



Call to Worship (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Hymn: StF 212 (*Latin, 18th Century*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HErO89bEI8g>

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:
O come, let us adore Him, (3x) Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above
Glory to God, in the highest:
O come, let us adore Him, (3x) Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to graze,
we too will thither, bend our joyful footsteps:
O come, let us adore Him, (3x) Christ the Lord.

Yea Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning
Jesus to Thee be all glory giv'n
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing.
O come, let us adore Him, (3x) Christ the Lord.

Opening Prayer (Dr. Susan M. (Elli) Elliott.)

O Holy One, born in the night – meet us here now at your manger. Meet us as a newborn child meets new parents, come to change our lives forever. Meet us as the newborn who insists that we make room for you, who requires that we reorder our lives to pay attention to you. You come as a light in a vast darkness yet that light changes the darkness completely. Meet us here in the lighting of our small lights. Be born in us again. Amen.

Scripture Luke 2:1-20

Reflection *Rising & Following*

The shepherds were visited by angels, with an amazing and holy message about the good and joyful news of our Savior's birth and the shepherds responded by rising up and going to Bethlehem to see the newborn baby. God sent us Jesus to change things, to touch the earth, and to touch each of us. If Christ was born and nothing ever changed on the earth, then he would not have been the Messiah. Clearly something was happening, and the shepherds recognized this and responded.

Shepherding was the province of the lowly, especially on the graveyard shift. The job was dangerous with wild animals that could attack at any time. The shepherds are not even included in the census. And yet, they are the ones that the angels appear to. God comes to us all, but God especially comes to the least and the lost.

We have the advantage of history. We know the babe in the manger grew up to lead the most amazing movement that ever existed and still exists. Like the shepherds, we've been taking care of our flocks, but are we going to listen to the angels' eternal message as they tell us that something miraculous is happening? How are we going to respond to Christ this Christmas? Are we going to rise up & follow him?

There is a picture that I saw the other day of a life-sized nativity and dog lying in the manger with Jesus. Sometimes, we just need the good sense of this dog to curl up with Jesus. And then I saw another picture from a friend of her young daughter playing with an airplane. Baby Jesus was piloting the plane with Mary and Joseph as passengers! Sometimes, we need to leave the comfort of what we know and rise up and go and join Jesus wherever he wants to pilot us. Maybe we'll end up in familiar territory, or maybe we will find ourselves following him and flying to somewhere that we have never been before.



God sent us Jesus to bring salvation and to turn the world upside-down or right-side up. In Chapter 1 of Luke, Mary had been singing about this. Those promises are still true for us today. We live in a world where so much is wrong, and life makes no sense to us. This picture (left) has not been photoshopped. The rock is real. The soil is real. The trees are real. It is hard to figure out how that large rock can stay suspended in midair. But if you take a moment and turn this picture upside-down (right), then things will become a lot clearer.



Jesus came to show us that the way we are looking at the world and the way we are living does not make sense. We are called to rise up and follow him in some counter-cultural ways, in the way of love, in the way of forgiveness, peace, justice and grace, in the way of kindness, compassion and generosity, in the way of loving our enemies and offering hospitality to the stranger, of feeding the hungry, and of loving all God's children. God came down to earth to turn our upside-down non-sensical world back the right way up. And he did it by sending us a tiny baby and first telling those on the margins the joyful, good news.

There's a baby in the manger. And God is here today birthing new things in the present 2000+ years after Bethlehem. And that is good and joyful news for us still today. So as rich and poor, the powerful and the oppressed, together, let's rise up and follow!

Hymn: StF 191 *Anonymous*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcZlzuqCCF0>

Away in a manger, no crib for a 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 side until 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

Prayers

God of light, you announced Your arrival among us to the poorest, the most humble. We celebrate your good news to each of us and to everyone. With the shepherds in the fields, let us rise up and go now to find Christ in our hearts, and in the world. Let us follow you and praise your holy name. May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. *We lift up now the concerns for others that we have on our hearts. ...* Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray: *Our Father ...*

The Gift of Light

John 1:1-5 (NRSV) and 1:14 (The Message) says: *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 overcome it. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

It is into the mess of this world and the darkness that Christ came. 2000+ years ago the word became flesh and Jesus was born. He told his disciples "I am the light". And then he passed the light to them, telling them you are the light of the world, let your light shine for all to see and share it with others. And so for 2000 years people have been sharing that light. And now I share it with you: "The light of Christ. Happy Christmas."

Hymn: StF 217 *Joseph Mohr (1792-1848); Trans. Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832-1916)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n036kBC1HEw>

Silent night, holy night:
Sleeps the world; hid from sight,
Mary and Joseph in stable bare
watch o'er the child beloved and fair
sleeping in heavenly rest.

Silent night, holy night:
shepherds first saw the light,
heard resounding clear and long,

far and near, the angel song:
'Christ the Redeemer is here!'

Silent night, holy night:
Son of God, O how bright
love is smiling from your face!
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,
Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Blessing

Let us rise up and go forth to spread the Good News wherever we go, sharing God's love and promise with all whom we meet. And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.