

South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church

# FESTIVAL of CAROLS



“Dreams of the Holy Night”

## POETRY & BIBLE READINGS

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## **Come (A Poetic Call to Worship)**

One: Come Lord Jesus.

**Many: Come into our waiting hearts.**

One: Into our mess and our grief. Come meet us in hospital rooms and AA meetings. Find us on a sticky bathroom floor in the middle of the night with a sick child.

**Many: Come into our waiting hearts. Meet us where we are.**

One: We dream of your coming, Lord. Find us in our dark, sleepless night.

**Many: Come into our waiting hearts. Meet us in our dreams.**

One: Come, Lord Jesus, into a simple stable in a crowded town, on a night when none of us expected you.

**All: Come, Lord Jesus. We are waiting.**

### **First Lesson: Prophecy (Isaiah 7: 14; Isaiah 9: 6-7)**

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders,  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Great will be his authority,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

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## What's in a Name?

Immanuel.

Immanuel.

A new name.

God with us.

Not God over there,

Or God in heaven,

Or God in the next town over,

But God with us.

You know how when someone really loves you,

and you want so badly to see them,

but you can't,

and then they say,

"Don't worry, I'll come to you."

That's what Immanuel means.

If you can't get to me, I'll come to you.

Don't worry, I'll come to you.

Amen.

## **Second Lesson: Angel Gabriel Comes to Mary (Luke 1: 26-38)**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

### **Do Not Be Afraid**

That's what the angels always say, isn't it?

When they arrive on the scene.

It's a nice sentiment, I think, do not be afraid,

But

It's lacking something.

For one thing, it doesn't work, does it?  
I mean, if a heavenly being appeared in front of you,  
how do you think you would feel?  
And when, in the history of humanity,  
has telling someone else how to feel ever worked?  
Respectfully, Gabriel, I think you meant to say,  
Do it Afraid.  
Be afraid.  
God's dreams can sometimes terrify you.  
Shake in your boots. Let your voice waver.  
Wake up sweating in the middle of the night  
because of what God has asked you to do.  
And do it anyway. Do it scared.  
Bravery was never the absence of fear;  
It's just not letting fear be the boss.  
It's looking fear in the face and saying,  
"For nothing will be impossible with God."  
Amen.

### **Third Lesson: Angel Gabriel Comes to Joseph (Matthew 1: 18-25)**

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,

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planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

### **Echoes of Joseph**

When he blew into the church office,  
there was a slightly wild look in his eyes.  
It belied the rest of his put together outfit.  
He introduced himself quickly,  
and then he inquired about our preschool.  
Do you have any openings for a two-year-old?  
We weren't sure, we hedged. We'd have to check with the director.  
The desperation in his eyes flared.  
Please, he said.  
My wife needs help. We have a two-year-old son, and twin baby boys,  
And

I've got get her some relief.

She needs help, he said,

I've got to get her some help.

And I have to tell you that

it's not that often that a father walks in, alone,

without an appointment,

to beg for a spot in the preschool.

Echoes of a man, about two thousand years ago,

who dreamed an angel told him to marry his pregnant fiancée,

and found himself knocking on doors in Bethlehem

one unexpected night.

My wife needs help, he said.

I've got to get her some relief.

\*Yes, we found him a spot. He's probably in this sanctuary right now.

#### **Fourth Lesson: Mary Goes to Elizabeth (Magnificat) (Luke 1: 39-56)**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

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“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.  
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name;  
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

### **Mary Did You Know?**

(By Jennifer Henry)

Mary did you know,  
that your ancient words  
would still leap off our pages?  
Mary did you know,  
that your spirit song  
would echo through the ages?

Did you know that your holy cry  
would be subversive word,  
that the tyrants would be trembling



when they know your truth is heard?

Mary did you know,  
that your lullaby  
would stir your own Child's passion?  
Mary did you know,  
that your song inspires  
the work of liberation?

Did you know that your Jubilee  
is hope within the heart  
of all who dream of justice,  
who yearn for it to start?

The truth will teach, the drum will sound, healing for the pain  
The poor will rise, the rich will fall. Hope will live again

Mary did you know,  
that we hear your voice  
for the healing of the nations?  
Mary did you know,  
your unsettling cry  
can help renew creation?

