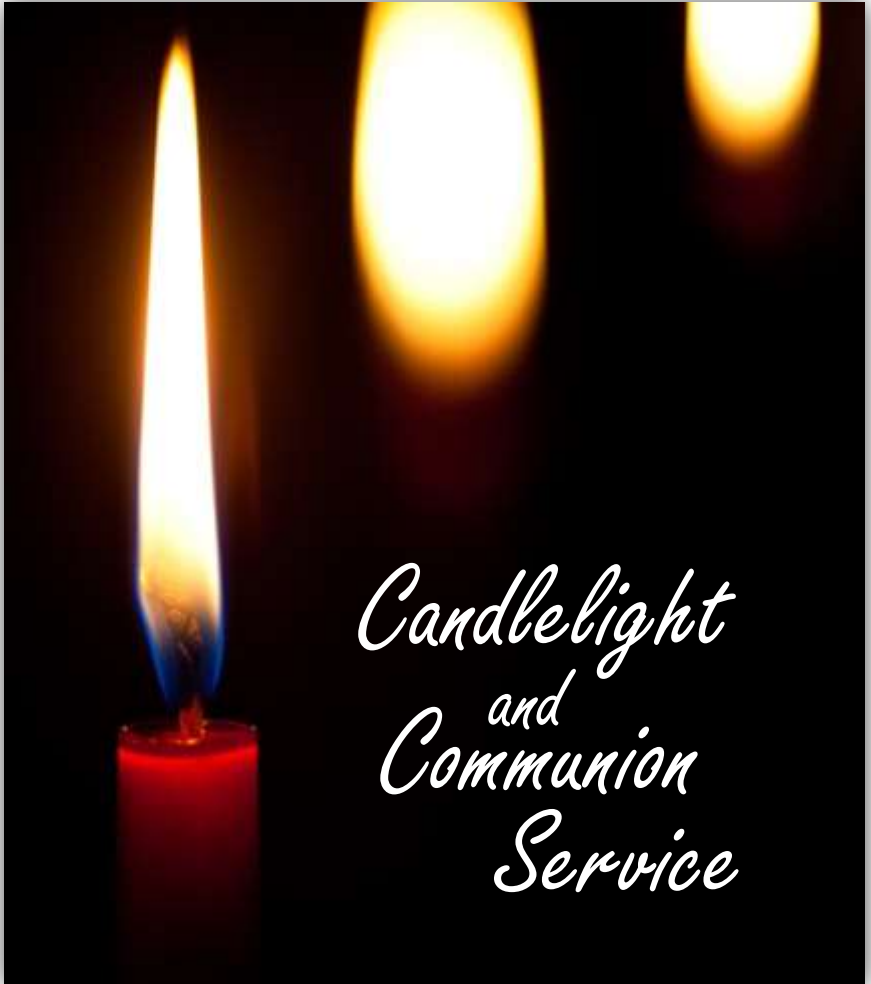

St. James'-Rosemount United Church

171 Sherwood Ave. Kitchener ON N2B 1K2

United Church Women



December 8, 2020

Welcome!

Welcome to worship! We're glad you're here!

WE GATHER IN GOD'S HOPE

VU: Voices United

MV: More Voices

We would like to acknowledge that we are on the Haldimand Tract, traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Welcome

Prelude

Call to Worship

One: Hush... Hush... Listen...
Can you hear it?

All: Hear what?

One: A mother's tears.
A father's sigh of relief.
The hustle and bustle of the night.
Hush... hush... listen... Can you hear it?

All: Hear what?

One: The rhythm of your heart.
The blessing of your neighbour.
The cry of the newborn child. Can you hear it?

All: We hear

**in the silent places and
in the songs of praise,
in the peace of the night and in the chaos of
the morning, in this place,
and in all places, we hear God's love.**

One: Alive.

All: Abundant.

One: For all!

*Written by Richard Bott, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2015-2016,
pg. 28. Used by permission.*

Hymn: **Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus** VU 2

***1 Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free:
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.***

***2 Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.***

***3 Born thy people to deliver;
born a child and yet a king;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.***

***4 By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.***

Creed For Our Advent Pilgrimage:

**All: I believe in the promise of Christmas
and the importance of celebrating it in the
church. I believe in the God at the centre of
Christmas, whose hope for the world was
imagined by prophets. I believe in Mary,
who sang of turning the world upside down
and who allowed her life to be disrupted by God.
I believe in Joseph,
whose broken heart broke the rules
to do the right thing.
I believe in the smell of the stable—
I believe there is no place where God will not go.
I believe in the shepherds,**

**those simple ones open to hear the angels' song.
I believe in the Magi,
the ones outside the faith, outside the
community, who searched out the Holy.
I believe in Jesus,
born in poverty, soon a refugee,
raised in faith, lived seeking justice,
died speaking forgiveness,
rose with a love that could not be stopped. I
commit to use this season
to seek out the Holy
both in God among us,
and in God beyond us.
I open myself to an Advent journey of great joy
that will change my life.**

Written by Barb Janes, based on "I believe in Jesus Christ" by Walter Russell Bowie, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2010-2011, pg. 32. Used by permission.

