**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2022**

*““What good is it for me if Mary gave birth to the Son of God 1400 years ago and I don't give birth to God's son in my person and my culture and my times?” (Meister Eckhart)*

**Please bring:**

* **A candle to light together**
* **Bread and wine or other beverage**

**HELLOS AND INTRODUCTIONS (Suzie De Quattro and Betty Thompson)**

3:30–4:00 PM Your family is welcome to come and stay as long (or short) as they want.

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**WELCOME (Suzie)**

* Betty and I had the joy of preparing today’s communal prayer.  You will hear the old songs and readings that many of us love, despite their traditional male references to God.
* Thanks to Solidarity with Sisters for being the origin and center of our communal prayer since we began in March 2020.
* Our music uses the traditional lyrics, even as we know that the Holy One is beyond all our categories, including genders. Thanks to our musicians Marilyn and Paul Voigt and Debra Street and Keith Miller. We gratefully sing with Keith’s recorded piano accompaniment on many other Sundays, and today he is here in person. And thanks to Jim De Quattro for creating gentle recordings for entering into our meditative quiet.
* Thanks to our readers today: Anne Regan, Bill Fanelli, Frances Beard, Sr. Marie McCarthy, Jim De Quattro, Alicia and George Urban, Lynn Bufka, and Sr. Grace Hartzog, as well as Marilyn and Paul Voigt.

**SETTLING IN (Marilyn Voigt)**

Let us settle into this holy night.

Take a gentle, slow breath and let your body feel the support of your chair.

 [Pause to take a gentle, slow breath after each line.]

Take a gentle, slow breath and let it soften what may be tight in you.

Take a gentle, slow breath and LOOK at the community gathered here in God’s love.

Take a gentle, slow breath and rest in Emmanuel among us. [2 breaths]

Now we enter Christmas joy together by singing “O Come, All Ye Faithful” with Debra Street and Keith Miller. .Then we will light our Christ candles with Anne Regan and Bill Fanelli.

**OPENING SONG: O Come, All Ye Faithful (Debra Street & Keith Miller)**

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
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
All glory in the highest
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning
Jesus, to Thee be glory given
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord!

**OPENING RITUAL:  WELCOMING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST  (Isaiah 9:1-6)**

**(Anne Regan & Bill Fanelli)**

All through Advent, we have been aware of the darkness that surrounds this time.  And we have been watching for signs of what we know is already here: the presence of God. Today we pray to see holiness anew in Jesus, and to rejoice in this fresh radiance! I invite you to light your Christ candle as I read from Isaiah:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom
a light has shone.

You have brought them abundant joy
and great rejoicing,
For unto us a child is born, unto us an heir is given;
upon whose shoulder dominion rests.
This One shall be called Wonderful Counselor,

The Strength of God, Eternal Protector, Guardian of Peace.

This dominion is vast
and forever peaceful,sustained by fair judgment and justice,
from this time onwards and forever.

Holy One, we welcome with joy the Light you give us. In the light of our candles, we welcome the Guardian of Peace into our hurting, beautiful world and into our hearts. Let our hearts truly be “the sacred crib, the birthing place of God-among-us.” Amen.

**CALL TO WORSHIP/ INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Suzie)**

Our liturgical year always begins with us watching and waiting in darkness, anticipating the glorious story of God’s coming among us. Each year we hear again of the lion laying down with the lamb, the need for patience, the call to repentance from a firebrand preacher, a miraculous pregnancy. And tonight, as we have each December, we come full circle to Bethlehem and arrive at the manger.

I have asked myself what elements of the story resonate in my longing to hear them again and again.  And tonight, my answer is Mary's yes, Joseph's faithfulness, a vulnerable child, the astonishment of the shepherds and of course an angelic chorus.

This Advent, Betty and I have been more aware than ever that God’s design has made each of us an emerging Emmanuel. As we share our lives with one another we discover that God and human beings are united and joined as one.

And so on this Christmas Eve night let’s ponder how we will let this union of heaven and earth work in us. How do we let this familiar story ferment into steadfast, contagious hope and joy?

Let us listen as Sr. Grace Hartzog reads from the Gospel of John. Then questions and music will lead us into meditative quiet.

