

Christmas Day Service for Mission & Service

This service is written in parts that can easily be led by an individual or a number of worship leaders.

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: We gather to once again hear the angels announce the good news of Jesus' birth,

All: To ponder the wonder of Jesus as Mary did when she held her child.

One: To glorify God as the shepherds did when they saw love lying in a manger,

All: To remember how Mary and Joseph cherished the infant Jesus.

One: On that first Christmas, the prophets knew Jesus would grow to love without limits,

All: caring for adults and children alike,

One: instructing followers to love their neighbours.

All: When Jesus said "Love your neighbour," he meant everyone.

One: His love was so profound that, even from the very first day, the angels couldn't keep from singing.

All: We've been singing along with the chorus of angels ever since.

One: Glory! Hallelujah! Christ is born!

Hymn

VU 36 "Angels, from the Realms of Glory"

Prayer of Approach (in unison)

O God, today we celebrate the coming of the Christ child to the world. Over 2,000 years ago, hope, peace, joy, and love came to light not in a palace but in an ordinary stable; by the fire of Jesus' spirit, hearts like ours have been warmed ever since. And still today, we pray that love burns strong within us that even the smallest child can find comfort and warmth in its glow. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Children's Time

Invite the children to tell you about the most favourite gifts they have ever received (not just for Christmas). Next, ask them about the best gift they have ever given. Be curious about why they thought the gift they mention was the best so you can get at the deeper meaning (*e.g., I knew it would make XYZ happy. I thought it would help XYZ.*)

Explain that Christmas is a time when we focus on being generous, but God calls us to be generous all the time. That's why we have an offering every week. It reminds us to be generous with our time, our talent, and our money, not just at Christmas but year-round.

Ask the children what they can give today. Before the service, write things that children could give (not just at Christmas, but any time of year) on slips of paper, and put them in a box.

(Suggestions: A kind word. Clothes they have outgrown. A prayer for Mission & Service partners. Helping someone at home. Sharing a toy or treat. A thank you to someone who has helped them. Friendship for someone who is bullied. A homemade card....)

Invite any children who want to participate to take one slip out and give a special gift according to what the paper says. Offer to talk about the experience next week.

Pray: Holy God, the Bible says it's better to give than to receive. Inspire us to give joyfully just like Jesus did. Amen.

Children's Song

VU 50 "He Is Born" *(This song is great to play along with shakers or clap to.)*

Reading: Proverbs 14:20–21

Intro: The book of Proverbs includes wise sayings about what matters most in life. Think of it as the elder in your family whispering the most important things they have learned to you. In this short excerpt from chapter 14, verses 20–21, the writer says that although it is human nature to value the powerful over the powerless, more is expected from us. Listen to the Spirit speak to you through these wise words:

The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

Responsive Reading: Psalm 148, VU p. 871

Intro: Psalm 148 is all about praise. It's not just about how humanity praises God—it's about how God is praised throughout the cosmos. The first verses talk about how the angels, stars, and lights of the heavens praise God. Then, the psalm focuses on how the earth, including the mountains, trees, and animals, glorify God. Finally, it concludes with us, God's people. From the highest heavens to earthly creatures, when God is present, creation sings "Glory be to God on high."

Sound familiar? You are right, the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest heaven" when Jesus was born, and just like the heavens proclaimed God in Psalm 148, in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth a star leads seekers to the stable. The idea is that when God is present, every element of the cosmos offers praise.

Let's read and sing together.

Reading: Luke 2:8–20

Intro: Listen to the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke as though I'm reading it to you for the first time. You may even want to close your eyes and visualize the scene. Imagine being a

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shepherd hearing the good news for the first time. Imagine hearing the heavenly host praising God. What would you be expecting to find in Bethlehem?

May God bless us with insight as we listen to a reading from our sacred scripture:

Now in that same 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, and 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, just as it had been told them.

Reflection Series: For Love of a Child

The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the Messiah who had been announced with such joy and praise to God. They likely went curiously, not certain what to expect, but as the angels had said, the shepherds found a child in a stable lying in a manger, watched over by Mary and Joseph.

The Messiah. The promised one of God. Born like one of them. Sent to save people like them. A baby needing his parents to feed him and change him, protect him, raise him, and love him.

After the shepherds visited the Holy Family, they went on their way, glorifying and praising God.

Hymn

VU 55 “In the Bleak Midwinter,” verse 4

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

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If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him – give my heart.

Reflection

Luke's gospel goes on to tell how Jesus was named and circumcised according to the law, how Mary was purified after her time of healing, and Jesus was presented in the temple before the family returned to Nazareth, where Jesus grew through childhood into adulthood and "became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40), surrounded by his family and community.

During his ministry, Jesus showed compassion for the small, the sick, the weak, and especially for the children he encountered. He counselled the people who wanted to follow him to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to those who needed them; to welcome the stranger, comfort the sick, and visit the prisoner. And that children would be the first into the kingdom of God.

Hymn

VU 58 "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Infant holy; infant lowly; for his bed a cattle stall,
oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swift are wringing angels singing, noels ringing, tidings bringing;
Christ the babe is born for all. Christ the babe is born for all!

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new,
saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you. Christ the babe was born for you!

