

**Prince Edward North Pastoral Charge
Christmas Eve Service
December 24, 2009**

WE GATHER FOR WORSHIP

Prelude & Welcome

Hymn VU 60 O Come, All Ye Faithful

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Isn't It Ironic?

Isn't it ironic? Surrounded by spectacular Christmas lights and neon signs, we choose soft candlelight and the gentle glow from the manger. And despite comfortable homes with the seductive scents of baking and Christmas trees, we venture out to peer in a stable, to glimpse the miracle of God in human form – flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone.

Surrounded by gifts wrapped under our Christmas trees, homes filled with Christmas past, we pause to think about a priceless gift, the gift of God's son, the gift of God's very self, coming and loving this crazy old world, thereby making all things new.

Surrounded by Christmas cake, shortbread, mincemeat tarts, and exotic chocolate, we come together to satisfy a craving that is deeper than the snack we will have before bed. This craving speaks to the deepest hunger of our hearts – that searching, forgiving, wooing love of God.

Surrounded by eggnog and rum, hot cider, sparkling cranberry juice, or fine Prince Edward County wine, we bring a thirst that can only be quenched by something deeper than our physical thirst. It is love poured out, God's love, Jesus' life poured out, generously given – forgiveness, healing love, overflowing into our lives.

Scripture Luke 1: 26-33

Six months later, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary; she was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favoured one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!"

Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel's greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favour with God. You'll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus – 'Deliverance.' His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end."

Hymn VU 64 O Little Town Of Bethlehem

The Manger Sits In The Glow of The Cross

The manger sits in the glow of the cross. We might wonder what Mary said as she held Jesus in the dark, dank of the stable, after the pain and bleeding and crying. Might she have thought, "This is my body, this is my blood"?

And knowing the story of Jesus life and death, we remember Jesus on the night he was betrayed some thirty years later, when he gathered with his friends he spoke those words, "This is my body broken for you, this is my blood given for you." And as we recall Jesus' death we might wonder what Mary thought when she held him for the last time in the dark rain on a hilltop, after the pain and the bleeding and the dying. Did she think, "This is my body, this is my blood?"

The familiar words, "wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the

inn,” somehow anticipates the time when “they wrapped his body and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever been laid.”

There was no room in the inn. Thirty-three years later there seemed to be no room in the world for Jesus, as he was staked to a cross; and yet with death came the hope of life renewed with the resurrection of Jesus.

Scripture Luke 2: 1-7

In those days, Ceasar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole Roman world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to “the city of David” – Bethlehem, in Judea, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David; he went to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn.

Hymn VU 69 Away In A Manger

Scripture Luke 2: 8-14

There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid.

The angels said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you – news of great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David’s city, a saviour – the Messiah – has been born to you. Let this be

a sign to you; you’ll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying,
“Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth peace to those on whom God’s favour rests.”

Hymn VU 75 While Shepherds Watched

It is here that we celebrate the wonder of God’s presence in our run-of-the-mill world. We celebrate how God comes to us again and again, feeding our hearts and spirits. We celebrate God’s gift of Jesus with grace and love, through forgiveness and new direction; blessing us with new life this Christmas day.
Amen

WE RESPOND TO GOD’S CALL

Prayers of the People & The Lord’s Prayer

God of untamed glory, God of hope, and peace, joy and love, God with us –
We come before you filled with awe, freshly aware: of the world’s wild beauty; of your amazing grace; of your Living Word embodied in human flesh, born amid dirt and straw. We are astonished at creation’s Spirit drawing breath with tiny lungs.
In the faithful “Yes!” of young Mary’s soul, in the bloody labour of her child’s birth, we dare to believe that it is you, O God, who comes to live among us in Jesus, a peasant Jew.
We give thanks that you are not ruler of some faraway, irrelevant heavenly realm. No, you have drawn close to us in an infant boy, born in ancient Palestine, but nearer than a heartbeat. Born in poverty, cradled in a borrowed

manager, and threatened by the soldiers of a tyrant, you are at one with the least of the earth.

Draw near to us, O God of tender mercies.

Draw near to those with whom we share our lives.

Draw near to people who are hurting, in any kind of pain, who are anxious, lonely, ill or afraid.

God, by your healing and empowering love, teach us new ways of living.

Help us cherish and care for one another.

Help us to nurture life where it is unprotected and to celebrate it where it is strong and healthy. We seek to be witnesses of your love in the world, and we pray in the name of the Babe of Bethlehem who later taught us to pray together saying:

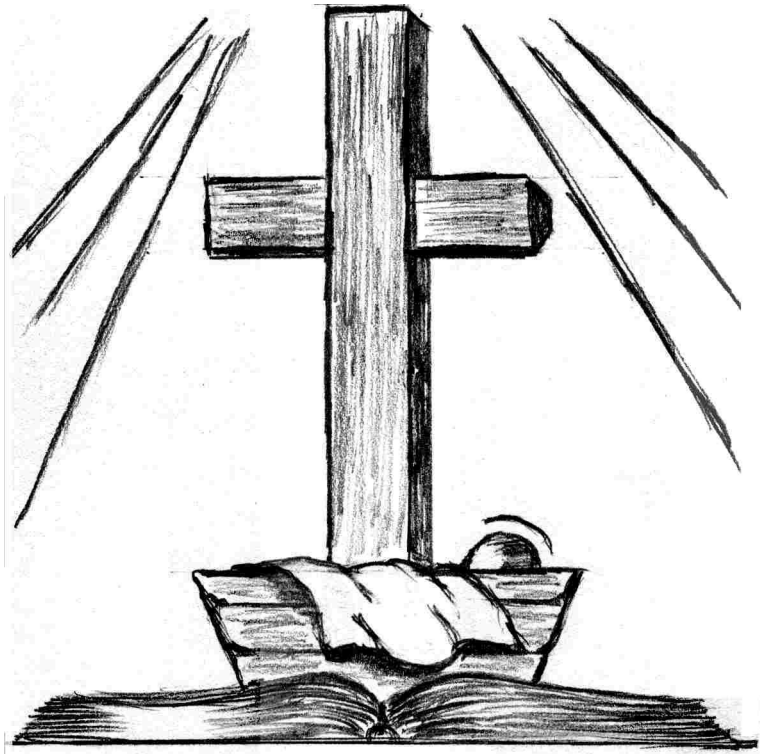
Our Creator who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

WE GO OUT TO LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS

Hymn VU 67 Silent Night

Sending Forth

This night has offered us a gift wrapped in a manger and sealed with a cross. Go into this Holy Night filled with God's Spirit. The gift is given – receive it with open hearts. The gift is given – share it, that all the world may celebrate God's love. Amen



*... and the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us.*