

### **Call to Worship**

Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Approach with awe, and with love.

**For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.**

Come, people of God – walk in peace.

### **Living the Word**

"Asleep on the Hay"

Value of sleep for each of us is essential. We need to rest in order to function to our potentials. For some of us, when we lay down our heads to sleep it is the only time we find peace and quiet. Even so, some people can sleep anywhere.

Though I have never slept in a manger, as a teenager I once had a slumber party outside in the back of my dad's big hauling truck. We put a layer of straw on the floor to make it softer.

After hours of 'girl talk' we decided to sleep a few hours before dawn arrived. But I have to say that it wasn't very comfortable as we were poked even through our sleeping bags by the straw. In the chaos of that hour, sleep had difficulty coming for us.

Babies can and will often sleep anywhere – so for Jesus as a human baby, sleep may have come easily even in the hay. But Jesus the Divine, also had the eternal peace of God within him and Christ would always be able to sleep like a baby, despite the chaos around him, including rolling storms at sea.

Even as a baby Christ was already teaching us through the story of his birthplace, that sleep can be gained, peace can be found in the midst of life's chaos. So innocent, he was.

Christmas as Prevenient Grace: God's gift of love to us before we knew it, even when we didn't and don't deserve it. Pre – going before; grace - unconditional love.

Like Charles Dickens's story, 'A Christmas Carol', we too can find meaning by looking at the past, present and future.

The Spirit of Christmas Past begins with the prophet Isaiah voicing the desire and waiting, of a hurting people, 800 years before Jesus was even born. Their lives were filled with oppression and chaos. They awaited a king who would come and save them.

Isaiah wrote with Divine wisdom of the potential they were seeking. Waiting for The One, the Messiah. He wrote following an ancient Egyptian tradition, the King receives a series of royal titles at the beginning of his reign, and these titles reflect the people's high expectations for their new leader.

He wrote of their desire for a 'Wonderful Counselor' – A teacher full of wisdom. A king who would be called 'Mighty God' as all great kings of his day were called.

Yet someone who would be a 'Prince of Peace' bringing good relationship across the land. But also, an 'Everlasting Father', a Godly One to lead and guide them into the future.

"His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace." Isaiah could not have known how Jesus would arrive as a baby, to grow into a child, then a youth and then an adult, with authority growing within his ministry as he went.

Into all of the Chaos of thousands of years, as the earth continued to rotate, year after year, repeating itself over and over; into all of this, God becomes 'the Word made flesh' through Jesus Christ.

Still within The Spirit of Christmas Past, we find the actual birth of Jesus. The story is surreal to even imagine, God arriving, being birthed as a baby; a clue to the transforming possibilities of the new born king.

With his earthly beginning so mysterious yet auspicious, we should suspect that all of our other expectations for this king may be not quite be in-line with God's potential for this child.

Still, by avenues and methods we would not expect, Christ was able to wear the Isaiah titles, just not as the people of his time expected. Christ did come to bring peace in the midst of their chaos, and does so even today as the Everlasting God who walked the earth as a human, like you and me. Yet the sleeping babe is overshadowed by the cross in his future.

They came to see him: the shepherds...and the wise men...From their own very different worlds of chaos, they came to find the Messiah – a baby asleep on the hay. The shepherds became wise ones in the seeking, and so it is said today: "Wise ones still seek him."

Now we might miss the birth of a Jewish baby from 2000 years ago, except God is still transforming all who ask for it, through that birth of the Christ child. The Spirit of Christmas Present is alive and well, or you wouldn't have been drawn to this place on this evening.

I know that we all like to come to be together and greet families, who come together to worship; and for some there may have been a bribe of presents to get you here. But even all of that is a part of the Spirit of Christmas Present.

At this time of year, just as winter in Wisconsin keeps the flowers at a dormant stage: Jesus is still asleep on the hay, until it is a time that you are ready to awaken Christ within you, via the Spirit of Christmas Present.

Our lives are filled with differing kinds of oppression and chaos. The peace to endure is available to each of us. It has to be our choice if we accept or reject Christ in our lives.