Do you know, that we need your faith,  
the confidence of you,  
May the God that you believe in,  
be so true.

### **Fifth Lesson: John the Baptist is Born (Luke 1: 5-17, 57-58, 65-66, The Message)**

During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was  
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descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.

It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.

But the angel reassured him, “Don’t fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You’re going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—many will delight in his birth. He’ll achieve great stature with God.

“He’ll drink neither wine nor beer. He’ll be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment he leaves his mother’s womb. He will turn many sons and daughters of Israel back to their God. He will herald God’s arrival in the style and strength of Elijah, soften the hearts of parents to children, and kindle devout understanding among hardened skeptics—he’ll get the people ready for God.”

When Elizabeth was full-term in her pregnancy, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives, seeing that God had overwhelmed her with mercy, celebrated with her.

A deep, reverential fear settled over the neighborhood, and in all that Judean hill country people talked about nothing else. Everyone who heard about it took it to heart, wondering, “What will become of this child? Clearly, God has his hand in this.”

## The World is About to Turn

Turn, turn, turn.

The world is about to turn.

Jesus is gonna flip us upside down.

God's dream is topsy-turvy.

Jesus is coming, and

He's gonna make the blind see, and the deaf hear.

He's gonna bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly.

He's gonna flip some tables and break bread with sinners.

Yes,

turn.

the

to

world

about

is

Servants become leaders.

The humble become the exalted.

Enemies become the beloved.

And the only question is:

Are we ready?

## **Sixth Lesson: Birth (Luke 2:1-7)**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

### **Awe**

My grandma, who is the kindest person I know, has late-stage dementia. It is mostly the worst.

But.

There are always moments of beauty, of the holy, if you look for them.

And one of them is this.

Every time she notices my twelve-year-old, which could happen sometimes 10 times in an hour, she says,

“How old is she?”

And I get to tell her, “That’s your oldest great-grandchild. She’s twelve, and then you have eight more. You have nine great grandchildren!”

The delight and wonder in her eyes at that moment—

It is holy and sacred. Unfiltered joy.

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"Do I really?"

"Yes ma'am!"

"She is so beautiful."

She experiences the birth over and over again, overwhelmed with awe each time.

Like a child gazing upon the baby in the manger, joy and delight. Pure wonder.

That's the gift of Christmas.

To encounter the birth of the Messiah,

Over and over again.

To be overwhelmed with awe each time.

God with us.

God born to us.

God's dream, coming true.

### **Seventh Lesson: Shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)**

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

### **The Invisible Workers**

Late tonight, while we sleep in our comfortable beds,  
Someone will enter a hospital room and take vitals,  
While another scans and stocks groceries,  
While we sleep. While we dream.

Someone will work on a road,  
And someone will clean a corporate office,  
While we sleep. While we dream.

Someone will drive a truck all night,  
And someone will don a uniform and keep us safe,  
While we sleep. While we dream.

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And when I start to think about it,  
about how Jesus' birth was first announced to  
a stinky, sleepy group of "unskilled laborers" in the middle of the night,  
I wonder who would receive the news first if it happened today.

I'm pretty sure that the angels would show up  
in the middle of a Walmart aisle  
at 3 am in a small, forgotten town  
in a flyover state,  
And we'd be asleep. Dreaming.

### **Eighth Lesson: Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **The Outsiders**

They didn't belong there,  
The Magi from the East.  
They didn't know the Scriptures,  
Had not been to the temple to be forgiven,  
Possessed no mezuzah for their doors.  
There was no reason at all for them to show up here,  
For this Jewish Messiah.  
And yet they came.  
Weary from a long journey.  
Fearful of a tyrant king.  
Laden with gifts completely unfit for a toddler.  
They arrived.

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They worshiped.

They gave.

They listened.

They protected.

They obeyed.

Magi from the East.

They didn't belong there, not at all.

And yet, in Matthew's good news,  
the first ones to worship the Messiah  
are outsiders.

### **Ninth Lesson: Conclusion (John 1:1-13)**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own

people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

## **Light**

In the beginning, you were loved.

From the foundation of the world, you were known.

You are God's dream.

There has never been a moment when the Creator of the Universe did not look upon you and marvel at the pure wonder of you.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and he loved you.

In the beginning was the light,

And the light is in all people,

And the light is in you.

You are God's dream.

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