



**Central Reformed Church
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2020**

REFLECTION

Out of the Big Bang, the stars; out of the stardust, the Earth; out of the matter of the Earth, life. Out of the life and death of single-celled creatures, an advancing tide: trilobites, fish, amphibians, insects, flowers, birds, reptiles, and mammals, among whom emerged human beings—mammals with brains so complex that we experience self-conscious intelligence and freedom.

Like all human beings, Jesus carried within himself what Jesuit Father David Toolan has called “the signature of the supernovas and the geology and life history of the Earth.” The genetic structure of his cells made him part of the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas. The flesh that the Word became thus reaches beyond Jesus and other human beings to encompass the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which we are composed.

By becoming flesh the Word of God confers blessing on the whole of earthly reality in its material dimension, and beyond that, on the cosmos in which the Earth exists. Rather than being a barrier that distances us from the divine, this material world becomes a sacrament that can reveal divine presence. In place of spiritual contempt for the world, we ally ourselves with the living God by loving the whole natural world, part of the flesh that the Word became.

—Elizabeth A. Johnson, Roman Catholic feminist theologian and member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood; excerpted from “For God So Loved the Cosmos” in *U.S. Catholic*, April 2010 (Vol. 74, No. 4, pages 18-21)

For those worshipping at home, as your situation allows, please have your candles ready for tonight's service. For those worshipping in the sanctuary, please remember to maintain physical distance at all times and keep your face covering on for the entirety of the service.

We extend a special welcome to those who are visiting with us this evening. In order to help us follow public health guidelines, we kindly ask all visitors to provide us with your name and e-mail address or phone number. This can be done by sending an e-mail to the church office (office@centralreformedchurch.org) or by completing a visitor form, located in each pew, and leaving it in the offering plate as you exit.

**ORDER OF WORSHIP
CHRISTMAS EVE
DECEMBER 24, 2020
7:00 pm**

GATHERING IN LOVE

The prelude is a call for personal preparation for the worship of God.

Prelude

“Still, Still, Still” (Anne Krentz Organ)
“Midnight Stars Make Bright the Skies” (Anne Krentz Organ)
“Vom Himmel hoch—From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” (Johann Pachelbel)
“The First Noel” (Kathryn Cater and Sandy Norman)
“Il est né, le divin Enfant (He Is Born, the Divine Child)” (Taemin Han)
“Silent Night—Theme and Variation” (Franz Gruber, arr. Nick Raspa)

Introit

“In the Bleak Midwinter” (Gustav Holst)

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign:
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.*

Votum

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
People: **Amen.**

***Call to Worship**

Leader: Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy.
People: **To us is born this day in the city of David a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.**
Leader: This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger.
People: **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace!**
Leader: Let us worship God.

***Carol**

“Once in Royal David’s City” (see end of order of worship for music)
(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

Children's Moment and Lighting of the Christ Candle

Leader: We light the Christ candle to symbolize God's promise fulfilled.
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.
Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to all people.

People: **The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.**

A Prayer for Christmas Eve

Leader: Let us pray:
All: **Living God, on this holy night we gather—
to stand with shepherds, amazed at your glory;
to sing with angels, rejoicing in your work;
to wait with Joseph, trusting in your promise;
to sit with Mary, cradling your love.
May the good news of this night inspire us
to tell the world of our great joy:
for to us is born a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.
Glory and praise to you forever! Amen.**

LISTENING IN EXPECTATION

First Lesson Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Hymn "Of the Father's Love Begotten" (see end of order of worship for music)
(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

Second Lesson Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
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.
His authority shall grow continually, 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.

*Carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" (see end of order of worship for music)
(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

Third Lesson Isaiah 11:1-4, 6-9

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Carol "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" (see end of order of worship for music)
(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

Fourth Lesson 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.

Musical Reflection "Gabriel's Message" (Basque Traditional)

*The angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "O lowly maiden Mary," most highly favored lady, Gloria!*

*"For know a blessed mother you shall be, all generations praise continually,
Your Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold." Most highly favored lady, Gloria!*

*Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head, "To me be as it pleases God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name." Most highly favored lady, Gloria!*

Fifth Lesson

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor 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 for them in the inn.

