



*All are welcome here.*

*Worship is a series of invitations; accept only those you feel called to accept.*

*Feel free to change language in a respectful manner if it helps the hour to be more worshipful for you. All ages are welcome in worship.*

## Prelude

## Welcome

### \*Call to Worship

A light shining in the darkness . . .

***What could it be?***

The sound of angels' wings . . .

***What could it mean?***

A baby born in a stable . . .

***Who could it be?***

Come to Bethlehem and see.

### \*Opening Carol | O Come, All Ye Faithful (vv. 1-3)

Glory to God #133

### Opening Prayer

O wondrous God of the stars,  
we come tonight with breathless wonder  
to see the babe who will change our lives.

We hear the names “Wonderful Counselor,”  
“Mighty God,” “Prince of Peace,”  
and we are in awe.  
You have touched the earth this night  
with your unconditional love.  
Touch us—  
touch our hearts and minds and souls.  
May we never tire of this story.  
May we never take it for granted.  
Make this night magical again. Amen.

**Solo | *I Need a Silent Night***

Caroline Sanderson-Doughty

**Prayer of Confession**

*It’s Christmas Eve again, God.  
We’re barely ready for it.  
So much to do to get ready—  
gifts to buy and wrap, parties to attend,  
trees to trim, houses to decorate.  
We’re in a whirlwind of activity.  
In the midst of the busyness  
we sometimes miss what it is all about—  
you coming to earth—Emmanuel—God-with-us.*

*Help us hear anew  
your promises of hope and salvation and love  
as we sing our familiar carols.  
Forgive us for forgetting the magic of this night,  
for focusing on ourselves  
and what we need to do  
instead of on the miracle of Jesus’ birth.  
Rock us out of our complacency.  
Let us hear angel voices,  
see shepherds hurrying to a stable,  
feel the baby’s soft breath on our cheeks,  
and ponder in our hearts what all this means  
for the world, for us.*

<p><i>A Tri-Told Nativity Pageant: An Inspired Midrash Written by Rev Jay Banasiak, with contributions by Rev Laura Becker (pastor, Northminster PCUSA, Chattanooga, TN) Inspired by a Venn Diagram by Rich Wyld</i></p> <p><i>Scripture quotations adapted from the NRSVUE</i></p> <p><i>We would like to thank Steve Griffith (John), Nancy Goering (Matthew), and Pastor Sarah Sanderson-Doughty (Luke) for helping us share this story today. And a very special thanks to Carol Patterson for her assistance with props!</i></p>	<p><b>Assurance of Forgiveness</b></p> <p>God’s love knows no bounds. Love comes down at Christmas— a love so deep and so profound that nothing will ever be the same again. Know that this love is come for you— to touch you, to heal you, to forgive you, to make you whole. <b><i>Alleluia! Amen.</i></b></p> <p><b>*Carol   Love Has Come</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Glory to God #110</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Story Enacted</b></p> <p>John: Good Evening, All three, simultaneously, joining John: I’m [Luke/Matthew/John], and I’m going to tell you the story of Jesus’ birth.</p> <p>John: You know, Mark really should start, since he was the first of us to start writing down the stories.</p> <p>Luke &amp; Matthew: <i>[simultaneously to John]</i> Yeah, I got a lot of my stories from Mark. <i>[look at one another incredulously]</i></p> <p>John: <i>[flabbergasted]</i> That was an option?!?! </p> <p>Matthew: But Mark didn’t include the birth story, so he isn’t here.</p> <p>Luke: He always was in such a hurry to tell his Gospel...he skipped over some things.</p> <p>John: <i>[slowly, pompously]</i> I prefer to take my time telling a story-</p> <p>Luke &amp; Matthew: WE KNOW!</p> <p>John: <i>[continuing on, undeterred...]</i> I think the reader really benefits from hearing what is within the mind of the characters and really</p>
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	gets a feel of what Jesus is thinking. For God so loved a good story-
Matthew:	<i>[interrupting John]</i> Since Mark isn't here, can I go first?
Luke:	I suppose...you were the next of us to start writing things down.
John:	I would be glad to have the final word today. At the end, I'll bring the word. The word I will tell. And the word-
Matthew:	<i>[talking over John, again]</i> An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers...
Luke:	<i>[interrupting Matthew]</i> Blah blah blah...enough of that...Many have gathered lots and lots of stories, just as they were handed on to us by eyewitnesses, and I wrote a well-ordered account of them, but let's get to the part everyone came here for tonight. The birth story!
Matthew:	Yes! Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way...Joseph-
Luke:	<i>[interrupting]</i> Hold on...Let's introduce the mother first.
Matthew:	Oh, alright. She carried the child, after all.
Luke:	In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a girl engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The girl's name was Mary.
Matthew:	Yes! Mary is in my story, too!
John:	And of course you wrote down the Angel's name...such the detail person you are.
Matthew:	Wait - we need a Mary and an Angel to act it out for us!

