

**Central Queens Pastoral Charge
United Church of Canada**

December 27, 2020

10:30 a.m.

First Sunday after Christmas

Central Queens Mission Statement

Central Queens United Church is a loving and living community called to support the life stages of all people; celebrating joy and sharing in pain. Through faith and fellowship we are united by God's love to live and serve as Disciples of Christ.

Gathering for Worship

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

Birthdays & Special Occasions

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Quiet Preparation for Worship (Bible is brought forward during the quiet time)

Bible Presentation

***Carol**

Joy to the World

VU #59

Opening Prayer

**Praise the living God! Praise God from the heavens:
sun and moon and shining stars, praise the living God!**

**Praise God's Holy Name,
whose word speaks all things into being**

**who is present in the expanse of the universe,
and in the voices of children.**

Praise the living God, our rescuer and deliverer,
**whose wonder is found in the heavens and in all creation,
who comes in innocence, and with mercy.**

O God, our light, our beauty, our rest:
with the appearance of your son you have brought us
into your new creation.

**Form us into your people, and root our lives in you;
through Christ, the Living Light.**

Carol

Go, Tell it on the Mountain

VU #43

Hearing God's Word

Isaiah 35:1-10 *The Return of the Redeemed to Zion*

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,

with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God’s people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Carol

O Little Town of Bethlehem

VU #64

Story

In 1865, the famous preacher and abolitionist Phillip Brooks rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and participated in the Church of the Nativity's Christmas Eve celebration. In response to his experience there, he wrote the now-famous carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem," which was first performed by the children's choir of his church a few years later. Unlike many Christmas carols, the lyrics of this reflective and hopeful song are set in the present tense rather than the past. The author's experience of wonder and awe are palpable and cover the seemingly great distance between the birth of Christ then and our experience of it now.

The worship leader can determine to what extent this and the subsequent stories will serve as the basis for deeper reflection during worship. If the stories include more reflection, they will want to draw attention here not only to the violence and despair in present-day Bethlehem and the surrounding region but also to stories of the hope and resilience of the people. Alternatively, if deeper reflection does not follow the story, the Prayers of the People can include petitions for peace.

A number of tunes have been composed for these words. The most familiar is ST LOUIS, though FOREST GREEN is equally beautiful (and set slightly lower, making it easier to sing). Popularized by Welsh boy soprano Aled Jones, the anthem setting by Walford Davies would suit a solo performance of this carol very well.

Isaiah 11:1-9 *The Peaceful Kingdom*

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

Story

Though the tune is taken from a much older madrigal, John Mason Neale's "Good King Wenceslas" (1853) is about a man who braves winter storms during Saint Stephen's Day (December 26) to help his poorer neighbours. The story it tells is based on a real person—Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia—who was assassinated by his own brother and had been adored by his subjects. His charity and popularity eventually led to his being named the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

This carol is beloved by many, in large part because of the evocative story images and the possibility for performance. Traditionally, the part of the Page (the king's assistant) is sung by a treble voice, while the King is sung by a bass voice. However, in a congregational setting, the same could be achieved by assigning a part to higher and lower voices, or children and adults, or one half of the church and the other, with everyone joining together for the non-dialogue parts. The whole thing is quite a bit of fun, especially since the opportunities to sing this simple Christmas story are so few.

Isaiah 9:2–7 *Light in darkness*

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,

and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Carol It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

VU #44

Story

Written by Massachusetts Unitarian minister Edmund Sears, this pastoral-sounding carol carries a much deeper meaning than simply retelling the birth of Jesus. Sears hoped to offer an uplifting message amid the great poverty he was witness to and to remind people that God, in the form of a child, had entered a world sorely in need of love and peace. Richard Storrs Willis' tune, CAROL, paired with the words only a year later, gave the carol its lasting appeal and one of its two most common tunes, the other being NOËL.

A very fine movie made in 1992, *A Midnight Clear*, tells the story of American and German soldiers laying aside their weapons on Christmas Eve of 1944. The story ends tragically, as miscommunication causes hostilities to resume. Yet, the powerful third verse of the carol, with its invitation to hush the noise of battle in order to hear God’s “love song” to the earth and all people, is a strong one. This carol speaks gently, yet powerfully, God’s word of peace amid strife and weariness.

Isaiah 63:7–9 *God’s Mercy Remembered*

⁷ I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD,
because of all that the LORD has done for us,
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

⁸ For he said, “Surely they are my people,
children who will not deal falsely”;
and he became their savior

⁹ in all their distress.

It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Carol Silent Night, Holy Night VU #67

Story

In 1816, Father Joseph Mohr wrote the poem “Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!” while stationed at a pilgrim church in Mariapfarr, Austria. Two years later, now at St. Nicholas’ church in Oberndorf, he asked Franz Gruber to set the poem for guitar and choir, which the two performed on Christmas Eve of 1818. Since then, a legend has grown around the

circumstances of this collaboration, beginning with a broken organ at St. Nicholas' and ending with a dramatic, last-minute musical setting for the now-familiar carol. To what extent the legend of the carol's origins is true is perhaps less important than its beauty and simplicity.

For this service of worship, try to have a duo of singer and guitar perform the carol and have the congregation join in. If the duo is comfortable singing in German, so much the better. Have the congregation join in either for the last verse (if performed in English) or for all three verses in English (if performed in German).

Anthem

Responding to God's Word

Community at Prayer

As you have drawn us to your cradle of wondrous love, O God, draw us together in this place, that we might pray for your people and your world.

Today, we give you thanks for the gift of your child, Jesus Christ, who in birth, life, death and resurrection revealed your unending love for all people and opened to us the purpose and promise of life together.

We give thanks also for the gifts of this season:
hope for the vision of justice you promise, even in the midst of despair;
for peace within and among your people, even in the midst of conflict;
joy found in reunion and celebration, even amid the challenges of this life;

and love, with the power to transform and heal all things, even in the midst of brokenness.

We pray for those who still long for these, your gifts, God of Love:
for those who will spend this season alone or anxious...
for those who grieve an empty place at the table this year...
for those who are ill, in body or in spirit...
for those in hospital and in care...
for those who endure the terror of conflict and oppression...
for those who will go hungry this day, and who long for the simplest of creation's gifts...
for your people and your world, we pray, O God.

Let us listen to the angels' song again, your song of love for this world. Move us to return that song in what we say and do, that we may be instruments of your hope and peace and joy and love. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, who became the Christ, and we share in his ancient prayer saying together, Our Father...

Invitation to Offering

In the gifts of word and song,
we hear the story of your gift of life, O God.
Here, we offer what we can of ourselves,
we who are part of that same story.

***Offering** In the Bleak Midwinter VU #55 v.4

Offering Prayer

Receive these gifts, God of All, for the work of your kingdom.
May our words become witness, and our witness become work,
for your people, in your world. Amen.

***Hymn** See Amid the Winter's Snow VU #78

***Blessing**

Go now and shine.

There is light within each of us,
for the Divine Light shines brightly:
on, in, and through us.

As we go from this place,
may the light of the Christ child guide our every step and
every encounter with God's earth and God's people. Amen

Postlude

i

*Please stand as you are able.

ⁱ This worship was created by the Rev. Andy O'Neil while minister at St. Paul's United Church
in Riverview, NBⁱ