Reflection: The other Side of the Starlight

- A Monologue by Mary's Mother, Anna

I greet you in the name of the Holy One, El Shaddai, the one who gives life and the one who gives life to those who give life. I come to you tonight in joy—my first grandchild has been born! A boy. They've called him Jesus. Being a grandmother has...how can I tell you...it has completely turned my world inside out. And quite honestly, I come to you as well with some fear...

What I feel tonight just can't be expressed in words, but I will try. Is anyone here a grandmother? Grandfather? Ah. Never, NEVER, in the wildest most scattered imagination of my heart did I expect that things would turn out this way.

I remember when my daughter, Mary, was born... can it be 14 years already? She was a beautiful baby. I love

my sons, most certainly I do.,.but Mary, Mary was my firstborn, and my only daughter. I almost died giving birth...my body was torn, broken...for her. For life. But when I held her for the first time, there was such a leaping in my being...my womb clenched, and my breasts ached with a sweet pain, and I knew that I would do anything, ANYTHING for this child.

As she grew, she just shone. Such a blessing. My sister, Elizabeth, always said that God had plans for her. "I'm telling you, Anna," she'd say. "That one will put her mark on the world."

She always had a heart too open for her own good. A keen eye for things that aren't fair. As a tiny little thing, she'd stand right up and fight against the odds, like a kitten on its hind legs hissing at a jackal. Brave! If one of the younger or weaker children was being bullied, there my Mary would be, right in the middle of it, trying to pull the bullies off their thrones. Then the next thing I knew she'd be bringing home a wounded bird. I have nursed more animals because of that girl.

Sometimes I scolded her, but secretly I was proud. She had a...a vision of how things should be. "The other side of the starlight," she called, it. She loved to be outside at night, watching the stars. She told me stories she made up about the constellations and the dream of the Holy One for this world. "Things will be right some day, Mama," she'd say, "on the other side of the starlight."

She learned to read by listening to the older children in the village. There was nothing she couldn't do. And so loving—always hugging me. I loved the time we spent working together in the garden or the house...we'd talk and talk...and when I'd insist that she put down her book

and help me sweep out the hearth, she'd say "In a minute." Sometimes I'd fret because she'd stay out too late at night looking at the stars... a girl has to be careful, you know? But she'd toss her braids and say, "You worry too much, Mom."

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Therefore, humble yourselves under God's power so that he may raise you up in the last day. ⁷ Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you.

Reflection

She's a wonder, my girl. And she's still my girl. One thing I always knew is that she'd tell me the truth. When Joseph approached my husband, wanting her as his wife, she had only just come into her womanhood. It was her 12th year. I wasn't ready to let her go—she was my baby! But Joachim insisted. "He's a good man, Anna," he said, and I knew it was true. We arranged a meeting of the families, and when we returned to our home, Mary said "I can tell by his eyes, Mama. His eyes are kind. They shine like the stars."

And so it was done. A formal betrothal—and I prayed with all my heart that she would be happy. You know what came next, or part of it anyway. But I don't know if you can imagine what it felt like to me; perhaps you can. Your child, your precious child, for whom you have had so many dreams and plans, comes to you with news like that. It knocks you to your knees.

It was evening, I'll never forget it. Mary and I were outside picking the evening scented herbs. (Well, I was picking; she was staring at the sky.) She had been unusually quiet, as though she were pondering something huge. "Mama, I'm going to have a baby" The world stopped.

Scripture: Luke 1:26-35

26 When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son."

Reflection

I don't know how it's possible for so many things to go through your head and heart at once, but I swear that in the time it took me to turn around, a whole galaxy of stuff overwhelmed me. MY Mary? This can't be true. Anger, at Joseph... how DARE he betray our trust? Disappointment at her... Guilt, had I not explained things to her well enough? Did she not understand the way of things? Overwhelming sadness and then, fear. The punishment for such a thing among our people - death. By stoning. All of that flashed, like a Falling star, searing a path through my guts. I turned to her. I expected to see tears... shame... but instead, what I saw was a light

shining more fiercely in her than ever it had shone. In that moment, she shimmered. And then she told me her story.

