

**The Immanuel Christmas Program
First Immanuel Lutheran Church
December 11, 2022**

Kanoa: It's that time of year again.

Sean: It's time to tell the Christmas story about how Jesus was born.

Luke: We do this every year.

Cora: But each year the same old story also tells us how God is with us now.

Kanoa: Christmas is more than just the story of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, where Mary gave birth to a baby and named him Jesus.

Luke: It's also the story of how God is with us now to bring comfort and strength and hope.

Sean: Christmas is more than just the story of shepherds watching their flocks by night and hearing angels sing "Glory to God in the highest."

Luke: It's also the story of how God continues to expand people's ideas about who's lives matter.

Kanoa: Christmas is more than just the story of the wise men coming from the east to bring gifts to the new-born king.

Luke: It's also the story of how God is still healing divisions and making the human family whole.

Cora: Christmas is about God opening the door to a new future, a future we've barely begun to enter.

Sean: A future where no one is truly alone in the world.

Kanoa: And every person matters.

Sean: And we all belong to each other.

Cora: I want to hear that Christmas story!

ELW 245, "Creator of the Stars of Night" (vv. 1-2) Choir and Congregation

Macy: For hundreds of years, God's people had been longing and praying for God to intervene in human affairs.

Pearl: They lived under the heavy hand of their enemies and cried out to God to show up and set things right.

Finn: But when God did show up, it was in a way no one expected.

Pearl: There was a young woman named Mary.

Macy: She lived in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee.

Finn: The religious and political leaders thought of Galilee as a rural backwater.

Macy: They dismissed the people there as unsophisticated hicks.

Pearl: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Finn: Mary was young, not yet married to her fiancé, Joseph.

Macy: The angel Gabriel appeared to her and said:

Pearl: Don’t be afraid, Mary. I have wonderful news for you. God has chosen you to have a son. He will be great, like his ancestor King David.

Finn: Through him God will bring peace and blessing to God’s people.

Macy: Could it be that God was showing up to set things right?

Finn: But not in Jerusalem, not in the temple or the palace.

Pearl: Instead, God was showing up in Galilee among the poor, with those looked down on by the powerful.

Macy: Mary trusted God. She said, “Let it be with me according to your word.”

Pearl: When Mary went to see her cousin, Elizabeth, she sang for joy.

Finn: She saw that God cared about people who suffered, the hungry, the powerless.

Macy: People like her.

Holden Evening Prayer, “Magnificat” – congregational singing

Hugo: Unfortunately, Mary wouldn’t be able to have her baby in the safety and comfort of home.

Finn: The emperor Augustus called for a census, and every person living in the Roman Empire had to travel to their ancestral home to be registered.

Macy: Since Joseph was descended from King David, he went to the little city of David known as Bethlehem.

Pearl: That was a real hardship for Joseph and Mary. They had to travel from Nazareth in the north all the way to Bethlehem in the south.

Macy: That’s like 90 miles!

Finn: When they arrived, there was no room for them.

Pearl: And Mary was very pregnant!

Finn: But an innkeeper acted with kindness for Mary and Joseph. He,

Macy: or she!

Finn: invited them to stay in the stable. It was out of the cold, warm and dry.

Pearl: So Mary gave birth in a stable. She wrapped her baby boy in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, and she named him Jesus.

Finn: According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus had an unexpected secret identity. He was Immanuel, which means “God-with-us.”

“Away in a Manger” (ELW 277) – children v.1; choir and congregational join vv. 2-3

Lily: Mary probably never expected to give birth for the first time, in a stable, surrounded by animals.

Hugo: She probably also never expected the first guests that arrived would be shepherds who had been watching their sheep that night in the hills outside of town.

Peter: In that time, everybody looked down on shepherds.

Lily: They were poor, and they lived and worked outside with their sheep.

Peter: People thought they were dirty and sneaky and untrustworthy.

Hugo: So, God sent angels to tell... shepherds!

Lily: In God’s eyes, every person matters.

Peter: Every person can be part of God’s work of love.

Hugo: No one is invisible or dispensable.

Lily: Angels told the shepherds:

Hugo: Don’t be afraid, I have wonderful, happy news for you!

