

**(Krysie Bruce instrumental prelude)**

**Welcome**

Penny: Merry Christmas, and welcome to Knox United Church! My name is Rev. Penny Nelson and I am the minister at Knox United. We are *so* happy to share our worship with all of you this evening!

Since today is a special day, I want to take time to express our thanks for the land and waters in which we live, work, and play.

Many people call the land in which we live here “Nova Scotia,” but for thousands of years before this, these lands and waters had another name called “Mi’kma’ki”. This is the name that the Mi’kmaq people still know for this place, and today, I would like us to pause for a moment of silence to say thank you to the Mi’kmaq people for all the ways that they have cared for the lands and waters of Mi’kma’ki for thousands of years. (*pause for a moment*)

As we celebrate the birth of hope, peace, joy, and love this night, let us wonder how each of us might honour the land and water of Mi’kma’ki, and live in peace and friendship with all people of this land.

And as we gather, we light our Affirmation Candle, for tonight we celebrate the light of Christ that is born in us! In all of our wonderful diversity of race, gender, sexuality and abilities, Christ is born, and God names this *good*. And so, this night, as we do each time we gather as this community of faith, we celebrate that:

All are welcome in this place.

**All are welcome by God’s grace!**

**Call to Worship**

Voice One: Welcome to everyone, from near and far.  
Whether you traveled by truck or by car.

Voice Two: We have been waiting all year for this night,  
For you to show up, with your eyes shining bright!

Voice One: To share in a story from long, long ago,  
Of a baby that changed everything that we know.

Voice Two: Welcome all ages, the young and the old,  
The meek and the mighty, the shy and the bold!

Voice One: Together we gather, we pray while we stand,  
Heart joined to heart and hand joined to hand.

Voice Two: Welcome the angels, the sheep, and the kings.  
Your gift is just right, whatever you bring!

Voice One: Christmas is mystery, wonder and cheer.

It's Christmas Eve, and we're glad that you're here!

### Opening Prayer

**All:** God of Mystery, we have been waiting for this night that is different from all nights; a night that marks the turning from darkness into light in our seasons and in our spirits.

Enter into our imaginations as we tell your story. Be with us this night as we welcome the gifts of Advent into our hearts and the miracle of Christmas into our lives. Amen.

**Hymn:** VU 60 O Come All Ye Faithful v.1

### The Christmas Story

**Penny:** Tonight we tell the story that we tell every year—the story of Christ's birth, the story of love made flesh. To tell our story, I'm going to need your help! You may notice there are some pictures taped to the pew in front of you—this is your character in our story tonight. As I share the story of the first Christmas, you'll need to pay attention for your character's name because whenever I mention their name, I want you to shout out their words and do the actions for your character. We're going to practice them right now, and you have a prompt in front of you in case you need a reminder later on. So, let's practice being the different characters in the story:

### Gabriel visits Mary

**Storyteller:** Many years ago (though not so many that we have forgotten), in a town in Galilee called Nazareth, there was a young woman named **Mary** who was engaged to a man called Joseph. Well, one day, and **angel** appeared to her and said: "**Mary**, do not be afraid! God has chosen you to give birth to God's **child**. You will name this baby Jesus, and he will become a king whose kingdom has no end."

**Mary** thought about this for awhile. It didn't seem possible, but she believed that anything was possible for God. "Okay," she told the **angel**, "I'll trust you on this." And with that, the **angel** disappeared.

**Ministry of Music:** Mary's Boy Child

### The Trip to Bethlehem

**John:** Now, in those days, a decree went out from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered in their own town. Joseph was from Bethlehem, so that is where he and his fiancée went. **Mary** rose on a donkey because, by that time, she was great with **child**.

While they were there, the time came for **Mary** to give birth. She delivered her **child** in a **stable** and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them at the inn.

**Carol:** VU 69 Away in a Manger

## The Angels and the Shepherds

**Penny:** Now, in the hills outside of Bethlehem, there were **shepherds** sleeping under the **stars**, keeping watch over their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an **angel** appeared above them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and the **shepherds** were terrified.

“Don’t be afraid,” the **angel** said to them, “Listen, I bring you news of great joy that should be shared with all people. Today, in Bethlehem, the City of David, a Saviour is born who is Christ, the Lord! You will find the **child** in a **stable** wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And then, *more* **angels** appeared, praising God and singing songs filled with joy for all people. And maybe their songs sounded a bit like our next carol? Let’s sing together “Angels We Have Heard on High”.

