

## Ottawa Worship December 20, 2020



### **Music To Prepare Us For Worship** Sue Koeppe, Musician **Welcome**

If we made a list of all the Christmas miracles; we'd probably talk about a virgin birth and angel visitations. We'd talk about Mary saying 'yes' when God asked her to believe, and Joseph saying 'yes' when God asked him to trust. Everything about their lives changed and their yeses changed everything! Think about it! Jesus' birth wasn't possible until they changed. And, what about the miracle of the star that lit the sky directing shepherds and wise men to our infant born, Savior. Is there another miracle in all this? Could it be the miracle of **Light**, the light that illuminates a way for peace to be born on earth? Surrounded by so much that feels so dark this year, we know how very fragile, even extinguishable our lights can be. Still, we do our best to believe in the One True Light. But, today's worship takes it one step further and invites us to be changed by the Light that illuminates peace. Let's begin worship this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent, lighting the Advent Candle of Peace. You're invited to join me in the Lighting the Candles of Advent litany.

### **Lighting the Candles of Advent**

**Pastor:** I believe in the light that has come and is coming.

**Congregation:** I believe in the light that has come and is coming.

**Pastor:** We see the star rising.

**Congregation:** We see the star rising.

**Pastor:** We hear the glad tidings.

**Congregation:** We hear the glad tidings.

**Pastor:** We know we are not alone.

**Congregation:** We know we are not alone.

Pastor: Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of peace on earth. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle-even when we are not sure that goodwill among us can be found, ignite the flame of peace within us.

**Congregation: that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out.**

*Pastor & Congregation: I believe in the light even when, even when light has come and is coming.*

Pastor: Glorious God, help us face the pain of life and embrace the assurance that light is already here, and always coming. AMEN

**Music Video** “Noel Peace Cannon” recording of the performance of the Ottawa First United Methodist Church Choir

Let’s open our hearts and sing inviting Christ to Be our Emmanuel...

**Opening Song** “O, Come, O Come, Emmanuel” #211

### **Prayer Intro**

During the pandemic, we’ve been home so much and Christmas isn’t going to change that. You might notice you’re a little more edgy or sensitive than usual. Maybe you’re quick to point out everything that’s wrong in the world. Maybe you jump on every mistake and feel it your duty to remind people of their’s. Maybe you’re just overly picky about everything or determined to keep bringing up the past. Christmas can be a pretty stressful season anyway but a Covid Christmas certainly doesn’t help put peace in our hearts and homes...Take a couple deep breaths. Breath in and breath it out. Let go of all that stress. Let’s give all our stress to our Prince of Peace in prayer...Let’s pray....

### **Pastoral Prayer & Lord’s Prayer**

Light-giving God – more than any other year we need Your light. Traveling through these dark times of loneliness and fear, through heartbreak and anger, through grief and loss, through fear and economic uncertainty, through wars in our hearts, homes and nations, through our own private crises, natural and human disasters, through struggles with our mental health, the decline of a parent, through the simple letting go of a child more ready to be an adult than we’re ready to allow their growth, through the changes in a new marriage, the welcoming of a new child, the completion of a degree, through the encumbering chains of our past. Light-giving God, we’re on a journey; we follow your Light, radiant and warm, comforting and yet energizing. We need your light to illuminate peace, peace in our hearts, our homes, our community, our nation and our world. But, God is we’re honest, sometimes we fear Your light. Light exposes the truth. Light forces us to face hard realities. We don’t want the light of Your truth to tarnish the image we work so hard to portray, the truth of the harm we’ve done to others, the truth of the palaces we

build to fortify our own privilege. Help us face, not fear the truth. Give us the strength within to acknowledge the pain of what we've done to others and what others have done to us. Light-Giving God keep us on our journey to the light. We pray this would be the Christmas your light perfects us in your peace. We pray Your light shines so brightly this Christmas we truly trust in the truth of your good news who is Jesus, the Christ, our Prince of Peace, who unites our hearts and voices in prayer to you, praying...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 and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

**The Old Testament Scripture Reading** Isaiah 9: 2-7 (Common English Bible)

Lorrie McCallister, Liturgist

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest, as those who divide plunder rejoice. As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that burdened them, the staff on their shoulders, and the rod of their oppressor. Because every boot of the thundering warriors, and every garment rolled in blood will be burned, fuel for the fire. A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever.

**The New Testament Scripture Reading** John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light. The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world. The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light. The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him. But those who did

welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known.