In that 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. But 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, as it had been told them.

Leader: In all of these passages, we have heard the Word of the Lord.
People: **Thanks be to God.**

Musical Reflection “O Holy Night” (Adolphe Adam, arr. Stephen DeCesare)

Meditation “The Light Bulb That Never Went Out”
Rev. Steven D. Pierce

RESPONDING IN FAITH

***Carol** “Angels We Have Heard on High” (see end of order of worship for music)
(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

Pastoral Prayer (adapted from the work of Rev. Jill Duffield)

All that will be done, has been done, Loving God.
The preparing, the waiting, the anticipation, the anxiety, all ends tonight.
We leave behind our burdens and fears, and rest in your incarnate love.
We abide in the beauty of boundaries broken, barriers breached,
and reconciliation enacted through the birth of Jesus Christ.

We rejoice that you make stables sacred, ordinary people vessels of the holy,
and shepherds and animals the first witnesses to the inbreaking of salvation.

May we have ears to hear the chorus of good news of great joy for all people,
not just tonight, but every day and night throughout the year.
Grant us the courage to leave what we know in order to encounter heaven come to earth.

May the coming of the Prince of Peace hush the din of violence,
quiet in us any voice but yours and render all creation lost in praise.

Hear us as we lift our joys and concerns in the silence of our hearts...

We ask these things in your most holy name, praying the prayer your Son taught us, saying:

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

In the sanctuary, the leaders will light their candles from the Christ candle and will then light candles on the chancel on behalf of the congregation. For those worshipping at home, as your situation allows, please light your candle as the leaders light the chancel candles. If worshipping with others at home, kindly share your light with them as the closing carol is sung.

Leader: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12). The light of our Lord shines through us wherever we go. By lighting candles, we are reminded of the many gifts he gives us, especially the "light of life."

Carol "Silent Night" (Franz Xaver Gruber)

Vocalist: Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht
Alles schläft; einsam wacht;
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

(Those worshipping at home are invited to sing; those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to hum.)

**All: Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin, mother and child!
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born."**

**Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.**

**Silent night, holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing,
Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.**

The Christmas Benediction and Blessing

This night, the soles of God's feet have touched the earth.
This night, the back street and the forgotten place have been lit up with significance.
This night, the households of earth welcome the King of Heaven.
For God has crept in beside us;
God has come among us;
God is one of us.

May the song of the angels, the joy of the shepherds, and the peace of the Christ child be with you this night and always. Merry Christmas!

Postlude

"Finale on 'Vom Himmel hoch'" (Walter L. Pelz)

For those worshipping in the sanctuary, please remain seated until the postlude concludes. The ushers will dismiss each household by row, starting from the rear of the sanctuary. Please exit in silent reflection.

A Christmas Offering

One of the greatest joys of the holiday season is lifting up others. This year has been especially challenging for some members of our community. In the spirit of the season, please consider making a gift to Addie's Pantry. Through the leadership of Mark and Sally Bulthuis, Addie's helps our faith community fight hunger right here in Grand Rapids, serving more than one hundred families per month. Your gift will help us continue to make a difference. Those worshipping in the sanctuary are invited to leave a donation in the offering plate at the rear of the sanctuary as you exit. Online donations are also gratefully received and may be made by visiting https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/1392171 and selecting "Addie's Pantry" in the "to" field. Thank you!