	<p>Luke: Yes, that's a great idea!</p> <p>John: Who would like to be Mary?  <i>[wait for volunteer(s)]</i></p> <p>If you want to be Mary, come stand over there in Luke's story. And if you want to be Gabriel, stand over there, near her. When one of us says, "Mary said" or "The Angel said," then act like you are talking to the other!</p> <p><i>[ad lib cues to your actors, as needed: "look at Mary," "act surprised", etc.]</i></p> <p>Luke: Right! So...</p> <p>The Angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one!  The Lord is with you." But she was confused by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be - <i>[to Mary]</i> Look confused! - The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son-"</p> <p>Matthew: <i>[interrupting excitedly, hand raised, like you know the answer]</i>  "and you will name him Jesus!"</p> <p>Luke: Please wait your turn.</p> <p>Matthew: But I say that in my story too!  <i>[point to script]</i></p> <p>Luke: <i>[rolling eyes]</i> Copycat.</p> <p>Matthew: <i>[slight pause; mimicking quietly to themself]</i>  Copycat.</p> <p>Luke: Ahem! "and you will name him Jesus! He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."</p>
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	<p>John: <i>[in awe]</i> I bet that left Mary speechless!</p> <p>Luke: No, not at all! In fact, Mary <i>questioned</i> the angel, saying “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”</p> <p>John: That’s brave of her!</p> <p>Luke: Yes! So, then the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your older cousin Elizabeth, who was said to be barren, has also conceived a son, and she is six months along. For nothing will be impossible with God.”</p> <p>Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”</p> <p>Then the angel departed from her.</p> <p>Matthew: <i>[to the Angel]</i> Come sit over here, Angel. You appear again in my story.</p> <p><i>[to the others]</i> What’s next? Is it my turn yet?</p> <p>John: Maybe we should sing a song. I always loved the mysterious, poetic songs. I’ve got an idea for one! How about...</p> <p><b>Carol   <i>Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence</i> (v.1)</b> <b>Glory to God #347</b></p> <p>John: What’s next... Didn’t Mary go visit Elizabeth?</p> <p>Luke: Yes, she did, but in the interest of time, we are going to skip that part.</p> <p>John: <i>[exaggerated thinking face, asking slowly]</i> Do you think Mary knew-</p>
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	<p>Matthew &amp; Luke: YES, SHE KNEW!!</p> <p>Luke: <i>[knowledgeably]</i> She even sang a song all about it! I wrote it down. <i>[looking through papers]</i> I've got it around here somewhere...</p> <p>John &amp; Matthew: <i>[sarcastically]</i> Of course you wrote it down.</p> <p>Luke: <i>[triumphantly]</i> Here it is! My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.</p> <p>John: <i>[exaggerated, sarcastic voice]</i> It just... sorta rolls off the tongue, doesn't it?</p> <p>Luke: <i>[defensively]</i> It was progressive for the time! AND, it's still progressive today!</p> <p>Matthew: <i>[redirecting the story...]</i> When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>John: How does that work?</p> <p>Luke: Shh! I already told you!</p> <p>Matthew: Her husband Joseph-</p> <p>John: We need a Joseph! Who wants to be Joseph? <i>[wait for volunteer(s)]</i></p>
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	<p>Come stand over here in Matthew's story.</p> <p>Matthew: Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream...</p> <p>Luke: <i>[to the previous angel who sat down]</i> Angel! That's you, again! You're gonna go see Joseph, now, but this time in a dream.</p> <p><i>[stage whisper to Joseph]</i> Joseph, go to sleep...</p> <p>Matthew: An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and the Angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid-</p> <p>John: <i>[rhetorically, to the room]</i> Why does the angel keep saying "Don't be afraid?"</p> <p>Matthew: ...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:</p> <p>"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"</p> <p>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-</p> <p>Luke: Joseph, now come stand over here close to Mary.</p> <p>Angel, wait there.</p> <p>Matthew: -but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son.</p>
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	John:	But not too close! <i>[motions them apart]</i>
	Luke:	But before we get to the actual birth, John the Baptist was born. And then on the eighth day, his parents took him to be circum-
	John:	<i>[quickly interrupting!]</i> Nnnnnnope... <i>[to the fourth wall]</i> we cut that part! <i>[wink (optional)]</i>
	Luke:	Ok, then... so, <i>[searching for place on the page]</i>
		Ah! Then, in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
	Matthew:	<i>[to John]</i> Luke is always name dropping.
	Luke:	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.
	Matthew:	Mary and Joseph, come to the middle, now.
	John:	Is this where the donkey comes in?
	Matthew & Luke:	<i>[confused]</i> What donkey?
	John:	There's always a donkey in the nativity stories.
	Luke:	<i>[flipping through pages]</i> Not in mine.
	Matthew:	<i>[flipping through pages]</i> Nor mine.
	John:	<i>[shrugs, quietly to self]</i> I still think there was a donkey...
	Luke:	Whatever...
	John:	<i>[mumbles again]</i> and a stable...

