



Beyond Human Time

Christmas Eve
5:30 pm Family Worship



BETHLEHEM
LUTHERAN CHURCH

48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org
The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

Sunday, December 24, 2023 ~ 5:30 Family Worship

PRELUDE

Of the Father's Love Begotten

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM
setting, Christopher Uehlein

Prelude on "Lo Desembre Congelat"
(Cold December Flies Away)

Catalonian carol
setting, David Schack

Angels We Have Heard on High

French carol
arr. Nancy and Randall Faber

Isabel Hoffman, piano

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Richard S. Willis
arr. Dennis Alexander

Il est né le divin Enfant
(He Is Born, the Holy Child)

French carol
Marcel Dupré

The church year begins in Advent with waiting. We prepare, repent, make a way. But by this night, the way has been made . . . or not! No matter how long the wait may have felt for us, the time is now! God has spent millennia liberating, planning, befriending humanity, working through the lost and unlikely, preparing for the incarnation – God made flesh! O come, let us adore him!

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in the shadows.

It is time to worship!

We listen for God.

It is time to hear!

We receive God's grace.

It is time to be loved!

We leave in peace.

It is time to serve others!

Emmanuel, God-with-us, is here in this time and place!

Glory to God in the highest!

GATHERING HYMN	O Come, All Ye Faithful	ELW 283
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O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him, born the king of angels:

Refrain: O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

The highest, most holy, light of light eternal,
born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;
Son of the Father now in flesh appearing!

Refrain

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God in the highest:

Refrain

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:

Refrain

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Emmanuel, God-with-us, the time is now. You are here! Your presence glows among us. However this night finds us—filled with joy or touched by grief, alone or in the company of our loved ones—you are with us, and you will never leave. And so we sing with the angels:

Alleluia and Amen!

ANTHEM

He Is Born

French carol
transl. George Evans

BLC Children's Choir
assisted by Rich Towsley, dulcimer

HEARING GOD'S WORD

We want to share a story with you. It's a story you might know well; one you may have heard before. Tonight, we want to tell you this story with something else we know well, our alphabet.

A is for an angel, Gabriel, who began the story with a greeting:

“Good evening! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you!” (*Luke 1.28, The Message*)

B is for Bethlehem, where our story takes place. People traveled from far and wide to arrive in the city; it was a very busy place.

C is for a census (that's a counting of all the people) the reason so many people filled the city of Bethlehem.

D is for the donkey that carried a family on their long journey to Bethlehem to be counted.

E is for exhausted, that's how everyone felt when they arrived – tired from all the travelling.

F is for family: Mary and Joseph and their new baby Jesus, who was born that night in Bethlehem.

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.

For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all the earth!

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming; but, in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

G is for the Good News about to be shared with all the earth.

The Holy Gospel according to Luke.
Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 2:1-20

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. 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.

Shepherds: Let us go now to Bethlehem!

[Joseph] 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 in the guest room.

Angels: Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth!

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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, 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.

Shepherds: Let us go now to Bethlehem!

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Angels: Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth!

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherds: Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and 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.

Angels: Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth!

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

H is for herds, all the animals that were present in the stable, and the flocks of sheep in the field with the shepherds when they heard the good news.

I is for our imaginations, stirred by this story!

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

Refrain: Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;
go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light. *Refrain*

The shepherds feared and trembled when, lo, above the earth
rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth. *Refrain*

Down in a lonely manger the humble Christ was born;
and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn. *Refrain*

J is for joy the excitement and happiness that a new baby, and now, this special night brings.

K is for kindness, shown by the innkeeper that night, allowing a tired family to stay in the stable when there was no room in the inn.

L is for the love we share with one another all through the year and especially at Christmas.

M is for the manger, usually used to hold food for animals, but this time it held the baby because he had no crib.

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord
Jesus laid down his sweet head; the stars in the bright sky looked
down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing; the baby awakes, but little Lord
Jesus, no crying he makes. I love you, Lord Jesus; look
down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me
forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in
your tender care and fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

N is for Noel, another word for Christmas. It means new birth, that's what happened in our story, and it happens every year.

O is for offering, there were many gifts for the baby; we even have some to share now!

OFFERING

Offering plates are placed at each entrance to the sanctuary. Information about supporting Bethlehem's ministry with your offerings is available in the Welcome insert in your pew rack or by visiting blcfairport.org/support-our-ministry.

OFFERING OF MUSIC

Prelude No. 2 in D Major

Robert Vandall

Madeleine Hoffman, piano

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Loving God, for the time we have, we say:

Thank you.

For the gifts we offer, we say:

Thank you.

For the chance to help others, we say:

Thank you.

For the people whose lives will be better because of these gifts, we say:

Thank you.

