

Penny Nelson

Carol Sing

Gathering Song as Ministry of Music:

****Welcome and Lighting of the Affirmation Candle**

One: Merry Christmas, and welcome to worship at Knox United Church this evening! My name is the Rev. Penny Nelson, and I am the minister here at Knox United.

We gather in the warmth of so much light this evening. After weeks of waiting and watching the light be rekindled in our Advent wreath, the circle has come to completion. This night, we celebrate the light of Christ that is born into this world, symbolized by our Christ candle.

As we gather for worship on this special night, let us take time to express our thanks for the land and waters in which we live, work, and play. Many people call the land in which we live here “Nova Scotia,” but for thousands of years before this, these lands and waters had another name called “Mi’kma’ki”. This is the name that the Mi’kmaq people still know for this place, and tonight, I invite us to pause for a moment of gratitude to say thank you to the lands, the waters, the birds, the trees and the peoples of Mi’kma’ki for all the ways in which life is nurtured in this place. (*pause for a moment*)

As we celebrate the birth of hope, peace, joy, and love this night, let us wonder how each of us might honour the land and water of Mi’kma’ki, and live in peace and friendship with all people of this land.

And through our Affirmation Candle, we celebrate the light of Christ that is born in us! In our Black, Brown, white, Asian, and Indigenous bodies—this night, Christ is born again in our gay, straight, queer, trans, non-binary bodies! Christ is born in our abled and disabled bodies, in all of our cognitive diversity, Christ is born, and God names this *good*. And so, this night, as we do each time we gather as this community of faith, we celebrate that:

All are welcome in this place.

All are welcome by God’s grace.

Call to Worship:

Tonight is Christmas Eve, the holiest of nights!

Tonight, the earth sings with angels and the sky is lit with a Bethlehem star.

From far and wide, we travel with the shepherds to meet God’s gift to the world, singing:

“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 the angels, the great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!”

****Opening Hymn:** VU 64 O Little Town of Bethlehem vv 1 and 4

Opening Prayer:

One: It is night after a long day. What is done is done. What is not done is not done. Now leaving behind our cares, let us deeply breathe in God’s new life. Let us rest in God’s love and presence, and let ourselves begin again tonight.

(a time for silent prayer)

Words of Assurance

One: God's love knows no bounds.
Love comes down at Christmas—
a love so deep and profound
that nothing will ever be the same again.
So, may you know this night that this love has come for you—
to heal you, forgive you, guide you, and inspire you.
Receive this gift, this love, and live your lives to share it.
Thanks be to God! Amen.

Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy:

Worship Leader: Over a hundred people, from the ages of two to eighty years old, were asked to fill in the blank for the statement: "My story is. . ." From the voices of different generations, hear their answers:

Voice 1: Amazing!

Voice 2: Just beginning.

Voice 3: A wee bit messy, with lots of love.

Voice 4: Privileged.

Voice 1: Hopeful.

Voice 2: Full of laughter.

Voice 3: Incomplete, thank goodness.

Voice 4: Long, but good.

Voice 1: One of resilience.

Voice 2: Still unfolding.

Voice 3: Multilingual.

Voice 4: A work in progress.

Voice 1: My story is not just mine, it's tied to yours.

Voice 2: Tonight we tell the story that we tell every year—the story of Christ's birth, the story of love made flesh. It's a story that weaves through every generation. It's a story that picks up the bits and pieces of our narrative and braids us together. *(Another worship leader or reader lights the candle.)*

Voice 3: So tonight, we light the Christ candle, because from generation to generation, our story belongs to God. Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

Candle Lighting Hymn: VU #44_It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Prayer of Illumination:

Reader: O Holy God, we need this story—this Christmas story. We need this story of ordinary people who were brave. We need this story of love that changed the world. We need this story of angel choruses that give reason to hope, and starlight that reminds us to look up. So, tonight we pray: scoop out space in us to truly listen. Quiet our minds. Open our hearts. Amen.

Scripture:

Luke 2: 1-20

- read by Vanessa Voerman

Words of God that are still speaking
Thanks be to God

Reflection:
Nelson

- Rev. Penny

Ministry of Music: Silent Night, Silent World

Offering Invitation

For generations and generations, it has been a Christian tradition to give gifts on Christmas. Children give homemade cards, parents and friends give presents wrapped in brightly-colored paper and bows. We do this in remembrance of the Magi who gave gifts when Jesus arrived. But we also do this because we love one another, and when you love someone, it feels good to give.

So just as we give gifts to one another on Christmas morning, let us also turn that same love towards our neighbours through our givings to this congregation of Knox United Church.

Your givings this night help Knox United to keep living into the way of compassion that Jesus teaches us about.

These offerings help our churches to do everything from visiting those who are sick and dying, to providing groceries or help with heating bill for those who are in need in our communities, all the way through to making sure that

there is a space for the Lower Sackville Nursery School, AA and Motion Dance to meet,

and keeping our doors open for all to come and worship together and learn about God's love.

So, if you feel called to help us live into

God's amazing and life-changing vision for this world by giving what you can into the offering plate tonight,

then we thank you from the bottom of your heart's for your generosity.