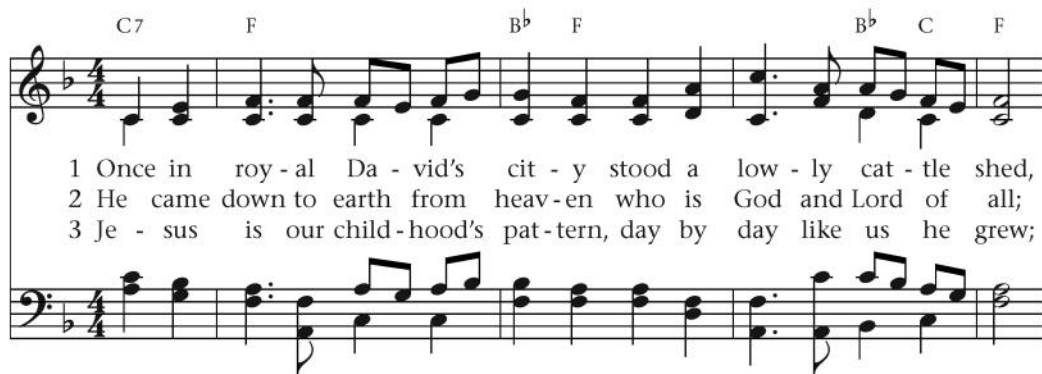
WORSHIP LEADERS

Preacher: Rev. Steven D. Pierce
Liturgist: Rev. Larry Schuyler
Director of Music Ministries: Taemin Han
Principal Organist: Norma de Waal Malefyt
Readers: Callie MacLean, Paul Troost, Mary Bauman
Vocalist: Kathryn Becksvoort
Violinist: Sara Witmer
Cellist: Andrew Plaisier
Harpist: Ella Webb
Celebration Ringers: Patsy Troost, Paul Troost, Jennifer Webb, Ella Webb
Video Tech: Alex Grigoriev
Sound Tech: Nick Loubert

Cover Art: Madonna & Child © 2016 P. Solomon Raj | Eyekons
"In the Bleak Midwinter" words: Christina Rossetti; music: Gustav Theodore Holst
"Of the Father's Love Begotten" words: Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius; music: Plainsong mode V, 13th c.; arr. Paul G. Bunjes
"Angels We Have Heard on High" words and music: French carol; trans. James Chadwick; arr. Edward Shippen Barnes
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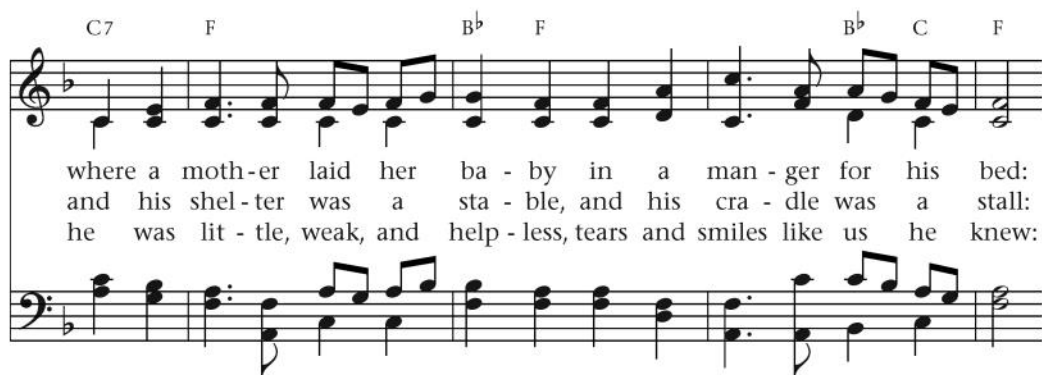
“Once in Royal David’s City”
(soloist sings verse 1; congregation sings/hums verses 3 and 5)

C7 F B^b F B^b C F



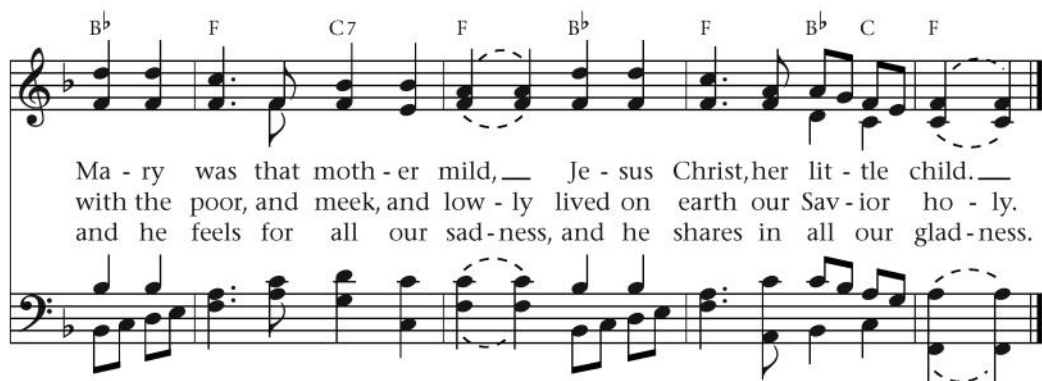
1 Once in roy-al Da-vid's cit-y stood a low-ly cat-tle shed,
2 He came down to earth from heav-en who is God and Lord of all;
3 Je-sus is our child-hood's pat-tern, day by day like us he grew;

