



100 Hawkwood Blvd. NW
Calgary, AB T3G 2S9
phone (403) 241-0366
www.stthomasunited.ca



Sunday, November 29 2015, 10:00am
Theme: Hanging of the Greens & Advent 1

† indicates stand as you are able
Bold indicates participation by the people

MV = More Voices
VU = Voices United

We Gather With

CAROLS: *The Maple Leaf Brass*

PRELUDE: *The Maple Leaf Brass*

WELCOME & GREETING VISITORS (*Leader*)

†GREETING ONE ANOTHER (Please feel free to move around)

SPIRIT LINES (Announcements)

SILENCE & TONE BOWL

CALL TO WORSHIP: (*Responsive*)

How shall we prepare this house for the birth of Jesus?

With branches of cedar, the tree of excellence and strength.

How shall we prepare this house for the eternal Christ?

With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, ever green.

How shall we prepare this house for the prophet of Galilee?

With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death, and resurrection.

How shall we prepare our hearts for this revelation of God?

By hearing again the words of the prophets and the promises of God.

For in the story of Jesus we see revealed the transforming power of God.

We are reminded anew of God's vision of wholeness, justice, and peace for all of creation.

Thanks be to God.

The meaning of the service

Over 2,000 years ago, the story goes, a clutch of sleepy shepherds were watching over their sheep on a star-brightened hillside in Palestine. It was a still, uneventful night. Suddenly the darkness was filled with a strange light. The stillness was broken by angel voices singing "Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, goodwill to all." So begins Christmas, the most beautiful and meaningful celebration of the Christian calendar. Christmas actually begins with Advent, the season through which we are moving. Both the seasons of Advent—the season of "going toward" the birth of Christ—and Christmas have a long history.

These seasons and their customs have developed through many centuries and many countries. Old customs and observances are refined, renewed, replaced; new ones are added. Some of our customs have pagan origins but have been "converted" by redefining their meanings. What is significant for us is not what they may once have meant but rather what they mean for us today.

This morning our church building will begin to wear its Christmas apparel. For the first time our Christmas tree stands in the Sanctuary. This day for the first time its lights will shine for us. As we make ready for the birth of the child by preparing this Sanctuary, we make ready ourselves and the sanctuary of our own hearts. We are mindful that, although it is not Christmas yet, it will be here soon, very soon. As we decorate the church, not only will we explain the history of the symbols of these special seasons, but we will rededicate these symbols—and ourselves—to the service of God in the world.

✠HYMN: *Joy to the World* (on-screen)

VU#59

Significance of the colours [paraments]

The cycle around which our worship revolves is the church year. Today, the first Sunday in Advent, marks the beginning of a new church year. Paraments, which cover our communion table and pulpit are something like drapes and curtains in a home. With the changing colours of the

church year, they attract attention, add variety, and point to the significance of the season being celebrated.

The traditional colour for Advent is purple, a colour that signifies the sacred, and spiritual fulfillment. Some traditions use blue, which represents anticipation and promise.

The mystery of the incarnation [Christmas tree]

Scripture Reading John 1:1-5, 9-14 Reader: Linda Miller

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, we light the Christmas tree. During this season of Advent, whenever you see a lighted Christmas tree, let it call to mind the One who brings light to our darkness, healing to our brokenness, and peace to all who receive him.

Blessing of the Christmas Tree – Unison

Loving God, we come with joy to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, whose path of justice and inclusivity lights a path for all who follow him. May this tree, arrayed in splendour, remind us of the life-giving presence of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

✠HYMN: *Away in a Manger* (on-screen)

VU#69

God Will Send a Light to the Nations [Advent wreath & candles]

Scripture Reading Isaiah 60:2-3 Reader: _____

The lighting of candles has been a part of religious worship for centuries. The Hebrews burned candles for eight days as part of their Feast of Lights. Light has been used by many religious groups to symbolize truth, while the darkness of night has been the universal symbol for evil. Since Jesus was called “the light of the world” in the New Testament, the lighting of candles has become an important part of our Christian worship.

Some early Christian leaders stated that the wax of altar candles represented the body of Christ, while the wick symbolized his soul, and the flame portrayed his divine nature. Candles made from pure beeswax were used to signify Mary, since this wax comes from virgin bees. This has resulted in the practice of some churches to burn only beeswax candles upon the altar or communion table.

When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple, Simeon referred to the Christ child as “a light to lighten the Gentiles.” From this statement, church leaders have used candles to symbolize the light of Christ shining throughout a broken world.

As we light these candles upon the communion table, we symbolize God, Emmanuel, God with us, whose transforming power heals the world of sin and evil, war and strife, stress and turmoil, suffering and despair. Jesus embodies hope and help for those held captive by oppression. His ministry guides us to personal peace and joy through the illumination of his message of the love of God.

Advent is a time of expectation, and this is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of an Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The four candles provide us with a visual way to count off four Sundays of this season. The flame of each new candle reminds us that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season is not complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The tradition of the Advent wreath is traced back to an old Scandinavian custom that celebrated the coming of light after a season of darkness. In that day, candles were placed on the edge of a horizontal wheel. As the wheel was spun around, the lighted candles would blend into a continuous circle of light. Today we use a circle of evergreens to remind us of the continuous power of God, which knows no beginning nor ending.

There is also symbolism in the colours of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy; its use goes back to the Latin Church, which asked the worshipers to fast during this period of time.

Candles of Advent

Adult Choir Only: Lift Up Your Eyes

Voice 1: It soon will be Christmas, with snowflakes and bells,

And turkeys and candy, and songs and noels.
Do you know what it means,
Do you know what it meant?
And are you all ready, a hundred percent?