**READING 1** [Mt 1:18-25](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/1?18)     John 1:1-5, 14                                      **(Sr. Grace Hartzog)**

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

The Word was present to God from the beginning.

Through the Word all things came into being

and without the Word nothing came to be.

What came to be through the Word was life,
        and this life was the light of the human race;
     the light shines in the darkness,
        and the darkness has not overcome it.

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

though some did not recognize it.

And the Word became flesh
        and dwelt among us,
        and we saw the Word’s glory,
       one beloved of God --

        full of grace

 and truth.

**QUESTIONS 1** *[Pause after each question.]*                                  **(Jim De Quattro)**

When do you feel that Beginning, that Word, especially in **your** **own** body?

When have you felt that the True Light in the world was absent? How did it shine again for you?

What are you hearing in the silence of this night?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE with initial musical meditation (3 min. total)**

  **(Betty:** Slide 1, music, time, chime)

Silent Night instrumental with the London Symphony Orchestra -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOEH7YRCJbg>[Fade between 1:37 - 1:41, when it changes key.]



**(Betty)** Let us listen as Frances Beard reads from the Gospel of Luke. Then questions and music will lead us into meditative quiet.

**READING 2 –** [**Lk 2:1-14**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/2?1)  **(Frances Beard)**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus
that a census should be made of the whole Roman world.

So all went to be registered, each to their own town.
And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth
to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem,
because he was of the house and family of David,
to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was great with child.
While they were there,
the time came for her to have her child,
and she gave birth to her firstborn son.
She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger,
because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields
and keeping the night watch over their flock.
The angel of God appeared to them
and the glory of the Holy One shone around them,
and they were struck with great fear.
The angel said to them,
“Do not be afraid;
for behold, I proclaim to you glad tidings of great joy
that will be for all the people.
For today in the city of David
a savior has been born for you who is Christ, the Messiah.
And this will be a sign for you:
you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes
and lying in a manger.”
And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel,
praising God and saying:
“Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to **all**, on whom God’s favor rests.”

**GO, TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN! (Debra Street- & everyone, muted)**

Refrain: Go tell it on the mountain

 Over the [hills](https://www.definitions.net/definition/hills) and everywhere,

 Go tell it on the mountain

 That Jesus Christ is born!

 Verse:

While [shepherds](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shepherds) kept [their](https://www.definitions.net/definition/their) watching

O'er [silent](https://www.definitions.net/definition/silent) flocks by night

Behold [throughout](https://www.definitions.net/definition/throughout) the heavens

There [shone](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shone) a holy light. Refrain

 Verse:

The shepherds feared and trembled

When lo, above the Earth,

Rang out the angel chorus

That hailed the Savior’s birth. Refrain

 Verse:

They found a [lowly](https://www.definitions.net/definition/lowly) manger

Where the [humble](https://www.definitions.net/definition/humble) Christ was born

And God sent our salvation

 That blessed Christmas morn. Refrain

**QUESTIONS 2** *[Pause after each question.]* **(Jim De Quattro)**

What captivates you in this story? (Pause.) How will you tell it “over the hills and everywhere”?

How are you different from the “you” who heard this story last year?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE (Betty:** Slide, time, chime**)**



(Betty) Let us listen as Lynn Bufka reads a meditation from Marie’s community, the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana. Then questions and music will lead us into meditative quiet,

**READING 3 (Lynn Bufka)**

“The early church mothers and fathers said that God became human in order that humanity might become divine. God and humanity exchange gifts. We share our lives with one another and in so doing discover that God and human beings are united and joined as one.

It is strange to me how easily we talk about the importance of seeing God in the poor and downtrodden yet how uneasy we feel focusing on the divine spark in ourselves. Until we know that presence in ourselves, we have difficulty seeing it in all other human beings. . . .

For me this Christmas I want something deeper than simply pausing for a day to open gifts and thinking Hooray, Jesus was born this day!... I want to spend some time wondering about how my own humble labors can bring light to my communities and my relationships on a daily basis.

Let’s not just *celebrate* Christmas this year. Let’s also *participate* in Christmas. Let’s ponder and treasure what it means that “We’re all meant to be mothers and fathers of God,” to welcome ‘God begotten in us.”

