

WELCOME TO WESTMINSTER

December 31, 2023

Worship Leaders: Anna-Marie Hancock and Jeanette Zollner

Music Director: Chris White

Announcements / Life and Work

Introit : VU 60 "O Come All Ye Faithful" (vs 1)

Opening Prayer (Unison)

Dear God, when your precious Son became a tiny baby in a stable in Bethlehem, in poverty and simplicity, you changed our world. As we imagine those surroundings, we join with the shepherds and the wise men in wonder and praise. We thank you for our material lives, praise you for our spiritual lives, and trust in you for our eternal life. Amen.

Procession of Christ Candle

"Long, long, long ago, before there was anything, before there was a world, before there was light, before there was darkness, there was God: Creator and Source of Life. God moved and God breathed the world into being, and God said, "Let there be light." We present this worship candle as a visible reminder of the Creator's great light and love."

Land Acknowledgement

"Today as we gather to worship let us remember that we worship God on the historic and unceded territory of nations of Treaty 7. As Christ's people, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and Reconciliation. May we live with respect on this land, and peace and friendship with its people."

Affirming Vision Statement

"As a community church that gathers from many smaller communities in the Medicine Hat area, Westminster United Church publicly declares our commitment to creating a space where people are welcome, safe, and encouraged to participate in the life of the church inclusive of: Sexual orientation, gender identity, two spirited people, differing abilities, age, ethnic background, race, marital status, or economic circumstance.

Participation in the life of the church includes leadership, membership, sacraments, marriage, and celebrating milestones of life's journey.

We celebrate the richness of diversity, and we commit ourselves to openness, growth, education and to influencing the community for social justice.

In our dedication to living our God's word and with God's help, we devote ourselves to proactive learning and inclusion."

Lighting of the Affirming Candle

"Not quite as long but still very long ago, One was born who embodied the light of the Creator in a way that sparked a movement and a new understanding God. We light this rainbow candle as a visible reminder of the radical inclusivity shown to us by Jesus, who calls us to follow him."

Lighting of Peace Candle

"We light the candle of Peace to remind ourselves that Christ is the Prince of Peace. We pray for peace for ourselves and for the world."

Call To Worship

One: This is the place.

All: **The place where we joyfully worship together.**

One: This is the time.

All: **The time that we know Holy Love within us for the coming year.**

One: These are our friends.

All: **The friends who celebrate with us and stay with us when challenges come.**

One: This is the faith.

All: **The faith in Jesus, which challenges us and shapes our future.**

Opening Hymn: VU 45 "Joy Is Now In Every Place"

Prayer of Confession (Responsive)

One: God of darkness and silence, you have pierced the quiet of this day by the utterance of your Word in our flesh. May your word of compassion and reconciliation resound in us and through us.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, you came to us in a child cradled in a borrowed bed of straw as there was no room in the inn. Open our hearts to the needs of the homeless and the hungry.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, shepherds and outcasts heard your good news. Give us grace to spread your gospel of joy and liberation.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, we rejoice at the coming of this time of re-creation. Be with those who travel, enrich our rejoicing, and strengthen the bonds between us.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, Christians throughout the world are celebrating Christ's birth. Unite us in one family that we may shine with the one light that scatters all our darkness.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, your living Word leaped down, shedding light on all who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Give strength and peace to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

One: On this holy day, heaven and earth embrace and in your true child, you give us power to be your children. Fulfill in your love all who have gone before us in the faith. May we, like them, remain faithful to the mystery of the Word made flesh and live in you eternal light.

All: God of love, grant our prayer.

Words of Assurance

Hear these prayers we bring to you and fulfil your purposes in us in the name of Jesus, your incarnate word. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: God of Love,

Response: Hear our prayer

The Lord's Prayer

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-20

New Living Translation

The Birth of Jesus

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

ALL: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.

Carol Requests

Poem: "The Bachelor's New Year's Feast" (written and read by Jeannette Zollner)

Carol Requests

Poem: "Seeing the Value of Community — Norman Fedrau's Story" (written and read by Jen Zollner)

Carol Requests

Poem: "The Church's Shepherds Pie" (written and read by Jen Zollner)

Invitation to the Offering

Offertory

Doxology: Your Work, O God Needs Many Hands

Offertory Prayer

As bells ring out, as joy breaks out, as light shines out, we recognize the blessing these gifts will bring and we rejoice! Amen.

A New Creed (VU 918)

Carol Requests

Conversation: "Unusual New Year's Customs Around the World"

Closing Hymn: VU 71 "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime"

Commissioning/Benediction

Jesus, the Light of the world, as we celebrate your birth, may we begin to see the world in the light of the understanding you give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcasts, and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known, so may we worship you in meekness of heart. May we also remember our brothers and sisters less fortunate than ourselves in this season of giving.

Choral Amen: VU 974

Sending Forth: VU 958 Halle, Halle, Halle

Postlude