a hope-filled, peaceful, serving, and loving existence that we can only achieve through surrender to his eternal forgiveness, mercy, and grace through our faith. That decision is a choice, but hearts must be ready to receive him; let us take time this season to plant seeds of faith with others through our own stories of grace, to also become messengers of the Word, and we'll ask God to bring his salvation to those who are open to it.

One way we as a church are planting seeds of faith is through our New United Gospel Food Mission as we build trusting relationships with our community. This Saturday, December 28th between 11 am and 2 pm, we are open to the public at the rear parking lot. There is a way to give on the insert in the bulletin. Being generous and serving others is the message of the Christ-child's birth and life. During the Instrumental Response, communion, or candle lighting, I encourage you to ask Jesus **how** to be his messenger. Come, all ye faithful, to the table.

After the music when directed, please come forward with your candles. We will offer communion by intinction (and for worship leaders the optional cup.) You will dip a piece of bread into the grape juice and eat as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Gather in a circle or oblong shape up here by the tree and altar table. After all are served, I will light two congregants' candles from the Christ Candle and you will hold the lighted candle straight as your neighbor tilts the unlighted candle to light theirs, and so on. We will sing one verse of “Silent Night;” music will continue until we safely light all candles in the circle. After my short benediction, we ask you to extinguish your candles carefully while singing one verse of “Hark!

The Herald Angels Sing!” then make your way back to your seats for the postlude. Please remain seated to enjoy the music. The instructions are printed in your bulletin.

INSTRUMENTAL RESPONSE:

“I Wonder as I Wander” (*Wind Quintet & Piano*)

Duane Funderburk

PASTOR: Prayer of Preparation – Please pray with me,

Thank you, Lord, for calling all your messengers to spread the message, especially Mary to be the mother of your son incarnate. We are grateful for your gifts through him of mercy, grace, and love. We ask you to make us messengers to and for the world, to share the Gospel, cultivate peace, share our resources, give comfort, healing, and the light of Christ to others in darkness. We pray for those who do not know you. Help us to be more mindful of others, so that we notice the needs of your people; please give us the tools and resources to fill them. May we also appreciate how you call each of us in different ways to serve through our time, talents, and gifts. Please bless these communion elements we are about to receive. Amen.

PASTOR: Communion by Intinction. **All who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior are welcomed to this table. All persons are welcomed to join our circle of light. Please come.**

Candle lighting – instructions in bulletin

Hymn #91: Silent Night – 1 verse

PASTOR: Spoken Benediction

In darkness we arrived. In light we now leave.

Though once we stumbled, we now walk with confidence and joy.

Rise up and go, for the grace of God has appeared,
bringing salvation to all.

May the light of Christ lead us forevermore. And may we show that light through our love, faith, and generosity with others. Amen.

PASTOR: Please safely extinguish your candle and sing only verse 1 of **Hymn #88--Hark! The Herald Angels Sing** as you go back to your seats. **AND please remain seated for our Wind Quintet Postlude. Photos by the tree may be taken after the music ends.**

Carol Response #88 (*extinguish candles & be seated, sing verse 1*) All

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” [*verse 1*]

Wesley, Mendelssohn

Postlude (*Remain Seated please*)

“Lift Up Your Heads in Joyful Hope”

Wind Quintet

Martin Madan, arr. Graham Bastable