Reflection

Christ—the greatest gift of all—was born for all people. He made that clear throughout his life as he fulfilled the angels' message of "good news of great joy for all the people."

As Christ-followers, we too desire that all people will hear good news of great joy. We are called by God to love and serve our neighbours as Jesus—born in a stable and cradled in a manger—loved and served. What better way to help make that happen than by generously sharing what we have? When we combine our giving through Mission & Service, the good news of great joy is proclaimed as we help transform lives, inspire meaning and purpose, and build a better world. As a United Church, we share our resources so we can have a bigger impact than any one of us could have alone.

After we sing, I want to share Lakshmi's story with you because it illustrates just how important it is that our generosity is for all people.

Hymn

VU 64 "O Little Town of Bethlehem," verse 4

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.

Reflection

If anyone needs to hear great, glad tidings, it is the children who are trafficked around the world. Human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal enterprises because it is relatively low risk and has a high profit potential. In India, non-governmental organizations estimate that 20–65 million people, especially children and youth, are exploited.

Lakshmi, a teenager from West Bengal, India, went missing from her family home just a few months ago. Struggling to survive, Lakshmi was trafficked by her aunt, who promised that she could earn money and become independent. Thankfully, Lakshmi's parents contacted the Diocese of Durgapur, part of the Church of North India, which runs an anti-human-trafficking program supported by your Mission & Service gifts. The Diocese intervened, and on the threat of legal action, Lakshmi's aunt returned her to her parents.

The anti-trafficking program finds and frees women and children who are being trafficked. Once they are freed, your gifts help victims seek justice for what they have been through and regain a sense of worth and acceptance. With your help, young women like Lakshmi have a second chance at freedom, and families like hers can get their children back safely.

Your generosity through Mission & Service is one of the ways you and I tell children like Lakshmi that they matter to us and they matter to God. Is there any better gift than to let someone know they are valued and loved just as they are?

Hymn

VU 68 "All Poor Ones and Humble," verse 1

All poor ones and humble and all those who stumble,
come hastening; and feel not afraid;
for Jesus, our treasure, with love past all measure,
in lowly poor manger was laid.
Though wise men who found him laid rich gifts around him,
yet oxen they gave him their hay,

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and Jesus in beauty accepted their duty, contented in manger he lay.
Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him;
our service he ne'er can despise;
whose love still is able to show us that stable,
where softly in manger he lies.

Reflection

When you give to Mission & Service, you are giving as a Christ-follower out of love and gratitude for what you have been given.

Your generosity is restoring dignity, putting food on a table and a roof over a head, letting someone know they aren't alone, providing education, agricultural training, and life-saving advocacy. For some, like Lakshmi, your generosity means a second chance at life.

Through your gifts, you are bringing great joy.

Treasure that thought today. Treasure knowing that you are making a difference.

May God bless us with wisdom to appreciate all that we have and all that we have to give, and may that blessing change us this Christmastime to be generous followers of the One born in a stable. Amen.

Hymn

VU 70 "There's a Star in the East"

Offering

When you offer your gifts in this time of offering for the ministry of this community of faith and for our Mission & Service, know that you are proclaiming good news of great joy for *all* the people. Please be generous.

Offertory Hymn

VU 37 "Gloria"

Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, Gloria, alleluia, alleluia.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory in the highest!
Glory to God, glory to God, hallelujah, hallelujah!

Offertory Prayer (in unison)

Glory to you, O God! Glory to you for all the ways this offering supports the work of our church. Glory to you for all the ways these gifts extend care in our neighbourhood. Glory to

you for all the ways our support transforms and saves lives through Mission & Service. Glory to you, O God! Amen.

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

This prayer weaves together silence and speech. Instead of silence, you could choose to play a verse of a gentle Christmas hymn in the contemplative parts. VU 47, "Still, Still, Still," would be appropriate.

Intro: I invite you to intentionally pray in silence with me this morning, listening for the ways Jesus inspires us to live with generosity toward all. Let us pray.

Loving God, on this day that has become so much about consumerism and "stuff," we ask that you turn our attention to gratitude and generosity—gratitude for what we already have and generosity to give what we can. Quiet us now to open our hearts to you. (*pause*)

In the silence of our hearts, we open ourselves to listen for one way you are calling us to give of our time this week. (*silence*)

In the silence of our hearts, we open ourselves to listen for one way you are calling us to share our talent or ability this week. (*silence*)

In the silence of our hearts, we open ourselves to listen for one way you are calling us to be generous with what we have this week. (*silence*)

From the very first moment of Jesus's birth, he was surrounded by love and generosity. In his later life, he shared this deep love with the children around him and held children up as role models for those who would inherit the kingdom of heaven.

When we are tempted to limit love, open our hearts and minds. Stir our hearts to care deeply, to live compassionately, to impress the world with love.

In the way of the One who taught us what it means to love our neighbour, we pray: "Our Father/Creator, 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; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass 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."

Closing Hymn

VU44 "It Came upon the Midnight Clear"

Commissioning and Benediction

We are called to love as Jesus did, to live with compassion, and to live generously.

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May God who is our Creator and Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer bless us today and in all the days to come. Amen.