



**Alberni Valley United Church
December 11th, 2022
Reverend: Ed Lewis
Worship Assistant: Doreen Grant
Worship Service**

11:20 – Ellen plays at the piano

11:25 – Rolling announcements on the screen

11:30 – Worship begins

Welcome/Announcements: (Doreen)

Welcome to this place, just as you are. Welcome to our online friends, you add to our worship. Welcome to this community of Alberni Valley United Church, where you may find a place of comfort and hope. Welcome to this worship service, where you may find a time of restoration.

At Alberni Valley United Church, we are an open-minded, open-hearted, LGBTQ2SPIRIT+ affirming community of faith. In our church we celebrate the many diverse families that now make up our society, and we feel very grateful that you are also connected to this community of faith. In this time of Advent prayers, praise and worship, may we be strengthened, challenged and sustained by our God and by each other.

Birthday/Anniversaries: (Doreen)

Land Acknowledgement (Doreen)

This land is sacred and holy and has been home to Indigenous people for thousands of years. It has also been home to many others, but for far less time than that. We give thanks to the Se-sh-ought (Tseshaht) and Who-pa-chess-eth (Hupacaseth) people who have peacefully shared this land with others for these many years. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live, worship, learn, work and play on these traditional lands. May we in this church community, honour the heritage and gifts of the Nuu Chah Nulth First people.

Lighting the Advent Candle – (Ed/Doreen)

Today we light our next candle in the Advent wreath. The candle of hope. We light this candle to bring hope into shadows of despair. We light this candle as our commitment to bringing healing to the people and world around us. We light this candle to reveal the Way of Jesus, who is the Hope of the World.

Opening prayer – Together

Eternal God of birth and new life, help us to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. Smooth out our roughness, and light up the hidden parts of our lives so that Your love might shine through us, to those around. Today as we hear the ancient stories of our faith and sing the songs of Christmas, may we be united together in our love for You and our love for our neighbours.

Be present with us O God, throughout the Advent season. As we live and work, worship and serve others, may we find hope and the renewal of our spirits. Through Christ, who is God with us, we pray. AMEN

Song: MVU #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. (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. (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. (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. (Mystery.)

Responsive Reading

One: We have seen the star in the East, and again we begin our journey to worship the Holy Child.

All: On the Advent Road, the star lights our way to family gatherings, and joyful times with friends.

One: On the Advent road, the star gleams in the tears for loved ones gone, for times of pain we have endured this year, and for those things that have been setbacks for people we love.

All: On the Advent Road, the starlight dances with hope filled celebrations of worship, and carol singing, the yuletide spirit, and Christmas giving.

One: On the Advent road, the star leads us by places where we see people who find this season so very difficult; for the homeless and needy, for those living alone and those living in fear.

All: On the Advent Road, hand in hand, we follow the star, with shepherds awe, and angels' joy, that we might see the newborn Messiah.

Children's Time:

Choir - "Silent Was the Night" by Lani Smith.

Blue Christmas Liturgy

O Come, O Come Emmanuel” verses 1, 2, 3 & 6

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who orders all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go. R

3 O come, O come, great God of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe. R

6 O come, O Dayspring, from on high,
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight. R

Message:

Blue Christmas Message 2022

We're only two weeks away from Christmas Day, which for most of us is one of the happiest days of the year. As followers of Jesus, we gather in worship to sing songs of the season, we hear the ancient story of Christ's birth, we hang Christmas decorations and, in the malls, and on the streets, most people are smiling and laughing as they shop and eat and attend gatherings. But I also know that for some people who don't feel as much joy this year, there is a lot of pressure to put on a brave face and be upbeat, and joyful.

And that means that it can be especially hard to keep up appearances when you're actually feeling pretty low. Most days in our world, there isn't much room given for people to grieve losses. And for those going through hardships, or struggles, it can be difficult to expose those raw feelings at this time of year. Which can leave a whole lot of people just going through the motions at Christmas time when they don't really feel like celebrating for any number of reasons.

For those of you who might be feeling blue today, maybe Christmas used to be the happiest time of year for you. But not this year. Perhaps part of the problem is that the Christmas season actually reminds us that things aren't the way they used to be; and might not be the same in the years ahead.

And maybe it's so hard to move on for many people, because the way we often celebrate Christmas is to try to relive the past. Think about traditions we follow at this time of year. In many families, Christmas involves certain foods and certain rituals. Pulling out the boxes from the attic or basement and decorating our homes the way we have done for years. Christmas morning, opening stockings with the kids or our parents and siblings. Going to Christmas eve services. Special

Christmas foods the ones our mom's or grandparents used to serve over the holidays.

But traditions intended to bring us comfort in an ever-changing world, when they can't be replicated, can actually make some folks feel even sadder.

Or think about the music we play and sing along with, so many are from bygone eras. I know that in our family, we always play Amy Grant's Tennessee Christmas from the 80's when our kids were young. And so many other songs we used to hear on the radio in the 50's and 60's. Those have a way of taking us back in time to happier moments.

