

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, NORTHAMPTON MA**  
**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS**  
**DECEMBER 24, 2020 AT 8 PM**

**INSTRUMENTAL PRELUDE**

Dr. Grant Moss

**STATION AT THE CHRISTMAS CRECHE**

O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament,  
that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger!  
Blessed is Mary the God-bearer, who was worthy to bear Christ the Lord.  
Alleluia!

V. The Word was made flesh

**R. And dwelt among us.**

*Presider*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who in the Incarnation of your Son has revealed to us the holiness of creation, be pleased to bless and hallow this image of his sacred birth, so that those who gaze upon it may behold this mystery, whereby humanity shares in your very nature; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

*“Adeste fideles” instrumental music is played as the creche is censed.*

**A BIDDING PRAYER**

**Dear People of God: In this Christmas Season, let it be our duty and delight to hear once more the message of the Angels, to go to Bethlehem and see the Son of God lying in a manger. Let us hear and heed in Holy Scripture the story of God's loving purpose in the glorious redemption brought to us by his holy Child Jesus, and let us make this place glad with our carols of praise.**

**But first, let us pray for the needs of his whole world, for peace and justice on earth, for the unity and mission of the Church for which he died, and especially for his Church in our country and in this city.**

**And because God particularly loves them, let us remember in the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and those who mourn, the lonely and unloved, the aged and little children, as well as all those who do not know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, let us remember before God his pure and lowly Mother, and that whole multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in Jesus, we are one for evermore.**

**And now, to gather up all these petitions, let us pray in the words which Christ himself has taught us, saying:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

## **THE LESSONS**

### **GENESIS 2:4B-9,15-25 (God creates man and woman to live in the Garden of Eden)**

A reading from the book of Genesis.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground- then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So, the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Here ends the lesson.

## **HYMN 60 Creator of the stars of night (verses 1,3,4 & 5)**

*Creator of the starry height, thy people's everlasting light,  
O Christ, redeemer of us all, we pray you hear us when we call.*

*When this old world drew on toward night, you came; but not in splendor bright,  
not as a monarch but the child of Mary blameless mother mild.*

*At your great name, O Jesus now all knees must bend, all hearts must bow:  
All things on earth with one accord, like those in heaven shall call you Lord.*

*Come in your holy night, we pray, redeem us for eternal day;  
Defend us while we dwell below from all assault of our dread foe.*

## **ISAIAH 40:1-5 (God comforts his people and calls on them to prepare for redemption)**

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Here ends the lesson.

## **HYMN 67 Comfort, comfort, ye my people**

*Comfort, comfort, O my people, speak of peace, now says our God.  
Comfort those who sit in shadows, mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.  
Speak unto Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them.  
Tell of all the sins I cover, and that warfare now is over.*

*Hark, the voice of one who's crying in the desert far and near,  
bidding all to full repentance, since the kingdom now is here.  
Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way!  
Valleys, rise in exaltation; hills, bow down in adoration.*

*O make straight what long was crooked, make the rougher places plain.  
Let your hearts be true and humble, as befits a holy reign.  
For the glory of our God now o'er earth is shed abroad.  
And all flesh shall see the token that God's word is never broken.*

**ISAIAH 35:1-2, 4-7, 10 (The prophet proclaims that God will come and save us)**

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Say to those who are of a fearful  
heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible  
recompense. He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame  
shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth  
in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty  
ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become  
reeds and rushes. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and  
sighing shall flee away.

Here ends the lesson.

**HYMN 65 PREPARE THE WAY O ZION**

*Prepare the way, O Zion; your Christ is drawing near!  
Let ev'ry hill and valley a level way appear.  
Greet One who comes in glory, fore told in sacred story.  
Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.*

*He brings God's rule, O Zion; he comes from heav'n above.  
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, peace, and love.  
Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.  
Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.*

*Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior's rule embrace.  
His tidings of salvation proclaim in ev'ry place.  
All lands will bow before him, their voices will adore him.  
Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.*

## **LUKE 2:1-20 (Jesus is born at Bethlehem and is worshiped by angels and shepherds)**

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Here ends the lesson.

## **HYMN 78 O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 1,2,3, and 5)**

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love.  
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!  
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth!*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of the heav'ns.  
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray,  
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today!  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.*

## **THE CHRISTMAS COLLECT**

**O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light:  
Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth,  
may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit  
he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.**

## **SILENT NIGHT**

### **CHRISTMAS BLESSING**

May Almighty God, who sent his Son to take our nature upon him, bless you in this holy season, scatter the darkness of sin, and brighten your heart with the light of his holiness. **Amen.**

May God, who sent his angels to proclaim the glad news of the Savior's birth, fill you with joy, and make you heralds of the Gospel. **Amen.**

May God, who in the Word made flesh joined heaven to earth and earth to heaven, give you his peace and favor. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. **Amen.**

## **FESTIVE POSTLUDE Handel "Joy to the World"**