Peter: A child is born! A savior, who is Christ the Lord!

Lily: You’ll find him in a manger in Bethlehem.

Peter: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.

Hugo: Then the sky was filled with angels, singing praise to God.

Lily: The shepherds were amazed and excited. They hurried into town to see this amazing thing that the angels had told them, their hearts filled with hope and joy, because God had included them in the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

“Angels We Have Heard on High” (ELW 289) – congregational singing

Peter: There were still more surprises to come.

Lily: The next visitors were foreigners, wise men who traveled from the east.

Hugo: They were astrologers from Persia who had been watching the night sky.

Peter: They had seen a sign in the stars telling them a new king was born for the people of Israel.

Lily: I wonder who was more surprised: Mary and Joseph at the arrival of “foreign dignitaries.”

Hugo: Or the wise men when they found the new-born king in a stable rather than the palace.

Lily: They brought expensive gifts— gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Peter: These gifts invite us to imagine how God comes to us.

Hugo: Gold was a gift for a king, because Jesus was born to be greater than King David.
Lily: He would embody the reign of God which would bring peace for the whole human family.
Hugo: And frankincense was a special kind of incense used in the temple. When it was burned as an offering to God, it gave a beautiful smell.
Peter: Jesus was born to show us the one, beautiful offering God wants—for us to love and care for each other.
Hugo: And myrrh was used when people were buried.
Lily: Jesus came to break through death and the grave, to overturn the power of death to make people afraid, and to bring the whole human family to know life with God.

“We Three Kings” (WOV 646) – congregational singing (v. 1)

Katie: Perhaps you’re wondering: Jesus was born more than 2000 years ago, and people have been hearing the story for a long time now.
Augie: That no one is truly alone in the world.
Luke: And every person matters.
Augie: And we all belong to each other.
Katie: So why aren’t we there yet? Why is there still so much loneliness, and people being hurt and excluded?
Augie: That’s a good question, and I wonder whether the next part of the story might speak to that.
Katie: When word reached King Herod about a baby born to be king of the Jews, he became worried about his grip on power.
Luke: And Herod would stop at nothing to hold onto power.
Augie: He sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to make sure there would be no new-born king to threaten his rule.
Katie: Herod used his power to eliminate anyone who might be in his way.
Luke: It wasn’t a safe place for any baby.
Katie: Mary and Joseph barely escaped, taking the baby Jesus to Egypt.
Augie: There was so much sorrow, so much grief left behind.

The Coventry Carol, choir

Katie: And in every generation, there are still people like Herod who want more-more-more.
Augie: They can’t imagine sacrificing some of their power or privilege to help others.

Luke: There are people who act out of fear or greed or anger.

Katie: They create so many victims with their ambition and their drive for power.

Augie: But fortunately there are also people in every generation who are drawn to Jesus' way of love and who reject Herod's way of violence.

Luke: We give thanks for every person who is committed to Jesus' way of compassion and forgiveness, who embodies Jesus' way of humility and generosity.

Katie: In every generation there are people who look beyond their own wants and desires, who are willing to do things that are difficult because they want to make their community stronger.

Augie: There are people who care for their neighbors and always seem able to step up to help.

Luke: The future belongs to them!

Katie: That's the future God invites us to enter—a future that really is God-with-us.

Augie: And Jesus's birth is only the beginning of the story.

“Love Has Come” (ELW 292) – congregational singing

Kanoa: Part of the joy of telling the story of Jesus' birth is recognizing, not only that God came to us long ago, but also that God is with us now.

Luke: And still in surprising and unexpected ways.

Sean: When we show love for each other, when we act like every person matters,

Cora: God is there.

Kanoa: When we care for each other because we understand we belong to each other,

Cora: God is there.

Luke: When we act with kindness, when we show forgiveness instead of holding onto grudges,

Cora: God is there.

Sean: When we choose compassion instead of selfishness, when we choose to be generous,

Cora: God is there.

Kanoa: We may not be shepherds or wise men, but we get to be part of the continuing story of how God comes to be with us.

Kanoa, Luke, Sean and Cora: Every one of us.

Hymn of the Day—“Go, Tell It On the Mountain,” ELW 290