**The Message** "I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace" Pastor Cheri

Ever taken a tour of a cave? 40 years ago, on our low-budget, Kentucky honeymoon, we toured Mammoth Caves. Mammoth Caves have the distinction of being the world's longest known cave system. The tour guide literally led us down into the bowels of the earth. Really cool in lotsa ways. Like 54 degrees cool. Lights line the trail's sides. Guardrails kept us from touching cave surfaces or falling into one of the caves many caverns. Absolutely fascinating were the size, shape and color variations of the stalactites and stalagmites. The little eeky- squeaky bats, NOT so fascinating. Didn't know it at the time but our tour guide would take us to the cave's bottom and turn out all the lights. He warned us first. It was absolutely pitch black. Couldn't EVEN see our hands in front of our faces. Do you know what happens in utter darkness? You start to feel unsure of yourself. Like driving in dense fog or a blizzard, utter darkness is disorienting. The lights were only off for a couple minutes, but it seemed like an eternity. Our eyes never adjusted. We just couldn't see. Today's scripture talks about people walking in darkness like they couldn't see, either. But, when the Bible talks about darkness, it's not talking about the utter darkness of our cave experience. In the scriptures, darkness symbolizes our spiritual blindness, our inability to know all that is divine. We're in the dark when we're not walking in God's will and way. It's a kind of darkness associated with evil and sin, a sort of hell on earth. Darkness is every anti-God thing. At creation, the earth was formless, empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And, the first thing God created? God said: "Let there be light." And, God saw that the light was good. God separated the light from the darkness. After our pitch-black cave experience, we know the relief light brings. **Light is good.** But, today Isaiah describes a different light, a light so strong it's a relief for the nations. Could the light Isaiah describes be a relief for our nation now? Safe to say, we're living in deep darkness, the dark valley of the shadow of death due to Covid. The

political divide's dark and so are the climate changes and systemic racism! And, well, we all have our dark times, don't we? Especially this year and this Christmas. We've lost so much. Looking to the New Year seems less than hopeful, more like one very dark tunnel with no light at the end. Don't we hope the Covid vaccine that came out this week will put a quick end to this dark pandemic time? Darkness. So much darkness. A broken relationship feels dark. Fear and anxiety are dark. Life's dark when our own wrongdoing gnaws away at our innards. THAT regret breaks hearts and hangs heavy on our mind. Illness can be all consuming darkness, too. Losing a loved one's a dark daily companion. Nothing fills that very deep, dark void. We all know darkness. One woman put it like this: "Life's tough. You're born, you suffer, and then you die." That's all there is -- the life, the pain and the suffering, and then the everlasting dark. Well, that's just not **a very merry and bright outlook!** Because...to all who walk in darkness a great light is given. God's Prophet Isaiah announces the arrival of the light. But, can that light still help us now? To answer that question, you need to know about life when Isaiah prophesied. God's prophet spoke around 700 years before Christ's birth during a very dark time when Ahaz was Judah's King. Judah was known as the Southern Kingdom. The Southern Kingdom faced attack from the Northern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom was Israel and Syria. Judah's King Ahaz considered enlisting the aid of Assyria. While Assyria would surely neutralize his northern neighbors' threats, it would also require entering into alliance with the evil Assyrian Empire. What should King Ahaz do? To Ahaz's political dilemma, Isaiah brought a religious solution. Isaiah urged Ahaz to stand firm in faith, to trust God, and refuse coalitions with the other countries, Syria, Israel or Assyria. Isaiah prophesies that God will provide a king to protect them, a light that's a relief to the nations. The child's birth would be the sign of God's promised protection. Today's scripture announces that significant birth. The child that's born, the son that's given will be our Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Eternal Father, our Prince of Peace. Isaiah speaks peace into every darkness then and now. If God delivered them from the evil Assyrians then, today's Good News is God will deliver us from all our darkness now. God is coming to us. The advent of God is the Light. What a relief to see the light! Light's exactly what's going to happen in tomorrow's night sky. As the very hard year, 2020 comes to a close, the solar system's gracing us with a cosmic Christmas miracle. We'd have to go all the way back to March 4, 1226, to see what we'll see tomorrow night on the longest night of the year, the December solstice. That's almost 800 years since Jupiter and Saturn aligned so closely. Safe to say, it will be a very rare cosmic phenomena! From our earthly vantage point, Jupiter and Saturn

will appear to collide, creating this AMAZING point of light in the night sky. That light's known as the Star of Bethlehem or the Christmas star. **Do you suppose this is ANY cosmic coincidence?** This rare Christmas Star comes to shine Light in all 2020's darkneses! Last week we talked about the violence, oppression and political and social unrest at the time of Jesus' birth. Interesting, a star lit the Wise Men's way to the baby Jesus. A star is light. Scientists would tell you that cosmic phenomena was a meeting of 3 stars: Jupiter, Saturn and Mars. Into that very dark time, came the Light. Jesus birthed peace on earth. And, into this a very dark time of violence, oppression and political and social unrest, on the darkest day of this year, Jupiter and Saturn will collide to give us the Christmas Star. We the people who walk in darkness will see a GREAT light. Light will shine...Jesus is light for all humankind. Jesus comes again this Christmas to birth peace on earth. Advent begins in darkness: but God speaks through Isaiah to remind us that light will shine. He is the Christ Child, the light of Emmanuel, God with us, a light more brilliant than we can imagine. And, of all the titles Isaiah gave the light, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace, my favorites are Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace. Jesus counsels us in peace, His promise: peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." Purpose Driven Life Author and large church pastor, Rick Warren says "peaceful relationships are built on the truth." So, today, I give you 3 Truths about God's Peace. **First truth, God is the source of all peace.** One of God's Old Testament Hebrew names is Jehovah Shalom. Jehovah Shalom means the Lord is Peace. Shalom, the Old Testament Hebrew word for peace encompasses so much more than our word for peace. Shalom means wholeness, soundness, health, yes peace, but also well-being and spiritual prosperity...Peace isn't the absence of difficulty or conflict: peace is God's presence in the difficulty. We think peace is the calm. But real peace is God's presence in the storm. The second truth about God's peace. **God intends peace for us.** Peace is God's gift to us, God's lavish blessings. In the Old Testament book of Numbers, God instructed the priests to continually speak this blessing over God's people, Israel to remind them of God's grace and peace: that blessing: The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." **Finally, the third truth: God's peace supersedes hard times.** When the boat carrying Jesus and his apostles was caught in a dangerous Galilean storm, Jesus commanded the waves, "Peace be still!" Immediately the wind and water were calm. Biblical peace doesn't mean we're promised a calm life. Jesus suffered and so does every apostle who follows him. God's peace ensures Jesus will either calm the storm or calm us