	<p>Luke: Stop adding to the story... <i>[rolls eyes]</i> 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.</p> <p>John: <i>[gives baby doll to Mary]</i> You can hold the baby while we sing...</p> <p><b>Carol   Away in a Manger</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Glory to God #114</p> <p>Luke: <i>[as if continuing where you left off before the carol...]</i> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger-</p> <p><i>[Matthew &amp; John join Luke and all three say, simultaneously]</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Luke: Because there was no place in the guest room. Matthew &amp; John: Because there was no room in the inn.</p> <p>John: The inn.</p> <p>Matthew: Yeah, that's how the story goes.</p> <p>Luke: <i>[knowledgably]</i> Not in the latest edition.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Further research shows that it was actually a guest room and not an inn.</p> <p>Matthew: So there was no innkeeper?</p> <p>Luke: No... BUT there was an innkeeper in another story! A man went down from Jericho-</p> <p>John: <i>[interrupting]</i> The birth story, Lukas! Focus! What happened next?</p> <p>Luke: Right! Sorry. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.</p>
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	<p>Matthew: Shepherds! We need shepherds! Who wants to be a shepherd??</p> <p>John: And we need some sheep! Who wants to be a sheep?? Y'all come stand over here in Luke's story. <i>[hand out Sheep &amp; Shepherd props]</i></p> <p><i>[as people are getting into place]</i></p> <p>You know, in my gospel, I later called Jesus the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God. Maybe there's a connection there...</p> <p>Luke: Maybe. <i>[slight pause, shrugs, then continues]</i> Then an angel of the Lord-</p> <p>Matthew: <i>[interrupting]</i> Angel! Need you again! Back over there!</p> <p><i>[calling after the Angel as they walk away]</i> And don't be so scary this time!</p> <p>Luke: Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid;</p> <p>John: If the angels are so scary, I think I'm going to leave them out of my version.</p> <p>Luke: <i>[ignoring John; optionally: give John the hand]</i> "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."</p> <p>John: Oddly specific, but there you are. Mary, you can put the baby in the manger now.</p> <p>Luke: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,</p> <p>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,</p>
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and on earth peace among those whom  
he favors!”

Matthew: Let’s all be angels and sing together!

**Carol | *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* (v. 1)**

Glory to God #119

Luke: When the angels had left them and gone into  
heaven, the shepherds said to one another,  
“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this  
thing that has taken place, which the Lord  
has told us.” So they went quickly and found  
Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the  
manger.

Matthew: Shepherds and sheep... move to the middle by  
the manger.

Luke: When they saw this, they shared what they  
were told about the baby, and all who heard  
it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

Matthew: *[to everyone]* Look amazed! Oooh! Ahhh!

Luke: Mary treasured all these words and pondered  
them in her heart. The shepherds returned,  
glorifying and praising God for all they had  
heard and seen, just as it had been told  
them.

John: Ok, shepherds, y’all move back over here to  
Luke’s side. And we’ll sing and celebrate  
together as we sing Go Tell It on the  
Mountain...

