

Stouffville United Church
34 Church Street N., Stouffville, Ontario L4A 1E3
Sunday, December 21, 2025
Fourth Sunday of Advent – Love
Hidden in Plain Sight: White Gift Sunday
(with content from Advent Unwrapped)
Lead by Julian Munro

Music Prelude

Welcome

Acknowledgement of the Land

The land on which we meet today is sacred land, and has been the site of human activity for thousands of years. We are gathered on the treaty territory of the Huron Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe people and their ancestors. May we honour their history, spirituality, culture and teachings and uphold our responsibilities as treaty partners, working continuously towards greater respect and understanding.

Announcements

Chorus "The First Noel"

Verse 1

The first Noel the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep

Chorus

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel

Verse 2

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them far
And to the earth it gave great light
And so it continued both day and night

Chorus

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel

Call to Worship

Advent is a season of waiting.

But we do not wait alone.

God is with us.

**We gather with those who have seen the signs,
heard the whispers, felt the tugs in their hearts.**

God is birthing love into this waiting world.

Let us worship with hearts open to Love.

Opening Prayer (adapt. from Psalm 107)

Give thanks to God, for God is good!

God's love endures forever!

May the lost, the found, the weary, and the joyful hear...

God's love endures forever.

May the thirsty, the hungry, the imprisoned, and the free hear...

God's love endures forever.

As we gather and grow, give and receive...

We sing of God's unfailing love!

Candle Lighting

We light our candles remembering that Jesus said: "Whoever believes in me, believes not just in me but in the One who sent me. Whoever looks at me is looking, in fact, at the One who sent me. I am Light that has come into the world so that all who believe in me won't have to stay any longer in the dark.

Lighting of the Advent Candles

Reader 1: Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent, we are approaching the birth of Christ. We lit the first candle in our Advent wreath three weeks ago, the candle that represents hope. *(The first candle is lit)*

Reader 2: Our second candle is the candle of peace, as we live in a world longing for all kinds of peace. *(the second candle is lit)*

Reader 1: The third candle is the candle for joy. A joy that persists all around for those with eyes to see it. *(the third candle is lit)*

Reader 2: Today we light the candle of love. A love of both from and for Christ and restores us. A love that breaks moulds and transforms all that it touches.

Knowing the need for love in our lives and in this transforming world, we light this candle as a symbol of the love promised in the coming of Jesus.

(The fourth candle is lit)

Congregation Sings: We Light this Candle TLUS #55

We light this candle for love.

Await the new life within.

May our hearts now live each day,
so love can find a way,
so love can find a way.

Reader 1: God-who-never-ceases-to-love, kindle our hearts that we may burn anew with your love. Bless us with the flame of lively living and believing. Take our words and release them to speak of you; take our minds and broaden them to reflect your overflowing love; take our hearts and set them alight with your desire for goodness. In the name of the One full of love. Amen.

Hymn MV # 20 God of Still Waiting

1 God of still waiting,
God of deep longing,
God of the heart's true rest:
hold us in fathomless peace,
guard us with unwaning love.

2 Spirit of promise,
Spirit of purpose,
Spirit of ceaseless prayer:
bathe us in life full and free,
kindle our wonder and hope.

3 Word who comes to us,
Word who lives with us,
Word who disturbs and heals:
silence our chattering fears,
waken our unconscious faith.

4 Word true and faithful,
hope-bringing Spirit,
God of enfolding love:
come in your fullness and grace;
work through our lives for your praise.

An Advent Prayer of Confession and Healing

As we witness to fear, in the news and in our streets,
we make space for hope in our lives.

With broken hearts, faltering steps, and a desire for healing,
we make gestures of peace with each other.

As we greet strangers, neighbours, and friends,
we make a place for joy in the chaos of our concerns.

Awaiting a future announced and promised by the Living God,
we make room for love in our habits, hearts, and homes.

Holy One, you make the crooked ways straight and mend the broken soul.
On this day, as we offer simple gifts in the face of profound need,
remind us how your grace grows in our giving and receiving.
Inspire the rebirth of love—in our world and in our lives—
as we dedicate ourselves to your justice and mercy.

Amen.

Anthem: Oh, Beautiful Star of Bethlehem

A Time of Silence

Invitation to the Offering and White Gifts

The story of White Gift Sunday began in 1903, in Painesville, Ohio, where a woman was troubled by her children arguing over the value of different gifts. She suggested that they, together with other children of the Sunday school who were bringing gifts to church for those in need, should wrap the gifts in white paper. The uniformity of decoration would obscure the gifts' value. The idea allowed everyone to participate in the joy of giving without regard to economic status.