Now I don't know what to tell you. I am a learned woman. I know the ways of the world, and I am no fool. But I know the truth when I hear it. And I know my daughter. And when she finished telling me, I gathered her into my arms. And there, in that garden, with the smell of the mint leaves perfuming the night air, I decided. Whatever this is, it is from God. And I will stand by my daughter no matter what. Let them come with stones if they must. It will be MY body they will have to break.

Her father? That's another story. He was so hurt. At first he was going to go to Joseph and do who knows what to him, but, when Mary insisted on her story, he simply fell silent...turned away from both of us.

Joseph, that dear, dear man really does have stars in his eyes. He is standing by her with a trust born of dreams that somehow, some way, God will work through this.

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. ²⁰ As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²² Now all of this took place

so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

²³ *Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,*

And they will call him, Emmanuel.

(*Emmanuel* means “God with us.”)

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he didn’t have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

Reflection

I arranged for the trip to visit my sister, Elizabeth. She and Zachariah live in the hill country, and after all these years and several miscarriages, Elizabeth, too, is carrying life within her. Mary, I told the neighbours, went to help my sister until the baby is born. Well, she had! And so my daughter began her first journey. Little did we all realize that there would be yet another before this child was born.

Scripture: Luke 1:39-56

39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”

Mary praises God

46 Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

47 In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name.

50 He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

51 He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

52 He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed.

54 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,

55 just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.

Reflection

When news of the census came, Mary, so heavy with this child, had not lost any of her fighting spirit. She was so angry at the Romans: "Counting us like sheep! And in a way that militates against the poor! How are those without means supposed to travel? They have to take time away from the fields when they just scrape by day to day, forced to use hard earned money to travel when they need it to feed their children. O yes, it's fine for the rich to travel to their hometowns. For them it's a holiday. For the poor it is misery. And for what? So Rome will know how many of us there are to exact more taxes

from? Some day the mighty will be pulled down from those thrones and the rich sent empty away."

Scripture: Luke 2:1-5

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. 5 He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant.

Reflection

On and on she went and she insisted that she go with Joseph. "We may be able to help along the way," she said. "Poor old Sarah is barely able to walk. I can help." And so, expecting a baby any day, feet and legs swollen, my Mary set out on the journey to Bethlehem I watched them leave and prayed that the Holy One and Mary knew what they were doing. Would they make it back in time for her to have her baby here with all of us with her in the birthing house?)

Hymn: **Little Town of Bethlehem** vs 1 & 2 VU 64

1 *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.***

Reflection

Every night that they were gone I would go outside after dark, look into the sky at the same stars shining down on her so far away, and I'd think about Mary's dream that some day on the other side of the starlight, things would be made right.

One night - how to explain? I just knew. It was the sound of the night wind, almost like singing, and the look of the sky...and the tightness in my chest. I knew that the baby had been born.

It seemed forever until they returned. But return they did. Mary looking exhausted, but what a story they had to tell! The whole company of travellers, full of such tales... they were all talking at once. Something about angels and shepherds. And also about old Sarah, for whom the journey had been too much... they buried her with her relatives in Bethlehem.

Hymn: **The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy** VU 73

***1 The virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
the virgin Mary had a baby boy,
and they say that his name is Jesus.***

***Refrain He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.
Oh, yes! believer! Oh, yes! believer!***

***He come from the glory, (clap, clap)
he come from the glorious kingdom.***

***2 The angels sang when the baby was born,
the angels sang when the baby was born,
the angels sang when the baby was born,
and they say that his name is Jesus. Refrain***

***3 The shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
the shepherds came where the baby was born,
and they say that his name is Jesus. Refrain***

Reflection

I couldn't make it all out, and honestly I wasn't really trying to. I only had eyes for my daughter... and my grandson. She held him out to me, and I took him in my arms. He was so tiny. Had my own babies really been that small? He smelled like...a baby. And I swear that he opened his eyes and looked into my soul, He has old eyes, that little one. When you look at him it's as though those eyes have seen everything.