**Carol:** VU 38 Angels We Have Heard on High v.1

## The Shepherds and the Stable

**John:** When the **angels** departed, the **stars** seemed to shine even brighter than before, and so the **shepherds** wasted no time in running to the city of Bethlehem where they found the **stable** with **Mary** and Joseph inside, and the newborn **child** lying in the manger. When the **shepherds** met this family, they were overwhelmed with joy, and after their visit, they told everyone they met about this newborn **child**. Everyone was amazed by the story the **shepherds** told them. And **Mary** treasured all these wonders and pondered them in her heart.

**Carol:** VU 43 Go, Tell It On The Mountain

## The Visit from the Magi

**Penny:** Now, even though the **stable** in Bethlehem already seems full of visitors, our story is not yet finished.

In the distance, three camels plod up the road to Bethlehem. They have come from the East, far beyond the Arabian Desert, perhaps as far as the Caspian Sea.

The camels carry three kings, the wise ones, called the **Magi**. These people were so smart that people in their country thought they were magic—and so they were called “**magi**”, which is where our word “magic” comes from. They knew so much about so many things, but what they knew the most about was the sky.

And when the **magi** saw a bright and wild **star** in the sky, one they had never seen before, they decided they needed to follow that **star** because they were sure it meant that a very special **child** had been born. And so, they rode through the night,

always watching the **star**, until it stopped over the **stable** where Jesus, God's **child** had been born.

**Carol:** VU 91 The First Noel vv.1-2, 3

**John:** Now, everyone is there in the **stable** that night, like one big, holy family—the animals cram in, and the **angels** peer through the windows, and the **star** shines above them to make sure everyone can see.

And Jesus, God's **child** gets passed from arm to arm while the **Magi** give him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and all those **shepherds** hold him and rub their beards against his face and give him sloppy, wet kisses.

And at the end of the night, **Mary** lays back against a hay bale and thinks about all that has happened and wonders about all that was yet to be.

The **shepherds**, with big, sloppy grins on their faces, go back to the fields rejoicing at all that they heard and seen, and the **magi** leave for their homes, still following the **stars**, singing songs of joy and love because of this newborn child.

In fact, they might have even sung the Joy to the World. So why don't we sing it with them? And as we do that, we'll also take up our offering.

**Offertory Hymn:** VU 59 Joy to the World vv 1,2

### **Offering Dedication**

**All:** Just as **shepherds, angels, magi, and stars** came to offer praise and gifts to the new **child** Jesus, we offer our gifts and praise to you, O God.

We ask a blessing on *all* the gifts that are given everywhere this night, and especially for the gifts that have been offered here. May the gifts that we've given you tonight be used to touch and bless the lives of people here in Sackville, and around this world. This we pray, in the name of your newborn Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

Penny: Now, Christians believe that Jesus was God's gift to the whole world. And what do you say to someone when they give you a gift? (*Thank you!*) That's right!

So before you go, I thought that maybe we could say a prayer, which is a way of saying thanks to God for something in our lives that we're thankful for.

So what I want you to do right now is to think of something you are thankful for in your life,

and on the count of three, we're all going to shout out really loud what we're thankful for: ready? Thank you God for ONE, TWO, THREE!

Now prayer isn't just about saying thank you, it's also about asking God for help.

So now, I want you to think of someone you know who needs help sometimes—maybe they're sad, or they're sick, or they're lonely.

So, on the count of three, we are each going to whisper as quietly as we can the name of someone who needs God's help today. Let's whisper together: God we pray that you help these people, *one, two, three...*

We ask all these prayers in the name of your child that is born this night, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

**Carol:** VU 67 Silent Night

**Blessing:**

One: Go now with the courage of **Mary** in your heart and the songs of **angels** in your ears,

Go now with the wonder of the **shepherds** in your souls and the wisdom of the **magi** in your minds.

May you go to live into the openness and hospitality of the **stable** in all you say and do,

And through all your days, may the love of God shine above you like the **stars** in the night.

Go and spread the word—

for the **child** of Bethlehem is born this night for all! Thanks be to God. Amen.

+Service heavily adapted from "The Christmas Story" written by Jessie Negropontes and Chris Giffen, found in *Mandate: November 2013*. Pg. 43-44. Used with permission.