

Christmas Eve Thanksgiving



*Memorial (Unitarian) Church
Cambridge*

Christmas Eve Thanksgiving

¶ *The service leader invites those gathered to rest together for a while in silence. Following the silence the service leader says the following words and those gathered respond with the words in bold italics:*

Out of a community of diverse heritage and belief,
**we come together to share our hope,
and to create good in the world.**

The teachers of all traditions and times have taught that we are called to mercy, generosity, and mutual care
and that to be good is to serve.

We know that there can be no enduring happiness for humanity so long as suffering and want go unrelieved;
until all may be sheltered, none of us is truly at home.

May the power of our various faiths sustain us in this work, that we may be the hands of holy creativity and justice;
and together build a better world.

Kendyl Gibbons, adapted

**Love is the doctrine of this church,
The quest of truth is our sacrament,
And service is our prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
To serve others in community,
To the end that all souls shall grow
Into harmony with God and Nature,
Thus do we covenant with one another.**

¶ *The service leader then begins to light the Advent Wreath with the following words:*

O light of life, be kindled again in our hearts
As we meet together on this Christmas Eve,
To celebrate the joy of human community,
Seeking a wholeness that extends beyond ourselves.

Samuel A. Trumbore

¶ *The service leader invites those gathered to say the following responsive reading:*

A planet is born, a spark ignites, something completely new comes into being;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of life.

A waterfall descends, a rainbow arcs through the sky, the ocean opens to an endless horizon;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of beauty.

The stars pierce our hearts, peace envelops us, we are blessed;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of wonder.

In the midst of pain, we find our way to hope and restoration;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of healing.

In the midst of fear, we do what is right and speak our truth in faith;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of courage.

In our aloneness we see someone in greater need and offer ourselves to them;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of compassion.

We gather in community, in friendship, and cherish each other;

we give thanks for the mystery and miracle of love.

Amanda Udis-Kessler

Carol: *It came upon the midnight clear*

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven’s all-gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O’er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o’er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo!, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Readings:

From *The Gospel according to St Matthew*
A Child in Starlight by Elmer Diktonius

Music

Readings:

From *The Gospel according to St Luke*
The Lamb Baaed Gently

Carol: *Silent Night*

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 Saviour is born. Christ the Saviour 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.

Service leader: Spirit of Life, we come to this, your table, to celebrate your presence all around us, to share of all the fruits of the earth, to share hope by the work of our hands, to reap the harvest of wisdom we know can be found in the human heart. Fill our emptiness where we hunger, empty our surfeit where we overflow and may we, by grace, be your servants, seeking justice and peace for every child on earth.

But we know, despite our many achievements, that we are yet frail; limited creatures bound to history and place, subject always to flesh and the earth. So let us speak now to one another of our common struggle to be whole:

Spirit of Life, search me and know my heart! Try me, and know my thoughts, see if there be any mistaken ways in me and guide me in the path of everlasting wisdom.

¶ *A short time of silence follows.*

In sharing this broken bread, we acknowledge our dependence on the graceful bounty of the earth; our unity with all people who, like us, receive their daily bread in gratitude and humility (*break the bread*).

In sharing this juice from the fruit of the vine, we acknowledge that we are part of the vine of life, with its branches and tendrils in every nook and cranny of the good earth, its root in the mysterious source of all that is (*pour the wine*).

¶ *The bread & wine are now silently distributed by those present, each to their neighbour. If you do not wish to partake, simply pass them on.*

¶ *The service leader then reads the following meditation*

Spirit of Life, in this season of grace, we seek faith, hope, love. Let our meditations be centred in the stillness within. Let our prayers reach out to the encompassing holiness of being. Let us find the sacred place where our inward hearts and the whole world's longing are one.

Time catches us up. The urgency we feel in the swift rush of our lives, and the fateful weight we feel in the awesome events of the world, disturb and distract us. So we set this time apart, to be mindful in our meditations and at one in our prayers.

Sacred is the event that redeems our faith, and gives us the confidence to go on. In our mixed courage and fear, like shepherds catching the strains of angelic song, may we keep faith, always, and leave behind all fearful and faithless ways.

Sacred is the event that redeems our hope, and gives us the vision of a better world to be. In our mixed wisdom of folly, like three kings following a bright and steady star, may we hope, always, and leave behind all despairing and hopeless ways.

Sacred is the event that redeems our love, and gives us hearts ready to reach out to the friend and the stranger, to those whom we love and to the world's despised. In our mixed longing for love and proud independence, like a holy family—each of us a fragile vessel of life, yet drawn together by the strongest bonds on earth—may we love, always, and ourselves be reborn this evening. Amen.

Carol: *O little town of Bethlehem*

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the Angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His Heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

Where children pure and happy
Pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to Thee,
Son of the Mother mild;
Where Charity stands watching
And Faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
And Christmas comes once more.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray!
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels,
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

¶ *The service leader invites those gathered to say the following words:*

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds. Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves.

Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things.

Evoking the presence of the great compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion—towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practise the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

Thich Nhat Hanh

¶ *The service leader continues with the following words:*

The inner spirit makes us feel that behind every appearance of diversity there is an interdependent unity of all things. Let us, therefore, preach the universal and everlasting gospel of boundless, universal love for the entire human race, without exception, and for each one in particular.

George de Benneville (1703–1793), adapted

And, in the end, it will not matter how much we have, rather how much we have given. It will not matter how much we know, but rather how much we love. And it will not matter how much we profess to believe, but rather how deeply we live the few enduring truths we claim as ultimate.
All the rest is discipline.

John Morgan

¶ *Those gathered then say responsively the following words:*

This making of a whole self takes such a very long time: pieces are not sequential, nor our supplies.

We work here, then there, hold up tattered fabric to the light. Sew past dark, intent. Use all our thread.

Sleeves may come before length; buttons, before a rounded neck.

We sew at what most needs us, and as it asks, sew again.

The self is not one thing, once made, unaltered. Not midnight task alone, not after other work.

It is everything we come upon, make ours: all this fitting of what-once-was and has-become.

Nancy Shaffer

¶ The service leader concludes the service by saying:

Go in peace, speak the truth, give thanks each day.

Respect the earth and her creatures, for they are alive like you.

Care for your body; it is a wondrous gift.

Live simply. Be of service.

Be guided by your faith and not your fear.

Go lightly on your path. Walk in a sacred manner.

Amen.

Gary Kowalski

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