



We know that this year we are actually suffering the frustrations and deprivations of a global situation the outcome of which we can't even predict. We just know things are not good. But that also helps us remember that for some people on this planet, daily life is difficult or even desperate through all seasons, year after year. Maybe this Christmas, more than ever we will feel a calling to be part of changes that allow us to share the good things of life more freely and fairly all around.

Christmas is about the wonderful truth of Jesus being born. But it is about so much more than an enchanting story that makes us picture twinkling stars with angelic voices. It is a stage peopled with more characters than just a bunch of rustic shepherds or three exotic wise, wealthy wanderers we call "kings". Christmas is all this for us, of course, because historically some images have taken shape in our minds to give us, every year, an almost mystical knowledge where we feel – or want to feel – a little closer to the work of God in the world. But theologian Vincent Pizzuto warns: "It is not mystical experience we are after but radical interior transformation, so that others may experience Christ more fully in us."

Today, open up to that experience of Christ as you enter the story again. You and I are on the stage of the Christmas pageant. We are people who have come for a birth. So, as you hear the music of our singers and the musings of your pastors, be inspired. Be comforted. Be refreshed. Be transformed. Be reborn!

**Prayer:** [fr. *VU* hymnbook] [Doug Schulz]

Eternal God, in Jesus Christ your light shines in our darkness, giving joy in our sorrow and presence in our loneliness. Fill us with the mystery of your Word made flesh, until our hearts overflow with praise and joy, for he is the beginning and the end of all that exists, living forevermore. AMEN

**Grace Singers:** "O Little Town of Bethlehem" [HWB #191, vv.1&4]

*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 tonight.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray,  
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today!  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!*

**Grace Singers:**

**“What Child is This”**

**[HWB #215, vv.1&2]**

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?*

*This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

*Why lies He in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.*

*This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

**Candle of Hope – Reflection:**

**[Beth Woelk]**

Today on Christmas Eve we will light all the candles in our Advent wreath using the Christ candle as our source. First, we'll light the candle of hope for all who are feeling vulnerable and weary of life's challenges. Then, we'll light the second candle to give voice to the joy we find in God's coming and salvation. In the third candle, we will feel the warmth of God's transformational love. And the fourth candle will shine a light of peace to bring harmony where there is discord in our lives and in the world. So, as the candles are lit one at a time, rejoice in your heart as we reflect on our confession that with the birth of the Messiah, restoration has come!

And so we light our first candle. The candle of hope. Like a flame in the darkness, a seed in the earth, a child in the womb, hope starts small and grows forth expanding the borders of what we have known.

One of my favourite scenes in the biblical narrative is when young Mary, just having given her courageous “Yes” to the angel, hurries to the home of her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth intuitively knows what has happened and the baby in her womb leaps and she is filled with the Holy Spirit. Then Elizabeth blesses Mary for her hope, for her radical belief that God will fulfill the promise made by Gabriel. Elizabeth, pregnant in her old age, knows the power of hope. She too carries it in her womb. Then Mary, with her heart full of Elizabeth's blessing, pours forth her own song of hope that echoes the song of her foremother Hannah. “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he has looked with favour on the lowliness 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.” Her hopeful hymn speaks to the mercy and justice that God has delivered and promises is yet to come. Mary sings with the radical and revolutionary hope that her courageous “yes” will make a difference and that the child in her womb will transform the world. She sings with an honest hope that shines bright even in the midst of her very human circumstances,



couple of days screwed down and balanced inside its red-and-green metal stand in the corner of the living room while the branches settled into position after having being all tied up with twine for their journey in an open truck from someplace near the North Pole, I always figured. And the whole house, it seemed, gradually filled with that sweet aroma that a lop-sided but unconditionally loved evergreen can bring inside.

But the real joy of Christmas for me was my very favorite item brought out by my mother among the decorations that were kept year-round waiting on a high shelf in the front hall closet. It was the carousel. Well, I mean, it was the Christmas story scene-set made out of an ornately painted cardboard base and backing, with the ceramic characters of Christmas stuck onto it in perfect formation on that stage with obviously good glue. This wonderful Christmas-in-a-box contraption would be placed in front of the tree on the floor, so that I could lie down and stare at it beneath the string of coloured lights and the balls and bells hanging there that I was not supposed to touch, ever.

