



The _____
First Congregational Church
of Woodstock _____

*Declaring, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today,
and forever." Hebrews 13:8*

December 24th, 2023
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

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Five o'clock pm

Welcome! Tonight is a night of holy wonder. The God of all Creation has entered into the physical world to rescue His people. Mighty God has been born a lowly infant. Listen to the readings of Scripture. Sing along with the songs of praise.

Declare together to all the world, "Jesus Christ is born!"

Prelude

Welcome

Pastor Doug Warren

Advent Candle Lighting

Stephen & Alison Briggs

Leader: This night we celebrate what millions of people waited so long to come! Why do we light the advent candles?

Congregation: **Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life."**

Leader: What is the meaning of the lighted *Christ Candle*?

Congregation: **The lighted candle is a reminder that Christ, the true Light, has come into the world as promised, our Messiah—Prophet, Priest, and King.**

Leader: What do the gospels say about Christ?

Congregation: **The Gospels assure us that "the true Light that gives light to every man had already come into the world, though the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all that received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."**
(John 1:9-13)

Invocation

Pastor

❖ Carol #195

Joy to the World

Congregation

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 7:14;
9:1-9

7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

9:1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over his kingdom,

to establish it and to uphold it with

justice and with righteousness

from this time forth and

forevermore. The zeal of the LORD

of hosts will do this.

❖ Carol #194 *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* Congregation

Explanation of Sacrificial Offering Pastor

New Testament Lesson Acts 16:30-34

³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Sacrificial Offering

Board of Christian Missions

Gospel Lesson

John 1:29b; 3:16

1:29b “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

❖ Carol #213 *What Child Is This* Congregation

Christmas Eve Message Luke 2:6-20 Pastor

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

❖ Carol #214 *Angels We Have Heard on High* Congregation

❖ Candle Lighting*

Jesus is the light of the world. He has made us to be His torchbearers and to pass that light on to others. We pause now to receive the light and then to pass it on until the whole assembly bears His light as we sing His praise.

❖ Carol #210 *Silent Night! Holy Night!* Congregation

❖ Benediction Numbers 6:24-26 Pastor

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

The Congregation may be seated after the Benediction for silent prayer.

Postlude

~~ Organist: Jonathan Denham ~~

~~ Violinist: Leah Eells ~~

~~ Handbells: Jonathan Denham, Kyle Huck, Heidi Tucker,
Marie Tucker, Jo Truell, Kristen Warren~~

~~ Please ensure cell phones are off ~~
Preludes: Angels We Have Heard on High (Parman)
O Holy Night (Fritchie)
O Come, All Ye Faithful (Wade/Sanders)
Come On, Ring Those Bells (Culverwell/Cota)
Offertory: Away in a Manger (Murray/Sanders) Postlude:
Silent Night! Holy Night!

Pastor Doug's Notes on Christmas

Why did Jesus come as a baby born in Bethlehem?

Jesus was born in fulfillment of many promises made by God¹ to His people to deliver us and save us from our sin. We have these promises in the Bible where God explains that in humanity's rebellion against Him, we have received the penalty of our sin, which is spiritual death.²

Unable to resuscitate ourselves, we are lost and without hope unless God Himself comes to save us.³ But that is exactly what He did! Jesus, God the Son, as only He could, came to win us back to right relationship with God the Father. This role of mediator between God and human beings was long foretold as the unique work of the true King of Israel who would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David, Israel's greatest king. **What are we supposed to do?**

Jesus calls us to repent from our disobedience, to believe and put our trust in Him for the salvation we so desperately need, and to identify with His people as the recipients of His grace. Let's look at each one of these things.

Repent. This means to turn from all the ways we disobey God and to start obeying Him instead. God has made Himself evident to all people⁴ even though we suppress that knowledge, but if we want to know Him as He truly is, the Bible shows us how to live in obedience to His holy calling.

Believe. Jesus calls us to stop believing that we can save ourselves or that any other thing can save us. He tells us to trust that He is the only way to God the Father. To believe *in* Christ is more than just believing that He was born; it's trusting Him to the exclusion of all else. What this baby King was born to do was to live the perfect life of obedience we fail to live and then die as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. His death on the cross paid the penalty for

¹ The Bible presents itself as God's self-revelation to His people as they came up out of Egypt into the Promised Land. These footnotes include references to books in the Bible by listing the name of the book followed by the chapter and verse in which to find the idea summarized above.

² Romans 6:23.

³ Ephesians 2:11-22. ⁴

Romans 1:18-23.

our rebellion and His resurrection from the dead on Easter morning declared that sacrifice was accepted by God the Father. To believe in Jesus is to trust His life, death, and resurrection to the exclusion of all else.

Identify. Jesus doesn't just save us as individuals; He saves us into His family. He adopts His followers as brothers and sisters. The practice of baptism is the historic way of identifying with this family of God. If you have never been baptized then you should confirm your belief in Christ by being baptized into membership of a Bible-believing church. If you have already been baptized, then you should profess your faith in Christ and be joined officially as a member.