C7 F B^b F B^b C F



where a moth-er laid her ba-by in a man-ger for his bed:
and his shel-ter was a sta-ble, and his cra-dle was a stall:
he was lit-tle, weak, and help-less, tears and smiles like us he knew;

B^b F C7 F B^b F B^b C F



Ma-ry was that moth-er mild,— Je-sus Christ, her lit-tle child.—
with the poor, and meek, and low-ly lived on earth our Sav-ior ho-ly.
and he feels for all our sad-ness, and he shares in all our glad-ness.

4 And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child, so dear and gentle,
is our Lord in heaven above:
and he leads his children on
to the place where he has gone.

5 Not in that poor lowly stable
with the oxen standing by
we shall see him, but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high;
there his children gather round,
bright like stars, with glory crowned.

"Of the Father's Love Begotten" (verses 1, 2, and 4)

Unison E^b Cm B^b

1 Of the Fa-ther's love be-got-ten ere the worlds be-gan to be,
 2 O that birth for-ev-er bless-ed, when a vir-gin, blest with grace,
 3 This is he whom seers in old time chant-ed of with one ac-cord,
 4 Let the heights of heaven a-dore him; an-gel hosts, his prais-es sing:
 5 Christ, to you, with God the Fa-ther and the Spir-it, there shall be

Fm E^b B^b Cm Fm Cm Fm E^b

he is Al-pha and O-me-ga— he the source, the end-ing he,
 by the Ho-ly Ghost con-ceive-ing, bore the Sav-ior of our race;
 > whom the voic-es of the proph-ets prom-ised in their faith-ful word;
 powers, do-min-ions, bow be-fore him and ex-tol our God and King;
 hymn and chant and high thanks-giv-ing and the shout of ju-bi-lee:

Gm Cm A^b B^b

of the things that are, that have been, and that fu-ture years shall see
 and the babe, the world's Re-deem-er, first re-vealed his sa-cred face,
 > now he shines, the long-ex-pect-ed; let cre-a-tion praise its Lord
 let no tongue on earth be si-lent, ev-ery voice in con-cert ring
 hon-or, glo-ry, and do-min-ion and e-ter-nal vic-to-ry

Cm B^b7 E^b Last time A^b B^b E^b

ev-er-more and ev-er-more. (A-men.)

For an alternate arrangement see 38, 54

Words: Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-413); tr. Composite, P.D.

Music (DIVINUM MYSTERIUM 8.7.8.7.8.7.7): Plainsong mode V, 13th c.; arr. Paul G. Bunjes (1914-1998);

arr. © 1982 Concordia Publishing House

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” (verses 1 and 3)

F C Am B^b F/C C F

1 Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King;
 2 Christ, by high - est heaven a - dored, Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord!
 3 Hail the heaven - born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Right - eous - ness!

Dm7 G7 C Fmaj7 G7 C

peace on earth and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
 Late in time be - hold him come, off - spring of the vir - gin's womb.
 Light and life to all he brings, risen with heal - ing in his wings.

F F/C C F F/C C

Joy - ful, all ye na - tions, rise; join the tri - umph of the skies;
 Veiled in flesh the God - head see; hail the in - car - nate De - i - ty,
 Mild, he lays his glo - ry by, born that we no more may die,

B^b D Gm C7 F C F

with the an - gel - ic hosts pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
 pleased as man with us to dwell, Je - sus, our Im - man - u - el.
 born to raise us from the earth, born to give us sec - ond birth.