For the ways you are changing the world, we say:

Thank you.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who appears wherever people need our help.

Amen.

P is for prayer and praise and pondering, all different ways people reacted the amazing thing that happened. We pray and praise and ponder together...

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prayers are always offered on behalf of the whole community.

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

A brief silence.

Glory to you, God, for the song of the angels, proclaiming to the world Christ's holy birth. Give your church a joyful song to sing, that we bring the good news of peace and salvation to all people. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Glory to you, God, for the stars that shine in the depth of the night. Provoke awe in our hearts at the expansive mystery of the cosmos. Open us to find beauty in the clear darkness of night and in the first glimmers of dawn. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Glory to you, God, for the child born to us who establishes a kingdom of justice and righteousness. Break bonds of oppression, bring reconciliation to warring lands, and establish peace from this time onward and forevermore.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Glory to you, God, for the faithfulness of the shepherds in their vocation. Grant rest to any who feel exhausted from their work during this season: parents and all who bring Christmas to life for others, retail and restaurant workers, church musicians and staff, organizers of charitable-giving events, and service workers doing essential tasks. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Glory to you, God, for Mary's loving care. Lead us to tend to one another in time of need. Share the comfort of your presence with all people tonight who are alone or separated from loved ones due to estrangement, incarceration, or illness, especially those we name before you silently or out loud.

Silence for individual prayer.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace.

Amen.

Q is for quiet, the deep peace that Christmas brings – knowing that God is with us.

R is for revelation, God showing us who God is (in a little baby born one night)

S is for one special star that shone bright in the night showing wise ones the way to Jesus.

T is for trust, the confidence we have in God.

U is for unity, all different people brought together tonight to celebrate God's love!

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

With this bread and wine

Build us into a lasting community of hope, peace, joy and love.

Be among us in this meal.

And form us to be your presence in the world today.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

One in body, one in Spirit, we pray as Jesus taught:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who

sin against us.

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION
Rejoice! Emmanuel comes to you.
Thanks be to God.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION
Please come forward at the direction of the ushers. All are welcome to share in Christ's meal of forgiveness and grace. Children who do not yet commune are welcome to come forward for a blessing. Gluten-free wafers and grape juice are available; please indicate your need to the pastor or communion assistant.

THE COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN	Angels We Have Heard on High	ELW 289
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Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain: Gloria in excelsis Deo; gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heav'nly song? *Refrain*

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn king. *Refrain*

COMMUNION HYMN	Infant Holy, Infant Lowly	ELW 276
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Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the child is Lord of all.
Swiftly winging, angels singing, bells are ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the child is Lord of all! Christ the child is Lord of all!

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new
saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the child was born for you! Christ the child was born for you!

COMMUNION HYMN

What Child Is This

ELW 296

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;
hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;
joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!

TABLE BLESSING

V is for vulnerable, a little child needs to be cared for, protected—that's our job.

W is for wonder—our amazement at the beauty of how much God loves us.

POST COMMUNION HYMN

Love Has Come

ELW 292

Love has come—a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.

Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.
Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;
what is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers;
Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

X is for Xmas, the x is actually the symbol for Christ – it is the first letter of the Greek word for Christ.

Y is for You! here to celebrate and worship.

Z is for zeal, the passion with which we share the Good News and God's love, tonight.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE LIGHT

The pastor will light a candle from the Christ Candle and share the flame with ushers who will begin to move down the aisle lighting the candles of the congregation in this manner: the worshiper nearest the center aisle will receive the light and in turn give the light to the one by their side. The lighted candle is never tilted, but is always held upright when passing the light to another so that the hot wax will not be spilled.

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so 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, heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from your holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

(Hum fourth stanza)

THE PRAYER

Gracious God, bathe us always in the light of your Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

LEAVING TO SERVE

BENEDICTION

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

(Candles may be extinguished. Please return your candles to an usher as you leave the sanctuary.)

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

DISMISSAL

Christ is born! Go in joy and peace!

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Toccata on ANTIOCH
(Joy to the World)

Lowell Mason
setting, Craig Phillips

BLC Musicians

Raelynn Clare, Director of Music and Organist

Dr. Jim Jefferis, Director of The Chancel Choir

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Merry Christmas!

We wish you and yours a blessed Christmas!

A Gift for You!

Beginning Christmas Day and continuing throughout the 12 Days of Christmas, listen in to short conversations with co-Pastors Abigail Zang Hoffman and Amy Walter-Peterson. Look for the ***Between Sundays podcast*** wherever you listen.

Worship: We worship each Sunday at 8:55 am (both in-person and livestream). Visit our website – blcfairport.org – for information on how to share in worship with Bethlehem!