In one way, Christmas is all about the past. The problem is that when things change, and we suffer a loss in our lives, or we have broken family relationships, it can make us feel worse. And we can't bring back those feelings when things were so much happier.

But here's the secret about Christmas. The true meaning is not in the past, although the central story comes from long ago, and it's a beautiful story. But the true meaning of Christmas needs to be felt and experienced fresh and new every year. Because the true meaning of Christmas is a promise that God made to us, a promise that God is fulfilling right now. *The promise to always be with us.* The promise that the people who lived in darkness, would actually see a light. Not a promise that things would be the way they were when we were younger, or when life was so wonderful.

Christmas reminds us that God's promise to be with the human race in a unique way, and to us individually, and as a community of faith, has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, who is still present with us today. He was the sign in the straw for sure, and that story is so powerful and comforting. But the true meaning of Christmas is so much bigger than the simple birth narratives in the Gospels. It's that Christ is born in us and among us today.

The OT prophets who looked ahead to the day when God would do a new thing in restoring humanity and recreating the world and setting it right, through the coming of Emmanuel, God with us, didn't live to see that day fulfilled. But we who live 2000 years after the event of Christ's birth, look back to the fulfillment of those ancient prophecies.

And the Good News story that the angels sang about and the shepherds witnessed and the Magi journeyed to find, all wrapped up in Jesus, isn't locked in the past, but needs to be a present reality for those of us living so long after that holy birth.

In Jesus, God with Us, we need to experience His presence with us today. Especially if we're feeling like things are so difficult or not the way we ever dreamed they would be for us. We need to be open to God gently gathering us in God's arms – singing over us the way spoken of in Zephaniah 3:17 “THE LORD YOUR GOD IS WITH YOU, GOD IS MIGHTY TO SAVE. GOD TAKES GREAT DELIGHT IN YOU, GOD WILL QUIET YOU WITH HIS LOVE, AND REJOICE OVER YOU WITH SINGING.”

We need to be open to experiencing Jesus' carrying some of the load we might be experiencing this year; or giving us new hope, or enabling us to let go of our anger, or pain or our despair. I'm not saying this is easy to experience, and I know that healing of our sadness or losses don't come quickly. But Jesus has time and I hope as you turn to him in this season, not simply as the babe in the manger, but as the risen one, whose love and compassion for you is endless, you will discover new strength rising, and you will open your heart to hope, to light and to love and new life.

And so this year, I invite you to acknowledge your pain and losses, and not to stuff them down and say, “Oh well, it's Christmastime, I have to be happy”. No your suffering is real and it's Ok to feel that way. But I want to invite you to also

trust that even amidst that pain, Christ is being born in you today. Christ is with you, and he will gently restore your soul and shed his light into the dark places you are feeling today, and in time, you will find a new path forward into a brighter future.

Communion Song – MVU #195 “Long Ago and Far Away”

1. Long ago and far away
Jesus lived and worked and prayed
healed the sick and the fearful and lonely
lived his life to show us God’s way.

Refrain

Stretched his arms out as he said
Fill the cup and share the bread
Remember me in love and joy and blessing.

2. Jesus gathered the children around him
spoke of Love and the joy to be found
told them stories of wisdom and wonder
God’s creation in all that’s around.
3. Jesus called all his friends to be with him
share the bread and the cup once again
life to you I will offer it gladly
love will be with you right to the end.

Prayer of Confession (together)

O God of Grace and Mercy, we sing “O Come all Ye Faithful”, but we confess that we are not always faithful. We could have shown greater kindness and patience to someone going through a rough patch this past week, but we kept ourselves busy with other things. At different times we have spoken without thinking and hurt someone. All too often we focus on our own problems, and fail to pray for people in places where the difficulties are beyond our imaginations. Forgive us we pray.

In this time of the year, in the stillness of Advent love and light, hear our confession; heal us and make us new through the One whose birth we celebrate. AMEN

Words of Assurance:

God hears our prayers and understands our failings. The God of love and compassion works within us to create new life, again and again. Let us be encouraged in the knowledge that God's love covers our sins, and that we are forgiven. AMEN

Prayer of Dedication (together)

God of Light, these gifts are not gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are the gifts of our labours and an expression of our love for You. May You multiply them for the ongoing work of Your church. We also ask that You might use them and us, to shine Your light of love to the world, like the light that shone brightly, the night of Jesus' birth. AMEN

Closing Song VU#8 "Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming" (see the 3 verses)

1. Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As seers of old have sung.
It came, a blossom bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.
2. Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore for us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.
3. This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere.
The One and very God,
From sin and death has saved us,
And lightens every load.

Benediction

Sung Blessing

May the Lord, strong and true,

Bless and keep you forever

Grant you peace, perfect peace

Courage in every endeavor

Lift up your eyes and see God's face

Receive God's grace forever

May the Lord, strong and true,

Bless and keep you forever.

Sung to the tune of Edelweiss