

Worship for January 1, 2023

Prelude

*Call to Worship Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

**Nations shall come to your light
and rulers to the brightness of your rising.**

*Hymn 143 Angels From the Realms of Glory

Prayer

Eternal God,

A thousand years in your sight are like a watch in the night.

as you have led us in days past, so guide us now and always,

that our hearts may learn to choose your will, and new resolves be strengthened.

Forgive what we have done that denies our devotion to you.

and forgive us for failing to do kindness in your name.

Set us free to love and serve you in this new year,

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

*Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Romans 8:34

Hear the good news!

Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.

The old life is gone and a new life has begun.

This is our peace. Amen.

Old Testament Reading Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Matthew 2:13-23

The Morning Message

Her first Madame Alexander doll. A soft-bodied creation, the right size for almost one-year-old Freya to hold and cuddle. A Lego village with at least 800 pieces. A telescope, safely packed in a box the size of a small piano.

They all sit in our living room this morning because they didn't make it to their Christmas destinations. The weather and illness and blended family arrangements have played havoc with our plans to visit children and grandchildren. We're trying to let it go...we will see them soon. And we've learned over time to be content with what is. And we have many pleasures of the season to enjoy and are most thankful for the blessings which have come our way.

So, thank you for the beautiful Christmas Eve service. All of you willing to change your own plans long enough to come here and read scripture and sing and light candles. To attest to our faith in God's only Son, Jesus, and claim his light as our own.

All day long on the 23rd and 24th, I received texts and calls from church and neighbors and family reporting various problems being encountered due to the severe winter weather. On Christmas Eve I joked that some of you deserved extra credit for coming out on such a frightfully cold night, knowing you would be returning to a cold house or a cold house with frozen water pipes or a cold house with frozen water pipes and no electricity.

But, for those moments together, all was calm, all was bright.

In the moments following Jesus' birth, all was calm, all was bright. The gospel writers have told us that Mary swaddled and fed her newborn son with tender care and Joseph guarded their safety. Stabled beasts and grazing sheep filled the place with pungent warmth. Lowing cattle and cooing doves sang lullabies to the newborn babe, a straw-filled manger for his bed. And all was calm. All was bright.

But, not for long. Just a few days after singing Silent Night, the glow of candlelight on our faces, we come to Matthew's story of terror and furtive flight.

The world into which Jesus is born is full of brokenness. The stain of human sin is all over the world God created and called "good."

Real life involves pain and suffering. Not one of us is spared. Evil is real and every generation faces a Herod or two.

Back in December of 2013, the world watched with horror the atrocities taking place in Syria. The war produced record numbers of refugees...people fleeing for their lives. According to Unicef, one Syrian baby was born in a refugee camp every hour. The weather was bitterly cold

and an outbreak of polio further threatened everyone. The need for medical care, food, clothing, and shelter overwhelmed relief organizations.

More than one million Syrian children in that year were declared refugees. Children. Children whose grandparents might have given them presents in some other year. Children whose parents and grandparents may have taught them to sing carols or entrusted little hands to place the Christ child in the family nativity set.

When all was calm and all was bright.

Rachel wept for the children of Israel. Who is weeping now?

Pastor Sharon Blezard says in a sense, we are all refugees...aliens in a foreign land, a place that is not our ultimate home. Years ago, at the Beverly Hills Church, one of the beloved members instructed me that the song he wanted sung at his funeral was "This World is Not My Home." I assured him that this world had benefitted by his presence and not to plan on leaving it anytime soon. He complied but we did eventually have to let him go to that other world, to the tune of his requested song.

The truth is, he had it right. We, who call ourselves Christian, are citizens of that other realm as surely as we are citizens of this one. We dwell in tension between discipleship and culture, faith and fantasy...the temporal and the eternal. Such is the story of faith.

Jesus escaped the death Herod sought for him. Thank you, God. But, the powers of the Roman Empire and the powerful religious leaders of his day would seek to destroy Jesus for the duration of his brief life.

Sharon Blezard reminds us that most of us have some insulation against the harshness of life. We have family, or work, or a faith community to support us.

Jesus, as far as we know, never married. Although his mother, Mary, seems to have been present for the entirety of his life, we hear precious little of a relationship with Joseph, the man who raised him, taught him the faith and a trade.

We don't think Jesus had any children and we know he owned no property and depended on the hospitality of others food room and board. Jesus, we are told, had no place to lay his head.

And yet, this infant king we celebrate, who grew in wisdom and stature, full of grace and truth, was God incarnate. The Savior of the world, Emmanuel, God-with-us, walking around in skin and bones. He modeled a way of life that lifted up the refugees and dispossessed, the needy, the un-loved and the un-lovely, all to usher in the reign of peace.

Jesus established the kingdom of heaven right here on the earth...laid out for us the possibility that all un-holy terrors of might and fright may be vanquished by selfless love and sacrifice.

So, on this first Sunday after Christmas, as we sit among the season's beauty, we acknowledge the reality of sin, and the plight of today's refugees at all the borders of safety and security. Cry for the children...and their mothers and fathers. Lament harsh and cruel treatment of the vulnerable. Decry and protest it.

But don't stop there.

Then bow your knee, your head, and your heart, and hold out your hand. God will fill you with purpose and power and praise for the Word made flesh, who came that we might live, not only for Christmas and its innumerable blessings, but for its Christ.

*Hymn 147 The First Nowell, verses 1 and 2

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

*Hymn 607 Doxology

Offertory

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn The First Nowell, verses 5 and 6

*Blessing

Go now, and bear witness to the light so others might believe.

Since you are chosen in Christ,

live before him in love, holy and blameless.

Live with hope in Christ, for the praise of his glory.

And may God fill the earth with peace;

may Christ give you grace upon grace from his fullness;

and may the Holy Spirit, the pledge of your inheritance,

lead you on straight paths where you will not stumble. Amen. *Laughingbird.net*

*Postlude

Announcements

Happy New Year to one and all. May God's blessings be yours in the coming days and months.

The staff of Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church wishes to express our most sincere gratitude for the generous bonus and other expressions of appreciation this season. It is a joy and a privilege to serve this congregation. May God grant hope, peace, joy, and love in fullest measure to you in the year ahead.

Cinda Harkless, Mark Baker, and Jessica Kidd

The Session meets January 15.