

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

December 26, 2021

10:30 a.m.

1st 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.

Welcome and Announcements

Call to worship

We light the Christ Candle.

Behold, I bring you good news of great joy: For to you is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord!

Jesus has arrived in grace and mystery, renewing our hopes, announcing peace to a weary world.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who find favour with God.

Jesus comes among us in power and glory to inspire fresh Christmas joy and call us to lives that are full of God's love.

**Jesus, the light of the world is born.
Let Christ's light shine in the darkest corners of our lives. Let
Christ's light shine in the darkest corners of our world.**

The Christ Candle is lit.

Opening Prayer

**God of mystery and manger, as we celebrate Christmas,
open our hearts to your love so that your Good News
is not just an old familiar story but a fresh truth lived out in our
lives every day, through the grace of Jesus our Christ. Amen**

Listen first to how Luke tells the Christmas story:

Reading: Luke 2:1–7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.

Voice 1: The inspiration for this worship service comes from a poem by the American writer Ann Weems, entitled 'Getting to the front of the stable'. Listen to the first stanza: 'Getting to the front of the stable', by Ann Weems (first stanza)

Who put Joseph in the back of the stable?
Who dressed him in brown, put a staff in his hand, and told him to
stand in the back of the crèche,
background for the magnificent light of the Madonna?

This poem helps us realise how rarely we listen to Joseph, even on Christmas. We seldom hear from him in our Christmas pageants and carols. He's just there in his brown bathrobe. But Matthew makes Joseph out to be a man of dreams.

The Dreamer

Voice 1 In this service we'll bring Joseph out from the back of the stable and listen to the dreamer.

Consider just how important he was to God's unfolding purposes. First, young Joseph speaks:

A monologue -- Young Joseph

My mother calls me a dreamer!
And I suppose it's true.
I do have a dream.

Ever since I joined my father Jacob in the family business, I've dreamed

that I could be the best carpenter in Judea! I wouldn't just make tables
for my neighbours,

build a door here or fix a chair there.

No, I want to build furniture fit for a king!

I can see the finest banquet table ever made,
its fine grain running the length of the room,
sanded lovingly by my hands, smooth as a glassy sea, oiled till it glistens
in the lamplight,
sturdy legs carved to curve like the cheek of the moon.

Not just ordinary kitchen tables,
my tables will bear the weight of the finest feasts and host meetings of
the world's greatest minds.

And cabinets!

My cabinets will display treasures from distant lands. Imagine golden
trinkets sparkling on my shelves; the finest pottery from the kilns of
eastern lands held up high so you can wonder at the secret contents.

Yes, I have a dream – to be the greatest carpenter in the land.
The wealthy will seek me out for my clear eye, my steady hands,
my craftsmanship to turn your neighbour green with envy.

And maybe one day I'll build a fine home, too,
start a family with a beautiful wife who has curves like the cheek of the
moon! Raise a son who shares my clear eye and my steady hand.
He can become the most famous carpenter in the whole world!

That's my dream –
to be the carpenter for ruling monarchs
and raise up a son who can be more famous than I!

Yes, I am a dreamer.

It's true.

Voice 1: Notice there’s no Joseph pictured in such a beloved carol. It’s Matthew who brings Joseph into view. Listen to how he tells the

Christmas story:

Reading Matthew 1:18–25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Monologue --- *Now Joseph speaks from experience.*

What a dream! ... Or rather ... What a nightmare! Mary is pregnant
and I can promise you I am not the father!
I don't know what to do.

People will scoff and scold if they think it's my child.
The same people will laugh behind my back if they know it's not my
child. And you know what will happen to Mary if this news gets out.
She'll be humiliated, shunned for sure, maybe even punished.

But we can't go on with our wedding ...
Well, I can't go on with the wedding, knowing what's happened. At
least I thought I couldn't go on.

I thought perhaps Mary could just go away quietly,
visit her cousin in the hill country, and then ... never come back. It
would be so much simpler – for me.

But then I saw that angel. It had to be a dream, right?

My mother always said I was a dreamer!

Still the angel's message cut me right to the heart.

'Joseph, son of David' ...

The angel called on our most famous ancestor, David,
so I had to pay attention.

'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid.'

Was I afraid? Afraid of the gossip? ... Maybe a little.

Afraid for Mary, more like it.

Her life would never be the same, to have a child on her own.

But that angel didn't stop.

'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for
the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'

Whoever heard of such a thing? A child conceived of God?

In the womb of the one I love? How can such a thing be?

Yet the angel has promised Mary a son.

'You are to name him Jesus,' said the angel.
Jesus. Yeshua. 'The one who will save people from their sins.'

What a dream!
Could this son save my family from disgrace?
If this baby can save Mary from our neighbours' spite,
I would love him just for that.
Could this son become the most famous carpenter in the world?

I would love him for that, too.
Maybe if love has its way with us, this dream can come true. And
something beautiful will be born for us all in Jesus.
Now there's a dream!

Poem 'Getting to the front of the stable' (stanza two)

God-chosen, this man Joseph was faithful in spite of the gossip in
Nazareth,
in spite of the danger from Herod.

This man, Joseph, listened to angels and it was he who named the Child
Emmanuel.

Voice 1 Is this a man to be stuck for centuries in the back of the stable?