Voice 2: *I know what it means, I do get your drift,
It means I get millions and zillions of gifts.
It means Christmas morning right under the tree
There's all kinds of gifts and they're mostly for me.*

Voice 1: Oh no you're quite wrong, oh no you're adrift
That isn't my meaning, that isn't my drift
Its not about millions and zillions at all,
It's not about piles of stuff bought at the mall
There's only one gift and it's really quite small
It really is tiny, it really is little,
It's hardly as big as a jot or a tittle.

Voice 2: *Just one little gift, and that is the reason?
Just one little gift for the whole Christmas season?
That really is awful, that really is bad,
I guess you just haven't been reading the ads.*

Voice 1: But wait till I tell you, this news is not sad,
This news is not awful, this news is not bad
This news is the best news that you've ever had
This news is awesome and happy and glad.
The gift is a baby, this gift is a boy,
It's all about love, and it's all about joy,
It's all about hope and it's all about peace
This baby is sweeter than Pieces by Reese!
Now what do you think? Now what do you say?
Do you think this will be such a bad Christmas day?

Voice 2: *That really is awesome, and now I agree,
This gift is for everyone, not for just me!
I do get your meaning, I do get your drift
So let's light a candle to honour the Gift! (lights 1 candle.)*

Sing: Lift Up Your Eyes, Congregation Part

God will send a king [cedar]

Scripture Reading Jer. 23: 5 – 6 Reader: _____

In ancient times the cedar tree was revered as the tree of excellence and endurance. It also signified immortality and was used for purification. We place this cedar branch as a sign of Christ and of the kind of power he wielded: not the power of might, but the power of transformation. As we contemplate his call to justice and peace, we seek to purify our hearts and “renew a right spirit within us.”

[Place cedar branch on the communion table.]

MINISTRY OF MUSIC: *The Maple Leaf Brass~Sussex Carol~ Traditional*
~arr. Ron Langlo

The fourth servant song [holly]

Scripture Reading Isaiah 53:1-6 Reader: _____

For Christians, this passage from Isaiah reflects the sufferings of Jesus on the cross and God’s transformation of that event into the promise of life. In ancient times, holly and ivy were considered signs of Christ’s passion. Their prickly leaves suggested the crown of thorns, the red berries the blood of Jesus, and the bitter bark the drink offered to Jesus on the cross.

✠HYMN: *’Twas in the Moon of Wintertime (on-screen)*

VU#71

The prophet declares a child will be born (evergreens)

Scripture Reading Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 Reader: _____

Have you ever wondered why we talk about the “hanging of the greens?” Or why an evergreen is called an evergreen? And why Christmas greens are traditionally used to emphasize the nativity? Green represents renewal, new life, freshness, and rebirth. Plants such as pine, fir, holly, ivy, and mistletoe are called evergreens because they do not die; through the seasons of the year, they remain ever-green. Ever-alive. It is no wonder then that we deck our sanctuary and halls with evergreens during this Advent season. Advent is the season of preparation for the ever-coming Christ, God’s gift to us of renewal and transformation.

Because the needles of the pine and fir trees appear not to die each season, the ancients saw them as signs of things that last forever. Isaiah

tells us that there will be no end to the reign of the Messiah. Therefore, we hang this wreath of evergreens shaped in a circle, which in itself has no end, to signify that the kingdom of God, to which Christ so eloquently testified, is also without end, and is realized wherever truth, justice, and peace prevail.

[Hang wreaths.]

Nativity scene

The original crib in which the Christ Child was laid was a manger in the stable, a sign of his humble birth. The popular Christmas crèche at churches and in homes creates a tableau of Jesus in the stable crib at Bethlehem, depicting scenes described by Luke and Matthew.

St. Francis of Assisi is often credited with the first manger scene about 800 years ago. For a people who could not read it was an effective visual aid in telling the story of the birth of Jesus. We have such a scene here.

MINUTE FOR STUC: *The M&O Committee~ Karen Kavanagh*

INVITATION TO OPEN HANDS (*Leader*)

OPPORTUNITY TO OPEN HANDS

with our Tithes, Offerings, & Prayers.

(Please print clearly and place your Prayer Slips in the Prayer Baskets.)

MINISTRY OF MUSIC: *The Maple Leaf Brass~ Silent Night*

~ arr. Ron Langlo

†OFFERTORY: *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (on-screen)*

VU#541

†OFFERTORY PRAYER (*Unison, on-screen*)

We dedicate our lives and all that we strive to be as part of the work of hope, peace, joy, and love in this season of Advent. Receive our gifts, O God, and lead us in wisdom and courage as we live into our full Christian potential. Amen.

CALL TO PRAYER: *All Who Are Thirsty (on-screen)*

MV#4

PASTORAL PRAYERS & PRAYER OF JESUS

Open Hearts to Each Other and the World

✠COMMISSIONING and BENEDICTION

Take time, in the busyness of this season, for quiet reflection—
For the light of God's love is discernible everywhere.

We will let ourselves be surprised by wonder, and set aside time to offer quiet thanks.

The good news of Advent is this:

Christ is coming. Christ is always coming.

We will welcome Christ into our hearts. We will let ourselves be guided by His ministry. We will go forth from this place in hope.

✠HYMN: *In Christ There Is No East or West* (on-screen)

VU#606

POSTLUDE

Participating in worship leadership today: Rev. Bob, Rev. Tracy, The Adult Choir, The Maple Leaf Brass (Dick Worton, Ron Langlo, Sherman Montgomery, Barbara Stephen-deBruyn), Jeff McLean, Brian Shewan, Jake Highfield, Bob Nixon, Betty Thompson, Tess & Harold Ashley, Linda Miller, Mark Wagner, Marj Aucoin.