through the storm. God's peace is a gift that supersedes our pain and difficulty when we enter it with God who is but a prayer away. A young widow named Lisa Apello describes God's peace like this. Lisa said; "There are good things that come from pain. And there are good things that only come from pain. Sometimes I hate that this is our human experience but we all know it's true. We can tell our kids a hundred times it'll hurt if they touch a hot stove but it's only when they get their chubby finger too close and we're madly running cold water over it that they really understand. As painful as a loss of a loved one can be, there is good that has come from it. I understand things now I know only because of the pain and all that it brought. One of those is true peace. **Only when we were in the storm of our life, did I really understand peace.** Before my husband's death, I thought peace happened when everything was running smoothly. I thought peace was the quiet that comes after all the kids are down for the night or the waveless routine that came with a well-ordered life. True peace comes even when things don't run smoothly. Peace doesn't happen after the storm, when you look around and realize, "Hey, we made it through. We're still standing." **True peace happens right in the midst of the storm.** It's not that peace ignores the storm or walls itself off to all of the pain. When my husband Dan died, the pain was raw and real, the grief I felt for my children absolutely gut-wrenching. I had real fears and there have been real consequences every single day without a husband and a dad. Peace doesn't sugarcoat the circumstances. **Instead, peace comes because God is present in the midst of the hard.** Peace comes when I give Him my fears, my questions and my pain and I receive His assurance and promise and hope. Peace comes when I trust God; when I fill up daily on the life He breathes right into the hard. It's not that the waves stop crashing – they're still there. But they don't drag me down with them because the hope and promise of God's Presence is stronger. It is so not pie in the sky. It's not a platitude or wishful thinking. **Peace comes when we: replace the lies of our fear with the truth of God's promises.** When we remember how God has been faithful every single time before. When we release control of our circumstances and our fretting to God. When we realize God's character can only ever be love and faithfulness and goodness and truth. Peace comes because God has taken my hand in His and is madly pouring the water of His life over my hurt. I hate the storm that has left our family missing a father and a husband. I hate the storms that I see rocking some of my friends and family. But I wouldn't want to give back the good that has come. I know Jehovah Shalom in a way I never knew him before. There are some things – good things — that only come when you've endured a storm. My friends, what came into being through the Word was life, and the life

was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light even in life's deepest, darkest caves. This Christmas, receive the Light. Light REVEALS the TRUTH and the TRUTH SETS US FREE to live in God's peace. We are people of the Light. Believe in light. Light illuminates peace! Nazi concentration camp survivor and Author, Corrie Ten Boom once said: "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest." Rest is peace! This Christmas season, I pray you live always resting IN God's peace. AMEN

**The Invitation to Give Our Gifts & Tithes** In our lives and our neighborhoods, **we need light**. In our families and our work, we **need light**. In our nation and our world, we need light. We give gifts to the church to be the light that illuminates peace, the peace that's so needed now. You're invited to give a gift that shines light in Ottawa's darkness. You can mail your gift to the church or use the church's secure online PayPal giving option found on the church's website. Now, more than ever, our world needs the Light that illuminates peace. Let's give and trust the divine to use it for good. Now, let's thank God for the joy of giving as we pray to dedicate our gifts. Let's pray...

### **The Prayer of Dedication**

Light-Giving God, we give our gifts to you and your church to be a LIGHT that shines in all that's dark. When society seems uncaring and division predominates, may we never forget the warmth of YOUR light that fills us with peace and love for others. God of Love and Light, use us and use these gifts to help others in need. Use us and use these gifts to bring others to a saving relationship with the One who is Love and Light for we pray this and every prayer in His Holy, Awesome name. The name of Jesus Christ. AMEN

**Closing Song** "Go Tell It On the Mountain" #251

### **Benediction & Sending Forth**

The LORD bless you and keep you.

The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The LORD turn his face toward you this Christmas and give you ABUNDANT peace."

**Music After Worship**

Sue Koeppe, Musician