Refrain B^b D Gm C7 F C7 F

Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King!"

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739, alt., P.D.

Music (MENDELSSOHN 7.7.7.7. D refrain 7.7): Felix Mendelssohn, 1840; adapt. William H. Cummings, 1856, P.D.

"Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming" (verses 1, 2, and 4)

1 Lo, how a rose e'er bloom-ing from ten - der stem hath sprung;
 2 I - sa - iah 'twas fore - told it, the rose I have in mind;
 3 This flower, so small and ten - der, with fra-grance fills the air;
 4 O Sav - ior, child of Mar - y, who felt our hu - man woe;

of Jes - se's lin - eage com - ing, as saints of old have sung.
 with Mar - y we be - hold it, the vir - gin moth - er kind.
 his bright-ness ends the dark-ness that kept the earth in fear.
 O sav - ior, King of glo - ry, who does our weak - ness know:

It came, a flower - et bright, a - mid the cold of
 To show God's love a - right, she bore to us a
 True God and yet true man, he came to save his
 bring us at length, we pray, to the bright courts of

win - ter when half spent was the night.
 Sav - ior when half spent was the night.
 peo - ple from earth's dark night of sin.
 heav - en and in - to end - less day.

Words: German, 15th c.; st. 1-2 tr. Theodore Baker, 1894; st. 3 tr. Gracia Grindal, 1978, © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress; st. 4 John C. Mattes (1876-1948)
 Music (ES IST EIN' ROS' ENTSPRUNGEN 7.6.7.6.6.7.6): from *Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesäng*, Cologne, 1599; harm. Michael Praetorius, 1609, P.D.

“Angels We Have Heard on High” (verses 1 and 3)

French carol

GLORIA 7.7.7.7 with refrain

French carol

Trans. James Chadwick (1813–1882); alt.

Arr. Edward Shippen Barnes, 1937

1. An - gels we have heard on high, Sweet-ly sing-ing o'er the plains,
2. Shep-herds, why this ju - bi-lee? Why your joy-ous strains pro-long?
3. Come to Beth-le - hem and see Him whose birth the an - gels sing;

And the moun-tains in re-ly Ech - o - ing their joy - ous strains.
What the glad-some tid - ings be Which in-spire your heaven - ly song?
Come, a - dore on bend - ed knee Christ, the Lord, the new - born King.

Refrain
Glo - ri - a
in ex - cel - sis De - o; Glo - ri - a
in ex - cel - sis De - o.

Music: Copyright © 1937, renewed 1965, Fleming H. Revell Company, H. Augustine Smith, Jr., from the *New Church Hymnal*. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Advent Wreath

At Central, ours is a faith of symbols deeply lived. Symbols express visually the basic tenets of our faith and serve as reminders of the pilgrimage of our life in Christ. They can have heightened meaning for us when associated with particular seasons of that journey. One such symbol is the Advent wreath.

The Advent wreath has its roots in the pre-Christian practices of northern Europe. People sought the return of the sun in the dark time of the year (at the winter solstice) by lighting candles and fires. As early as the Middle Ages, Christians used fire and light to represent Christ's coming into the world. Using this same symbolism, the Advent wreath developed a few centuries ago in Germany as a sign of the waiting and hopeful expectation of the return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wreath, a circle, came to represent the eternal victory over death through Jesus Christ. The ever-greens were a sign of the faithfulness of God to God's people, even in death, and the lighted candles were a reminder of the light of Christ brought into the world (from www.elca.org/worshipfaq).

The lighting of the Advent candles dramatically depicts the growing expectation we have for the coming of Christ, the Light of the world. The traditional Advent wreath has four candles grouped around a white Christ candle. While some traditions use blue candles, Central uses purple, a color once associated with royalty; it symbolizes Christ as the "Prince of Peace."

The main symbolism portrayed by the wreath is the growing intensity of light as the candle lighting includes an additional candle each worship day and as anticipation builds for the celebration of Christ's second coming.



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Connecting all people to God and to one another through scripture, sacrament, song, and service.