# Christmas Sunday Service

*by David Sparks*



## Hymn

*More Voices* 59 Alleluia, Praise to God

## The Call to Worship

Put your Christmas busyness aside.
**We will join with our friends, and worship boldly.**Rejoice as you sing.
**We will join as a family; we will worship joyfully.**Give thanks for the Christmas story.
**We will join with faith community members, and listen carefully.**Greet visitors who are here for the holidays.
**We will welcome all who celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.
We will welcome warmly.**

## Hymn

*Voices United* 48 Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

## Lighting of Christ Candle

(See the [Advent Unwrapped webpage](https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped) for candle-lighting liturgies.)

## Music

(*A music video featuring the song “*[*The Giver*](https://youtu.be/dz-R_QX_pfE)*” is available on the United Church YouTube channel. Sheet music for this song is available on the* [*Advent Unwrapped webpage*](https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped) *under Music.*)

## A Prayer for Christmas

Rejoice, Jesus is born!
**Celebrate his birth to a humble couple far from home.**Rejoice, Jesus is born!
**Recognize this wonderful event, with shepherds out on the hillside.**Rejoice, Jesus is born!
**The angel tells of good news of great joy to everyone.**Rejoice, Jesus is born!
Listen to the words of the angels, “Glory to God, and on earth peace.”
**We sing,
we praise,
we join with folk
from pole to pole,
from shore to shore,
for Jesus is born. Alleluia! Amen.**

## Hymn

MV 137 Welcome, Jesus, You Are Welcome

## Theme Conversation: The Gift of Following Jesus

A dialogue with members of the congregation.

* Preparing for Christmas, preparing for the feast, getting gifts
* For some easy, for some challenging
* The gift of Christmas to the faith community, songs and drama, a special time of invitation to those who are not church members or friends
* Our response to Christmastime? Thanks to God for Jesus and…
* A response of “followship” as present-day disciples
* Those who care, those who seek justice, those who are unfailingly bold
* Show the [Advent Unwrapped Colouring Storybook video](https://youtu.be/je8d4SGnO9o)

## Hymn

MV 130 Rise Up, Rise Up

## A Prayer before the Reading

Your Word, Loving God,
**restores us.**Your Word
**challenges us.**Your Word
**sustains us.**Your word
**emboldens our discipleship.**Thank you, Loving God,
**for your life-giving Word. Amen**

## Readings

Psalm 96 Sing a new song to God
Isaiah 9:2‒7 Those who walked in darkness have seen the light
Luke 2:1‒20 The birth of Jesus

## A Prayer after the Reading

We have listened, Loving God,
**and we have found joy.**We have listened,
**and we have taken heart.**We have listened,
**and we have been called to compassion.**We have listened,
**and we have been moved to action.**Loving God,
**Your Word has been a blessing.
Thank you. Amen**

## Hymn

MV 130 Rise Up, Rise Up

## Reflection for Two Voices: Some Qualities of a Bold Disciple

(With the Christmas readings)

**Leader 1:** It’s not too assertive to say that most of us who claim the faith description “Christian” would aspire to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, and would see ourselves as 21st-century followers on the way of God’s anointed one.

Though we live countless generations away from the first 12 disciples, like them we seek to live closer to the spirit of Jesus for our particular age.

**Leader 2:** Not too assertive at all! I’d go further and make it clear that we are not done with our disciple growth yet, not at all.

We have the scriptures that tell of leader Jesus, choosing, teaching, even reprimanding members of his group. These are very helpful for us, but―and here’s the challenge―can we deepen, can we embolden our discipleship, can we make our discipleship more relevant for our day and generation, while referring back to scriptures that are not relating to the adult Jesus and the original 12?

**Leader 1:** You mean like the Christmas scriptures, Psalm 96, Isaiah 9:2‒7, and the familiar Christmas story, Luke 2:1‒20?

**Leader 2:** That is exactly what I mean.

**Leader 1:** Well, I for one would like to be a bolder and more faithful disciple, and I believe that many Hebrew and Christian scriptures speak to this enhanced discipleship, I’m ready to give it a try!

**Leader 2:** First there is Psalm 96. It starts on an upbeat note: “Sing a new song to God, praise God,” and I see a reminder here that our Christian life, our church life, is meant to be full of music and fun. Pictures of Jesus with the disciples tend to be on the somber and serious side, none of Jesus singing with the disciples, but there is a reminder here that song is for bold disciples and is a wonderful and an engaging way in for those who are interested in the Christian faith.

**Leader 1:** And there is more in Psalm 96, which has the trees, the fields, and the seas all praising God with a reminder that today’s bold disciples are called to be sensitive co-creators with God. But we will move on to the Isaiah reading, so familiar to us at Christmastime.

**Leader 2:** This is another upbeat reading:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
They lived in a land of shadows.
but now the light is shining on them.”

There is a challenge for today’s disciple to take the upbeat path, but also, to use the prophet’s metaphor, be a light.

We look back to those who have been lights to their day and generation for inspiration.

**Leader 1:** You know who comes to mind for me?William Tyndale, one of the first Bible translators. He was translating at the time when the scriptures were in Latin and Greek, and the top people in church and state wanted to keep it that way.

William Tyndale was determined to have a Bible that anyone on the street could read without any priestly intervention.

The light of God’s Word. It mattered to William that it was accessible and clear, and he paid for his persistence as a translator with his life, but among bold and light-bringing disciples he gets my vote for being one of the most faithful.