Actually, Joseph probably stood in the doorway guarding the mother
and child
or greeting shepherds and kings.

When he wasn't in the doorway,
he was probably urging Mary to get some rest, gently covering her with
his cloak,
assuring her that he would watch the Child.

Actually, he probably picked the Child up in his arms and walked him in
the night,
patting him lovingly
until he closed his eyes.

Suggested carol “What Child is This”

VU #74

Reading Matthew 2:1–11

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the

child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Offering

Offertory Invitation

We may not have gold and incense to offer, but the gifts we offer to God are part of God's dream to spread the love of the Christ Child to our generation.

Offertory "God, We See What You Have Given" Tune VU #260

God, we see what you have given;
Signs of grace are everywhere!
All around are gifts from heaven --
Gifts enough for all to share.
We are stewards of your bounty,
Called to give as we've received;
And your blessings have been plenty
From the day we first believed.

Author Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

***Presentation of Offering**

***Offertory Prayer**

O God, we don't have gold and frankincense in our pockets but we offer to you what we have to share.

**Bless the gifts we give this season
so that they may bring the love of the Christ Child
into the cold and dark places in the world.**

And bless our lives, too.

**May we become the gift that others need
because we have seen the wonder of your love in Jesus on this
holy night. Amen.**

Carol

"The First Nowell"

VU #91

Voice 1 Of course, Joseph's dream did get more difficult, remember?
Listen!

Reading Matthew 2:12–14

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt,

Monologue --- *Old Joseph reflects*

It all seems like a dream now, looking back.
Mary bearing a child by the Holy Spirit.
And little Jesus,
born just when King Herod was plotting against all our little ones. Those
wise men from the East coming into my humble home. Sure, I was a
good carpenter in those days.

We had a good house – but it was small.
Hardly room for those wise men and their caravan of servants! It still
seems like a dream.

Those strange and wonderful gifts set out to welcome our child – gold
for a king, incense for a priest, and myrrh ... a spice for burial! ... It's as
if they knew what would happen to him, my little son.

It seems like a dream –

though not the dream I held when I was young.
My son didn't grow up to be the finest carpenter in the world – though
I taught him all I could.

He had a dream, too,
a dream inspired by the Holy Spirit.
He had a clear eye and a steady hand
but he wasn't building tables and cabinets.

He was building a kingdom,
a new world,
a world where every child is precious – as precious as he was;
a world where the poor find open hearts
and a stranger finds an open door;
a world where we can always see something beautiful in each other; a
world where love always has the last word;
love that will save the world from its sin and sorrow.

That world is still a dream.
My little son gave his life for that dream.
Today we share the dream.
When we cradle this little one,
we believe that this dream can still come true for us because we cradle
Jesus' love in our hearts.
And that love can still save the world.
This is God's dream for us.

Poem: 'Getting to the front of the stable' (stanza three)

This Christmas, let us give thanks to God for this man of
incredible faith
into whose care God placed the Christ Child. As a gesture
of gratitude,

Voice 1

let's put Joseph in the front of the stable where he can guard and greet
and cast an occasional glance at this Child who brought us life.

God's dream of new life is that world where every child is precious;
where the poor find open hearts and a stranger finds an open door; a
world where we can always see something beautiful in each other;
where love always has the last word.

That world is still a dream.
And Jesus gave his life for that dream.

Today we share the dream for his sake and ask God to bring that
dream to fulfilment in us, through us and for us.

Pastoral Prayer

God of miracle and manger, God of mystery and magi,
we thank you for the wonder of Christmas – for goodwill that fills even
the crustiest souls, for smiles on the faces in spite of worries that will
return in a day or two, for generosity that lights up homes and hearts
and touches those with too little of their own this year.

Steadfast God,
we thank you for Joseph and all he stands for:
For everyone in our lives and communities we can count on –
people there in the background, looking after things;
for those with dreams, patiently waiting and working so things can
improve; for those with courage to cope when the world turns dark
and Herod and his ilk threaten.
Steadfast God, may Joseph inspire all of us in the year ahead.

Compassionate God,
we thank you for Mary and all she stands for:
For everyone in our lives and communities
who embraces us with comfort and encouragement;
for those who are willing to follow your leading
even when it means personal sacrifice
and criticism from others;
for those who nurture children with hope and wisdom
so they become a blessing to others;
Compassionate God, may Mary inspire us all in the year ahead.

God with us, thank you for the Christ Child and all he means to us: For
his gift of mercy so that we can let the past be the past
and make a fresh start;
for his open arms,

offering us strength and hope whenever we feel lost or lonely; and for his willingness to suffer and die

so that we will know your presence with us
in the midst of our hardest times.

In these moments of silence,
we remember those who need Christ's embrace this Christmas:

(silence)

God with us, take us from this holy place
to find your holiness in many places
and to meet Christ in many faces
so that we may live with the blessing of Christmas every day and offer
that blessing to all whom we meet,

in the name of Christ, our friend and Saviour. Amen

Carol: "Joy to the World" VU #59

Blessing:

To you is born this night a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. May the
love of the Christ Child embrace you;
the joy of the Christ Child fill your heart.

May the peace of the Christ Child give you rest, and the hope of
the Christ Child guide you into the year ahead. Amen.