But I was allowed to touch the Christmas story box, because it had a wind-up carousel that featured – in turn, as the carousel went round-‘n-round - the three wise men each presenting a rich treasure in hand, and one shepherd carrying the gift of a little lamb, to Jesus lying there, his face painted with an expression of awe and great joy. At least, that’s how I’m remembering it just now. I’d grab one side of the creche scene box thing with my left hand, and turn the winding-key on the top of the gizmo with my right hand – “not too far or you’ll sproing the spring!” my Dad would say – and I’d carefully wind it up and let it go... And as the device went ‘round to the tune of “Silent Night” till it all wound down, I was the happiest child in Saskatchewan, maybe the whole world, for a few minutes at a time... a long time ago.

What candle-memories give you joy, even today in these COVID-times? How do you picture Jesus? And where are you in the story? A shepherd? A wise person? A frightened watcher of a baby so vulnerable about whom it has been said that this child will change the world? So much joy, joy born into a world with so many questions, so much sadness and pain. But isn’t it amazing, astonishing really, that even though the world sort of goes ‘round like a carousel through periods of challenge and change, we can find joy over and over when we consider this One who came. Who came as “salvation”, we read in the Book of biblical Psalms which so often offers such compelling images of joy: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD; for he is coming!”





## **Candle of Peace – Reflection:**

**[Doug Schulz]**

The final candle being lit today is the candle of peace. Consider that one of the most powerful titles given to Jesus is Prince of Peace. In fact, when Jesus was born, according to the story told in the second chapter of the gospel of Luke, a whole choir of angels sang to a motley bunch of dumbfounded shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours.” Seems that God favours the humble and the poor. How unlikely! But it’s true! Now here is born a prince sent from that God. Well, a prince is someone who bodily inherits authority. Someone who is born with great expectations that the identity imprinted on them or embedded in them will make some kind of worthy impact in the world.

Therefore, the sign of Jesus’ authority in our personal lives and in life situations among people worldwide and throughout time, must be that peace will somehow be recognized, or bestowed, or implemented in such a way that a difference can be felt or seen. Ultimately, we believe, the peace of Jesus will restore the whole world, directing people - from humble shepherders to the kingpins of global political and economic power structures – to renew their vision and purpose in life so that peace and justice, kindness and goodness, prevail on this planet. This is the ultimate Christian message.

We have suggested here at Grace all Advent season that we should always prepare to seek and to serve that restoration to God’s peace. There is no better way to celebrate today that Jesus is the Prince of Peace than to make sure we move on from Christmas Eve to enter Christmas Day and the next day and the next year and the rest of our lives with a purpose to let God’s peace be born again in us all the time. How? Commit to being persons who choose daily to contemplate beauty and truth – in nature, in ideas, in ourselves, in others. As the old folk carol says, “Wonder as we wander out under the sky!” Yes, ponder the meaning of the story of the child born so humbly yet mystically... and then devote ourselves to engage in actions of justice-seeking and peace-making in recognizable ways... maybe in new ways we will discover to do going into 2021. Peace can be made real, through reflection. And through action.

May Christmas 2020 give us plenty to think about with hope, joy, love and peace as we celebrate all that’s calm and bright this wonderful silent, holy night.



**Grace Singers:**

**“Silent Night”**

**[HWB #193, vv.1,2,3]**

*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, heav'n-ly 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.*

**Words of Blessing:**

**[Doug Schulz/Beth Woelk]**

Doug: We close this year's Christmas Eve reflection time with two biblical texts that bless us with solid truth to live by as we move forward toward and into a New Year. From the New Testament letters to early Christian churches in the ancient world:

Beth: Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word...

Doug: May you know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**Postlude:**

**“We'll Walk in the Light”**

**[Annie Schulz]**