David Wilcox is a Contemporary Acoustic Folk artist. He lists his songs on his web site as "Musical Medicine." Listen while I read the lyrics to his song '**Jesus Ruins Christmas**' by David Wilcox

*'Jesus ruins Christmas' that's what the headlines said  
"Jesus" in quotation marks, 'cause by then the man was dead*

*Jesus in the parking lot, talking to the poor  
He gathered up a crowd of us and he walked into that store*

*So Jesus stood in Bloomingdales, a rebel with a cause  
He stepped up on the platform, right next to Santa Claus*

*Jesus tore the wrappings off the presents on display  
These boxes are all empty - they've always been that way*

*"Now your eyes they can deceive you, let your soul look through this store  
It's all shiny empty boxes, but I've come to bring you more"*

*"The presence that I offer is infinite joy  
Free for the asking but you have to make your choice"*

*Well, first came security, then came the police,  
destroying private property, disturbing the peace*

*They hauled him off in shackles, with Billy clubs and guns  
But when the cops saw the angry crowd they said, "let them have their fun"*

*They wrapped him up in ribbons, they dragged him through the mall. They lashed him to a Christmas tree  
and they plugged it in the wall.*

*With a strand of broken Christmas lights wrapped around his head. They had killed him off by Easter, but they  
could not keep him dead. 'Jesus Ruins Christmas', that's what the headlines said.*

Jesus, bringing peace in the midst of Chaos, not by force but by a peaceful submission. When we are awake, it would be easy to just see the harsh reality of the world, but when we really clear the sleepy blariness from our eyes we can see that there, in the midst, is God breaking through it all and living in the world.

Change, is the wish of many people today who would expect to see God making a difference around them. They are many who hope for a better today, as long as they don't have to do much to help make the difference, besides maybe, greet the changes when they arrive.

Jesus didn't come to fix our problems according to our wishes and expectations. The work of the Christ Child, was to show us how to live, in peace, and sort our own chaos, with the help of the Holy Spirit guiding us toward God's light - in the midst of it all.

We have a choice, accepting or rejecting the peace; and not making a choice is a choice of rejection, a choice to continue as we are, wallowing in the muck and mire of the chaos surrounding us. Jesus comes bringing peace in the midst of Chaos.

Peace that passes our expectation and understanding. Peace with God and peace with one another. To have peace with someone is dependent on right relationship between you. Peace is both a gift of the Holy Spirit and a fruit of right relationship with someone.

Maintaining peace depends on our ability to forgive, our ability to share grace – that unconditional love, and our ability to believe in second chances and new beginnings.

Having peace allows us to sleep in the darkness, but doesn't expect us to live in darkness. Paul says in Romans 13:11-14 – "*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.*

*Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ..."*

God's light comes to us when we are willing to turn toward the light, thus allowing us to sleep like a baby with peace in our hearts. Tonight, we commune together, partaking of the body of Christ, as the body of Christ coming together.

Knowing the past and why he came to be with us and believing in the future with hope, you are invited to drop the chaos of your lives here at the foot of the cross and be ready to receive a peace that passes understanding.

In the Spirit of Christmas Future, I would end with a poem written by Ann Weems:

### **What I want for Christmas!**

A miracle!

A miracle is what I want for Christmas!

A miracle!

In the early morning hours, people still in darkness,  
I want us all to be awakened by the pealing of church bells loud and wild,

Pealing over and over and over again,  
urgent, joyful, overwhelmingly loud and wild!  
And when we rush out to see what is going on,  
Neighbors in front of us, neighbors behind us,  
All of us rushing to the church,  
The bells continue their pealing, loud and wild, over and over again.

On the steps of the church stand a very tall angel dressed in red,  
And he speaks to us: "Don't be afraid; I have great news,  
For to you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord."  
With those words there is much fluttering of wings  
and the sky is full of angels, all singing, bells still pealing,  
"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill."

With that we are lifted into the still dark sky  
And then put down in front of a dazzling light.  
When our eyes adjust, we drop to our knees,  
for we are manger-side in front of the Holy Child,  
bells still pealing; angels still singing peace.  
I look over my shoulder and it looks as if the whole world's on their knees,  
heads bowed, and we too are singing peace,  
and the dark sky is snowing stars as dawn breaks.

Suddenly the world is bright and the Holy Child is now a Man,  
And he calls us to come and sit at his table.  
With nail marks in his hands, he breaks bread and pours wine  
until the whole world is fed.  
We no longer are in darkness.  
Stars have fallen into our hearts and we sing like angels:  
The miracle is Life! Peace on earth has come!