Offertory Hymn: VU 60 vv.1, 3 & 5 O Come All Ye Faithful

Offertory Response: Each of Us Has Treasures

**** Offering Dedication:**

All: God, we ask a blessing on *all* the gifts that are given everywhere this night, and especially for the gifts that have been offered here. May the gifts we've given you tonight be used to bless the lives of people of Sackville, and around this world. This we pray, in the name of your newborn Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Carol: VU 75 While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night vv 1,2 and 6

COMMUNION

Invitation:

One: This table is for everyone, a table of generous welcome for all people, in all of our diversity and difference. In The United Church, we celebrate what is called an "open table", meaning everyone is welcome to partake in communion,

regardless of age or whether you have been baptized or confirmed. Whether we are doubtful or certain, neighbour or stranger, no one is barred from this table. All are welcomed to be nourished in Christ's name.

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving:

One: God is with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts!

All: We lift them up to God!

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

All: It is right to give God thanks, and praise.

One: On this night of unexpected angels,
on this night of guarding shepherds,
on this night of tired and awestruck parents,
on this night of Abundant Life,
we give you thanks, O God!

**All: Heaven and earth are full of your Glory!
Hosanna in the highest!**

One: We give you thanks that you have been with your creation,
from before it came to be.
in new life aborning,
in times of calm and chaos,
in death, and beyond!
And so, with all Creation,
with the earth, the sea, the sky,
and all the creatures that live within it,
we join with your angels, and sing our joy:

Carol: Joy to the World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Saviour 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.

One: And you give us this great gift:

Child of Life,
Prince of Peace,
Emmanuel – God-with-us!
In the birth of a tiny baby,
born in a shack,
visited by the poor,
guarded by his parents' love,
you give us your Self!
Alleluia!

All: Alleluia!

One: This child laughed with those who laughed,
he grieved with those who grieved,
he listened and taught,
but most of all – he loved, and still continues to love us with a love that points us
back to you.

All: For his life, and for your love, we give you thanks.

One: On the night before he died,
Jesus sat with his friends, celebrating.
Together, they remembered the story
of the people Israel, brought out of slavery
by your love.

During the meal, Jesus took a loaf of bread
and blessed it,
giving thanks to you, God, for your gift of life.

He broke that bread and passed it to his disciples,
saying, *“This is my body, given for you.
Each time you eat this, remember me.”*

When the meal was almost over,
Jesus took a cup of wine, and blessed it,
giving thanks to you, God, for your gift of love.

He lifted that cup, passing it to his disciples,
saying, *“This is my life's blood. This is my promise.
This is for you and for the world. Each time you drink this, remember me.”*

On this night, we remember the fullness of his life, from birth to death, and
resurrection. And so, we eat, we drink and we remember God-with-us – then and
now.

One: And as we do this, we pray: Send your spirit upon these gifts, God of all love, that they, and we, might truly be Christ's body, living his love in the world, this Christmas, every day, all our lives.

We pray all of this as we lift up to you the prayers for the people and places that have been on our hearts this week, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Sharing Communion

Ministry of Music: O Holy Night

Prayer after Communion:

All: As you came in the hush of darkness, O God, still our hearts by the wonder of this night. Make us wise with the wisdom of a little one that truth might be born afresh in us. Let not our hearts be busy inns with no room, but the doors of homes opened wide to welcome your Son and our brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn: Silent Night VU 67

Blessing:

One: As we go from our worship this night:
May the joy of the angels sing in our voices;
may the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds;
may the strong faith of Mary and Joseph strengthen our spirits;
and may the love of the Christ Child shine in our hearts.
God's blessing be upon you all, this holy night and forever. Amen.

Instrumental recessional

**OUR MISSION
TO SHARE GOD'S LOVE
BY LIVING THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS:
showing mercy,
promoting justice,
offering forgiveness,
acceptance, and hope.**

Our Vision...

We, the congregation of Knox United Church,

publicly proclaim our commitment to become an open and welcoming community of faith. We declare that we welcome everyone regardless of age, race, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Everyone is welcome here.

Through the process of honouring diversity and challenging injustice with those who bear the weight of discrimination, we commit ourselves to openness, growth, education, love, and acceptance.

Christ's Disciples in Ministry: Everyone
MINISTER: Rev. Penny Nelson
Minister of Music & Dramatic Arts: John Lindsay-Botten
Church School Superintendent: Lynne Stewart
Youth Group: James O'Connell
Pastoral Care: Olive McIldoon & Judy Hayes

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+Call to Worship written by David Sparks, Okanagan Falls United, BC. Adapted from *The Gathering: A/C/E 2018-19*, pp.25-26. Used with permission; and Opening Prayer written by Jamie Miller, First UC, Dryden, ON. From *The Gathering: 2018-19*, pg. 32. Used with permission; Offering Prayer adapted from *The Gathering: Pentecost 1, 2018*; Communion Liturgy written by Rod Sykes, St. Andrew's United, Calgary, AB. Adapted from *The Ghatiner: A/C/E 2013-14 Drama Files*, pp.42-44. Used with permission.