**Leader 2:** So much for the Hebrew Christmas scripture, the psalmist and prophet Isaiah show ways for us to deepen our discipleship, and we arrive at Luke’s gospel, chapter 2, at the beginning. I don’t think we can pass by Mary and Joseph.

If you take the story as it is written, you have a bold family group with Mary and Joseph reaching Bethlehem where there is an accommodation shortage (nothing new for us there!). They get a less than stellar location for the birth of God’s Chosen One. An ordinary couple making the best of a bad situation. A reminder here that bold disciples sometimes simply hang in there and make the best of the way things are and not as they could or should be.

**Leader 2:** And while we are talking about ordinary people, there are those shepherds―not even “ordinary”; “despised” would be a better description of them―but they are the ones to whom the angel brought news, joyful news. The shepherds were the ones who acted on the good news even though their demanding job meant they were unable to be religiously correct. Though they seem to be less than ordinary, they were the ones who recognized the significance of Jesus and made the trip to the holy family. Here we see ordinary people acting bravely, even boldly, to reach the Christ Child. Good, bold ordinary-ness is good discipleship!

And in the Christmas story, it was the angel who was a messenger to the shepherds.

The skill that the angel excels at is communication. The angel tells the shepherds of good news for them. The angel gets the news across clearly and distinctly, and the angel gets a positive response.

The time of COVID has been a time when the need for good communicators has come to the fore. In BC, Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Health Officer, an honest and straightforward communicator, came into her own and was valued throughout the province for her calm and realistic approach at crisis time. You could rely on her statistics, you could rely on her guidelines, she exuded honesty, and she was widely trusted.

Good communication achieved results in this situation, and it is a reminder for the contemporary disciple that telling it straight―bold communication― is as essential as it ever was.

**Leader 2:** We are not done with the angels yet. There is a huge group of angels in the story, a huge “army” praising God. When we talk about discipleship, we usually think about mydiscipleship. We think of it in individual terms. This multitude of angels praising God remind us that discipleship has a group dimension. Our faith community has a discipleship role to play as one together, and it needs to be bold to be faithful.

Like many of you, I have been a part of vacation Bible events, and what impresses me about them is how the leaders and the participants sing, eat, learn, and play together and quickly achieve a high measure of purpose and harmony.

**Leader 1:** I have heard it said that if Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden were encouraged to attend a vacation Bible event and spent a compulsory two days learning gospel songs and a compulsory two days in the kitchen, the world’s problems would be speedily solved. And I believe it!

There is a call here to remember that the faith community has a bold role to play as disciples together*.*

**Leader 2:** We are not quite finished yet. Right at the end of the passage, Luke the gospel writer adds a comment about Mary:

**Leader 1: “**Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

We have heard the Christmas story as Luke recounts it, over and over again. Many of us would be able to recite it without reading verses 1 through 20. But looking at the familiar words as a way of deepening and clarifying the meaning of discipleship has certainly made me think, and I hope you have been challenged as well.

**Leader 2:** Like Mary I’m going to do some more pondering. Will you join me? Amen.

## Hymn

MV 154 Deep in Our Hearts or
VU 64 O Little Town of Bethlehem

## Offering

*Tune: Doxology (Old Hundredth)*

**God's love has come at Christmastime,
God's love in Jesus brightly shines,
God's Spirit love is on the move,
Our gifts are shared and blessed in love.**

## Offering Prayer

More than all the gifts we offer,
**More than the time we give.**More than the talent we share,
**More than the gift of peace.**More than the most moving music,
**More than the work for justice.**More than the happiest reunion,
**More than the hope of good health.
Is God’s gift of a little child at Christmas.
Thank you, Loving God. Amen**

## Going the Extra Mile: A Pastoral Prayer

(This prayer can be adapted to fit your local situation.)

There are refugee families needing sponsors and support.
**We will go the extra mile and help them.**There are children going without breakfast.
**We will go the extra mile to give them a nourishing start to the day.**There are families in this town/city without safe and warm homes.
**We are among those families, and we need help**.
**We will go the extra mile and work to find the house-poor shelter.**There are those whose Christmas is delayed because they are working.
**We will go the extra mile to make sure their celebration is wonderful.**There are members of our families, members of our faith community, who are sick and troubled. We hold them up in our hearts before you, Loving God,
and we remember them in silence. (time of silent reflection)
**We will go the extra mile to listen to them.
We will give them confidence to seek appropriate medical care.**There are people for whom Christmas is a sad time because loved ones who have died are remembered.
**We will go the extra mile to hear their stories and respond to their feelings.**In the name of your Anointed One, Jesus, we pray,
**Amen.**

## The Lord’s Prayer

Sung (VU 959) or said using the usual version of faith community.

## Hymn

VU 36 Angels, from the Realms of Glory or
VU 59 Joy to the World

CommissioningOne: With God’s love beside us,
**All: there is nothing we cannot achieve.**One: With God's love inspiring us,
**All: there is no one we cannot help.**One: With God’s love within us,
**All: there is no feeling we cannot claim.**One: With God’s love surrounding us,
**All: there is no fear we cannot overcome.**One: With God’s love to guide us,
**All: there is no journey we cannot take.**

Blessing

The grace of Jesus the Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us and those we love, this Christmastime and always. Amen

## Hymn

MV 47 Born in Human Likeness or
VU 67 Silent Night, Holy Night

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