Learn about upcoming events and activities... please sign-up to receive communication from Bethlehem, including Between Sundays (Mondays), the Weekly Star (Thursdays) and Ready for Worship (Saturdays). To subscribe, go to www.blcfairport.org and scroll down to sign up for reminders and special announcements. Contact the Church Office if you would prefer a hard copy of the Weekly Star.

***Christmas Poinsettia Donations
and/or contributions to
Lutheran Disaster Response – Middle East
were made to the glory of God by the following:***

- Bill and Gunnar Antell*** in memory of all loved ones from our church family
- Donald and Susan Cardinal*** in memory of Cathy Bitner, Norm Cardinal, and our grandparents
- Nancy Fehse*** in honor of Erich Helbig, and in memory of Connie Helbig and Anna & Frank Steuerwald
- Ruth and Andy Gates*** in memory of Elmer Yeakel and Sandy Gates
- Sandy Goehle*** in honor of loved ones
- Jeff and Ruth Hedin*** in memory of Nels & Mary Hedin and Don & Greta Ahlgren
- Roger and Rosemarie Kolker*** in honor of our children Kathryn & Chris and Russ & Erica and our grandchildren Blakely & Cooper
- Judy Lohr*** in memory of Bob Lohr
- Margaret Maxa*** in memory of William & Margaret Walsh
- Rolf Maxa*** in memory of Erich & Anna Maxa
- Gabriele and Frank Nardozi*** in memory of Erna & Gerhard Schlueter, Irene Cortini, and Frank Nardozi
- Howard and Janet Sharp*** in memory of our parents: Irv & June Sharp, Gene & Grace Garvey
- Joanne Swanson*** in honor of Peter Swanson
- Pastor Amy and Hans Walter-Peterson*** in honor of our Godchildren: Maddie, Izzy, Nate and Micah, and in memory of James Peterson
- Wayne and GerryAnn Westcott*** in honor of our family
- Maribeth Wilke*** in memory of Mitch Wilke and Paula & Ed Hitchings and Ed Hitchings Jr.
- Marjorie Yaeger*** in honor of family and friends, and in memory of family and friends
- Anonymous*** in honor of her LYLAS Ruth Gates
- Anonymous*** in honor of her LYLAS Lisa Rosenbauer

Our Christmas tree is given to the glory of God by **Jim and Donna Berner** in honor of their family, with extra thanks to **Dave Wideman** and to **Rich Towsley** for years of support in setting up the tree and donning it with lights!

The wreaths which decorate the sanctuary are given to the glory of God by **Brian Edwards** in memory of his parents Tom and Gert Edwards, his aunt Ann Rasbeck and his grandparents Henry and Charlotte Miller. The greens were donated by Jan and Howard Sharp.

The wreathes which decorate the doors are given to the glory of God by **Karen Bigenwald** with gratitude for all the love and blessings shared by this BLC community.

Adapted ABC's of Christmas by Erin Klassen, <https://youngclergywomen.org/the-abcs-of-christmas-a-worship-service/>
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Hope Born in a World of Humbugs

Dressed up with presents, lights, TV specials, extra concerts, parties, and spending money, there is a sense that Christmas is the time to feel good, do good, and perhaps live a little better than the rest of the year. Even the most cynical get swept up in the idea that the world and their lives shine a little brighter. It is a sugar-coated holiday rush only to be met days later by an emotional crash. Yet these signs point to a deep-seated hope that is lodged in the hearts and minds of those moving into this season. There is a longing and fervent hope that God will enter in and counter the challenges and humbugs of our days and world. And to this longing and fervent hope we look to one who claims us from marginal lives and engages us in a central story of hope and promise.

Wrapped in every breath, song, and action is God's direct connection with the earth and her peoples. This night counters voices and theologies that view God as distant and unengaged with humanity and the world. From old, the promise of God drawing near has been uttered; in the gospel we witness the birth of God's yearning presence through a teenage girl; throughout we are invited to join the song of creation, hope, and salvation. Tonight we pulse with the exhilaration of Mary and the shepherds, and those who have lived at the margins, as we experience and proclaim, that "God dwells with us." While people may often talk of the "magic" of Christmas, it is our call to speak to the *incarnation* of Christmas. As people come together to hear a familiar story and sing familiar hymns, the blessing and challenge is to witness again to God's promise and promise-keeping with vitality and to join the chorus of joy in what God has done and continues to do in being made real among us.

Into the lights and presents, the music and gatherings, even the wars, poverty, little empires, and tumult of the world, God meets and claims us in that spirit of hope. God calls us to dream and live into a new reality as we encounter this babe at Bethlehem and find this Christ-child born in our lives again. Christmas speaks to our greatest longing, and turns the "humbugs" to carols of joy.