**Carol | *Go, Tell It on the Mountain***

Glory to God #136

Matthew: My turn again! In the time of King Herod,

	<p>John: He was kind of a sus guy.</p> <p>Matthew: You're right, he kind of was. He's a whole nother story for another day. So, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, quite a while after he was born, actually, magi-</p> <p>Luke: <i>[interrupting]</i> What's a magi?</p> <p>Matthew: They are like astrologers or something. Verrry wise. Anyway, magi from the east came to Jerusalem.</p> <p>Luke: We need some magi! You said we need three, right?</p> <p>John: I don't think Matthew ever said three. We can have all the magi we want.</p> <p>Who wants to be a magi? Come on up here into Matthew's story, and get a crown because sometimes the magi were considered royals!</p> <p>Matthew: The magi asked Herod - pretend you're asking Herod - "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east-</p> <p>Luke: <i>[loud stage whisper to magi]</i> Magi... point to the east <i>[Luke points to the east]</i></p> <p>Matthew: -and have come to pay him homage." They set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was.</p> <p>John: Magi, move to the manger in the middle now.</p> <p>Matthew: 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. <i>[maybe need to instruct them to kneel]</i></p>
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Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they returned home by another road.

John: Told you Herod was sus.

Luke: I think this is a good place for another carol! And while we sing, you can all go back to your seats...

**Carol | *What Child Is This* (vv. 1 & 3)**

Glory to God #145

Matthew: That was fun!

Luke: I think we've done a good job telling the story - everyone acting it out and all! Let's give them a round of applause.

John: I haven't had my turn.

Luke: We hoped you wouldn't notice that.

John: My story doesn't need people to act it out.

Matthew: That's because they're too busy trying to understand it.

John: Well... that's why I say some things more than once... give people a chance to think about what they are hearing.

Luke: Uh huh, that's the reason?

John: Ok, so I'm wordy. *[air quotes]* "Wordy is the Lamb" some would say.

Matthew: How does that make you feel?

John: Hmmmm... Poetic.

Luke: Alright then, let's hear you. Get poetic on us.

John: OK...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

*[brief pause to let that sit; turn/search the page, as if reading a new chapter]*

There was a man sent from God whose name was John-

Matthew: *[interrupting]* John... really?

John: *[shrugging]* It's a popular name.

Luke: Continue...

John: John came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

"Might believe through him." I like that line...I might use something like that again later.

Matthew: Imagine that... John repeating himself.

Luke: Huh, yeah.

John: John himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

<p><i>This year your offering will be split between our gift to our Cuban kindred in Christ at our sister congregation in Santa Clara, as a delegation travels there in March) and our deacon's emergency fund, which will allow our deacons to assist nearby neighbors struggling to make ends meet.</i></p>	<p>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.</p> <p>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.</p> <p>Luke &amp; Matthew: <i>[after a brief pause, pensively echoing John]</i></p> <p>“that the world might be saved through him.”</p> <p>John: Yes.</p> <p>Luke: I like it.</p> <p>Matthew: Me too.</p> <p>John: It's a beautiful story.</p> <p>Luke &amp; Matthew: Amen to that.</p> <p><b>Carol   Once In Royal David's City</b></p> <p>Glory to God #140</p> <p><b>Response to the Story</b></p> <p><b>Worshiping God with our Tithes and Offerings</b></p> <p><b>Invitation to Generosity</b></p> <p>Every year our Christmas Eve offering is completely dedicated to mission. Through your generosity tonight you can benefit neighbors near and far away. Let us continue our worship in dedication.</p> <p><b>Offertory</b></p>
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As you tip your candle  
down to light from your  
neighbor's (they will hold  
theirs steady/upright),  
please be mindful of  
dripping wax and be  
careful not to get too  
close to hair or clothing.

### Prayer of Dedication

*These gifts, O God, we give  
so that our kindred in Cuba  
might have something,  
and so that those who are struggling nearby  
might have needs met by our Deacons.  
May your love take on flesh  
for those in need  
who receive these gifts  
as you took on flesh  
for all of us  
that holy night  
long ago. Amen.*

### Sharing the Light of Christ

#### Carol | *Silent Night*

Glory to God #122

### Blessing Poem

#### *First Coming, by Madeleine L'Engle*

He did not wait till the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace.  
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.  
He came when the need was deep and great.  
He dined with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.  
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin  
and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.

	<p>We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice, for to share our grief, to touch our pain, He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!</p> <p><b>*Closing Carol   <i>Joy to the World</i></b></p> <p>Glory to God #134</p> <p><b>Postlude</b></p>
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