The ideas behind the origin of the White Gifts tradition resonate for us today. Poverty may be obvious to the attentive observer, but there are many communities in which poverty goes unseen. Churches continue to play a vital role not only in making someone's Christmas with simple gifts, but also in declaring that unseen needs are not forgotten. This is the joy that Mary expresses in the Magnificat—that God sees the needs of the people and desires us to rectify injustice, reconcile relationships, and mend the broken.

Everyone who comes to church brings a gift. Many times, the gift we bring is monetary and helps to sustain the life and work of the congregation. People also bring gifts of music and song, story-telling and reading, preparing and serving food, quilting, driving, etc.

Offertory: 4th verse of "In the Bleak Midwinter" VU #55

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

if I were a wise man, I would do my part;

yet what I can I give him - give my heart.

Offertory Prayer:

All things come from you, Creating God, and by your grace we offer our gifts in return. Bless us and what we do here, that we and all your people might experience the renewal of life you reveal in Christ Jesus. Open our hearts and minds to receive your continual gift of transformation this day, and always. **Amen.**

Anthem: The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

Prayer for Understanding

Let us pray: **Gracious and merciful God, lend yourself so we may have humble, teachable hearts, that we may receive what you are to reveal to us and follow your way. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection

Time of Silence

Hymn "Emmanuel"

Verse 1

In the beginning, You spoke, there was light
Your word formed creation, Your breath gave us life
We walked in the garden, it brought You delight
How You love to be with us, we were fully alive

Chorus: You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel

Verse 2

Our fellowship broken, as we were deceived
The joy of the garden was now out of reach
You chose to pursue us, You longed for us still
You did not forsake us and You never will

Chorus: You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel

Verse 3

A pillar of fire that led through the night
A cloud of Your glory, no one could deny
We built You a temple, but You wanted more
You longed for a people that could be called Yours

Chorus: You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel

Verse 4

Then in the silence the Word became flesh
Our God dwelt among us, You gave us Your best
You offered communion, You gave up Your life
You rose up in victory and healed the divide

Chorus: You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel
Emmanuel, Emmanuel

Verse 5

The day is soon coming, You'll be revealed
Your dream of communion, finally fulfilled
We'll see a new heaven and walk a new earth
You will be ours, Lord, and we will be Yours

Chorus: You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel
Emmanuel, Emmanuel

Verse 6

In this very moment, God You are here
You're with and within us, You love to be near
Filled with Your Spirit, a promise of love
A blessed assurance of what is to come

End

You have always been, You will always be Emmanuel

Prayers of the People

God of Hope, you hear our silent prayers and urgent cries.
Hear us now as we pray for your world and its people.
God of hope, hear our prayer.

God of Peace, on this day we pray
for the people of Bethlehem, of Israel, and of Palestine.
for (*name places suffering conflict*);
for refugees who have nowhere to lay their heads;
for those who find themselves in strange lands.
God of the morning star, protect all people. Guide us in the ways of mercy and justice.

God of Joy, on this day we pray
for those who will spend this day alone;
for those whose tables will have an empty place this year;
for those in care homes and hospitals;
and for our loved ones who live again in your eternal joy.
God of heaven and earth, of anticipation and promise, be with us and heal us.

God of Love, open our hearts, that we might receive you and hear your voice.
Open us to the possibility of true change, in us and in others.
Remind us of your promise, made again to every generation, of your enduring love.
May things on earth be as they are in heaven.
We pray these things in the name of the One who comes, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Hymn **MV #158 Dream A Dream**

1 Dream a dream, a hopeful dream,
as children do on Christmas Eve,
imaginings, surprising things
to hold and to believe.

2 Dream a time, this Christmas time,
when no one's hungry or afraid;
that weapons go and harvests grow,
that friends are met and made.

3 Dream a peace, our planet's peace,
the greening of the earth at play,
the holy ground where life is found,
where God has touched the clay.

4 Dream a gift, the Christmas gift
that changes every thing we see:
the shimmering of angel wing,
the Child, the Mystery.

Note from the source: "(The anthem might reflect scriptural instances of the gift of love, e.g. Mary's making room for Jesus, or God's love for all. One appropriate and powerful hymn, which is good for large and small choirs, is "Dream a Dream" (More Voices (MV) 158). It speaks of the universal gifts implied in the birth of the Christ child. An arrangement of the haunting 15th century "I Sing of a Mayden" would also be appropriate.)"

Blessing:

The vision will be fulfilled in its own time.

If it seems slow in coming, wait for it,
for it will surely come.

And as we wait,

may all things work together for good;
may we be blessed with wisdom and discernment,
and determination and patience;

may we take the time to grow in grace,
day by day. Amen.

Closing Response #215MV: "Peace Be with You"

Love be with you, love for ever,

love be with you, my friends.

Till we meet again may God be with you.

Love, love, love.

Postlude