**QUESTIONS 3** *[Pause after each question.]* **(Jim De Quattro)**

How will you give birth to Emmanuel in our time and culture?

In what familiar or new places do you want to let your light shine?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE with initial musical meditation**

**(Betty:** Slide 3, total of 3 minutes including music, chime)

Play **“**This Little Light of Mine,” start 1:27 and fade between 2:00 and 2:07. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbP8yziBqMY>

 

**SHARING (Anne and Bill)**

We invite you to share **briefly** what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and reflected. That helps us to glimpse the many ways God is among us. We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening. And let’s leave a bridge of silence between speakers.

We begin in silence as we gather our reflections. *[Long pause.]*

Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute again afterwards. Who would like to begin?

(Sharing)

*[Let sharing continue for about 20 minutes.]*

Thank you.  We have to stop now, and we can continue after the final song, as we often do. Now let us pray, led by Alicia and George Urban.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Alicia and George Urban)**

This Christmas, ever ancient and ever new, notice what prayer is rising in you. [Pause.]

Now let us pray. Our response will be: God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Emmanuel, God within us, thank you for making your home in us and in our world. Help us notice and honor you. For this we pray. God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Emmanuel, God among us, thank you for all that shines out with your radiance, brightening lives, warming hearts, and illuminating truth. [Pause.] For this we pray. God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Emmanuel, God with us, thank you for this shining community of women religious and other lay people across North America. For this we pray. God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Emmanuel, God for us, turn our gratitude into action for justice and peace, especially for those with no place at the table. For this we pray. God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Emmanuel, God of love, bless and protect women who are giving birth, especially those who are in dangerous places and difficult situations. God who is with us, hear our prayer.

For what else shall we pray?

[Shared prayers]   God who is with us, hear our prayer.

Thank you.  O God, we will do all we can to make our prayers real, and we entrust the outcome to you.  Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION  (Sr. Marie McCarthy)**

At Christmas we are reminded of what is always true.

Ordinary matter is the hiding place for Spirit and thus the very Body of God.

And so we pray:

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of **Earth** and the work of human hands, and blessed them,

and shared them with the people who shared his life.

We, too, share Jesus’ life, and in a special way in this community.

So let us lift our bread and cup and extend our hands to one another,

in celebration of our communion in the One who is born in us.

Let us break bread with anyone in the room with us

and truly with one another, nourishing each other

to birth the emerging Emmanuel.

[All eat and drink.]

Holy One, you chose to be fully part of humanity.

We now choose to let you be fully part of us.

May we bring your good news into the lives and communities around us. Amen.

**PRAYER OF JESUS (Paul Voigt)**

Let us pray with all who seek justice and peace. We use the words that Jesus gave us interpreted by the Polynesian and Māori people and the New Zealand Anglican community:

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world…

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trial too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING  (Betty Thompson)**

Incarnate One, Word made flesh, open our hearts, our minds and our spirits as we extend our hands over one another in blessing.

…I cannot tell you
how the light comes,
but that it does.
That it will.
That it works its way
into the deepest dark
that enfolds you,
though it may seem
long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape
you did not foresee.

And so
may we this day
turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces
to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies
to follow the arc it makes.
May we open
and open more
and open still

to the blessed light
that comes. Amen.

Now let’s join Marilyn and Paul in singing our joy to the world!

**JOY TO THE WORLD** by Isaac Watts/Lowell Mason **(Marilyn and Paul Voigt)**

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 world! 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.

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.

**RESOURCES**

The initial quote, parts of the Intro to Theme, and all of Reading 3 are from Meister Eckhart, drawn from the December Taize service of the Sisters of Providence of St.-Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, with thanks to Marie McCarthy, SP.

The quote in the Opening Ritual is from “Psalm of an Emerging Emmanuel” by Edward Hayes, thanks to Lynn Bufka’s plan for our third Sunday of Advent.

Images from

* Webb telescope – NASA.gov
* Jesus Mafa art – <https://globalworship.tumblr.com/post/13908904724/pictures-of-the-nativity-story-in-africa-jesus>
* Spiral of candles -- <https://geoffmead.blog/2015/05/29/widening-circles/>

Final blessing: “How the Light Comes” by Jan Richardson from her book [Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons](https://janrichardson.com/books)