Jesus. They've called him Jesus. Some say that the angels said he will change the world. I know he's changed mine. And my husband, Joachim, has become the most doting grandfather there ever could be. Yes, this child, like all newborns, turns the world upside down. The strangest thing happened not long ago...Three strangers, foreigners, came to our town. One of them was from Egypt I'm not sure about the other man, or the woman. They asked in the marketplace, and Abraham directed them to our home. Apparently they had been to Bethlehem and had been told to come here; they had limited use of our language, and we had none of theirs, but they wanted to see Jesus. They knelt and presented gifts - strange, confusing, almost frightening gifts. They

talked with Mary and Joseph as best they could and then they left.

Joseph told me that they had warned him about Herod -- the man is mad. They told Joseph of a safe and little-known road to Egypt, and a safe place to stay there if they ever need sanctuary. It disturbed Joseph. My instinct told me that we should protect Mary from that information but he said no, she needs to know. And he was right. So he's gone to tell her, right now. I'm afraid this is going to mean another journey for my daughter and this little one. How much more can they all endure?

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." 14 Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

Reflection

That baby's birth has changed me and, in ways I cannot explain, has made me - whole. What will become of him? It seems I can't protect him the way a grandmother should. Where is he going this time and will people care for him? Be kind to a tiny stranger? He took my world and turned it inside out so that the farthest stars are now as close as the eyes of my neighbours.

Where is he going? If he should travel into your life, will you welcome him? I leave it now in the hands of the Holy One who has brought these strange and shimmering moments into being. And I leave it to you, my friends.

And some day I will see you again, on the other side of the starlight.

Written by Beverly Brazie, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2010-2011, pp. 63-65. Used by permission

Invitation to Offering:

As we remember the gift of Christmas, let us present our gifts to God.

Prayer of Dedication:

All: Loving God, we present these gifts as well as the gifts we cannot put on an offering plate: Our hearts and lives. Amen

Written by Beth Johnston, Gathering, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2010-2011, pg. 42. Used by permission

Doxology

Sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion

One: We gather as United Church friends during this season of anticipation for new beginnings, with new promises and new hope. Here is a place of welcome for all, where we can rest and be nourished in the heart of love.

All: We come to this common table, knowing the warmth of God's love.

One: Holy One, you shaped creation and placed your grace and starlight within us. Your star of hope has reached across from ancient times, calling us through starlight to listen and join in. A young woman named Mary opened her heart wide to your light. She heard the promise that she would give birth; she heard the promise that this child would transform the world — and she believed from the depths of her heart. In the stillness of this Advent season we wait and prepare, as our hearts echo an ancient cry:

All: O come, O come, Emmanuel.

One: Again in this Advent season we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us. We remember how this child, born in a stable, lived a life of healing, compassion, and wisdom. The starlight of God-with-us offered wholeness of spirit for all in his times, and through these many centuries. We remember a special meal shared with friends. Gathering them together around a common table, Jesus spoke with boundless love. In the blessing of the bread, Jesus asked his friends to share the bread of life. In the blessing of the cup, Jesus asked his friends to share the cup of promise. Jesus asked down through the centuries, and asks us today, always to remember.

All: Jesus, we remember your life, your words, your love.

One: In the quiet curve of evening we also remember the faithful saints of our own lives and the faithful saints of this congregation. Those who've become the starlight, and, while living on earth, welcomed us when we were anxious, afraid, or tired; those who shared their questions and Christian understanding, so that our faith might be deepened; those who reminded us of the positives in life and brought us to places of thankfulness and gratitude; those who told us in word and deed that we were loved... Hear us Gracious Spirit as we share aloud the names of those who've nurtured us in love, faith, hope and joy....

One: Thankful for the love and faith that have been gifted through the centuries, we come to this evening. As friends we gather to remember the life,

words and love of Jesus. We pray to El Shaddai that as we share this bread and cup, our spirits would be so nourished that we may continue to grow in wholeness. May our hope in the promises of this season give us courage to live in the way of Jesus, in whose name we pray:

**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 thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory.
For ever and ever. Amen.**

One: Jesus Christ, the bread of life.
Jesus Christ, the cup of promise.
Come, for all is ready.
The gifts of God, for the people of God.

Communion is Served

Prayer after Communion

**All: Gracious Holy One, we thank you for this
sacred evening and meal, where we UCW
women eagerly come together to celebrate
your grace and love, in hope that the world
may be nourished and transformed. Hold us
and heal us with your Presence, that our lives
may be whole. Gift us with starlight that we**

may bring your peace, hope, justice, love, and joy to all we meet. Amen.

Lighting of the Candles

Hymn

Silent Night



***Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.***

***Silent night, Holy night
Shepherds quake, at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah,
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.***

***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.***