

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE PLAN

December 24, 2025 • 5:00pm & 11:15pm

Luke 2:1-7; John 1:1-5

"Jesus Arrives"

Even with Jesus' birth we should still be waiting.

Questions for the announcement loop

In preparing for Worship, consider the following:

- What are you giving God for Christmas this year?
- Where have you made space for the Christ Child in your life this season? This week? For the coming year?
- Upon hearing this story once more, what are you actually going to DO with it?

(5:00) Choral Introit

"Mercy Manger" arr. Jay Rouse

(11:15) Prelude

"The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy" by Don Besig; Duet: Lora and Noah Melton

Opening Sentence

Luke 2:6 (CEB)

While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby.

Merry Christmas! And welcome to Hawfields Presbyterian Church!...

Welcome Visitor!

We are glad you are here! Our nursery (5:00pm only) is in the Education Building (behind us) and our restrooms are in the buildings other than this Sanctuary.

Giving Is Still Possible

Sometimes, with the arrival of Christmas, it seems like everything stops. But the needs of our community march on and so if you find you have opportunity, spend time helping out in our local shelters and food banks, checking in on folks, and even donating money. This season finds some of the families in our community more on the brink than they have been. Don't just wait for opportunities to find you. Actively pursue them, look for them. Also, don't forget that, like the Good Samaritan

parable, needs don't just show up on holidays: they are ongoing.

Embrace Christmas

The story of the Nativity, of the birth of Jesus, is a remarkable affirmation of our common humanity. Not only has God not given up on us, God has embraced us intimately, with humility and vulnerability. This is NOT a usual position in which we like to live. At all. But nevertheless, God entrusts the Christ Child to us...to all of us. In following God's example this week and in the weeks (in the year) to come, let us embrace God back by embracing our fellow humanity. And let us do so with intimacy, humility and vulnerability, in other words, with the love of God.

...Greet One Another in Christ!

In this moment, let us take a deep breath, silence our devices, and prepare for worship together using our Advent Wreath. As you are able in heart or body, let us stand together.



Advent Wreath (Candle of Christ: white candle)

Leaders: Christ shall prevail in small and large places, In small and large fashion, in small and large people, unknown and famous, kind and unkind. Christ is embodied in the world around us and within us.

People: We will serve the Lord with celebration! We will come before Christ with hearts ready to love! Let every living thing praise the Lord!

*leader: Jesus is here!...(light white candle)
Let us pray:*

All: Lord God, thank you for teaching us your songs even in times of breathless evil. Thank you for sending us Jesus. Thank you for causing Jesus to be kindled in us. Help us take heart as we celebrate the light of the Christ Child. Amen.

Let us sing together...

Hymn:

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" GTG#119

Prayer of Confession Series

Mary's faith journey didn't end with the birth of Jesus. It only continued from there. We must resist the temptation to allow our faith to get stuck in place, even in wonderful moments. Let us begin with silent prayer...

Please pray silently...

Pray: Holy God, this is the night of nights. We rightfully celebrate the birth of Jesus. We know we celebrate him for what he would do. We also celebrate Jesus for what he will do for us now. Our faith doesn't begin and end with his birth alone. So, Lord, please, forgive us when we don't go any further. Forgive us when we allow Jesus' birth to become a occasional ritual rather than a way of life.

Despite our efforts to live differently, thank you for giving us real hope, real love, real joy and real peace always. May we come to reflect your generosity as enthusiastically as we receive it. Thank you for listening, God. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

*Knowing what is coming, God sends Jesus to us anyway. Entrusts Jesus to us anyway. Of all the gifts we could ever want or hope for, let us be open to God's hope for us and speak the great truth of our lives:
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.*

Sung response:

"Angels We Have Heard on High" GTG#113

Proclamation of the Word

Say: The Word of God is alive and working. The Word of God lives as the Spirit lives in us. So when God speaks we should listen. When God reveals we should not close our eyes. Let us be open to this gift of God and ask for help to understand. Let us pray...

Pray/Sing: "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice" (GTG #132, verse 3)

Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice; now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save!

Calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall.

Christ was born to save!

Christ was born to save!

Read: Luke 2:1-8 (CEB)

Jesus is born.

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. ² This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. ³ Everyone went to their

own cities to be enrolled. ⁴ Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. ⁵ He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

Say: *For the Word of God in Scripture, for the Word of God among us, for the Word of God within us,*

All: Thanks be to God!

(5:00 Song for Christmas

"Ding Dong, Merrily on High" arr. Ruth Morris Gray

(5:00) Children's Message

Adults, you'll need:

- a gift (for each child)
- To be sure to wait for answers!

"What Does Jesus Want?"

- (Showing the gifts) Do you know what these are? Yes! They're Christmas presents. They're beautiful aren't they? Just look at them...what do you want for Christmas?...
- Those are all great ideas! But whose birthday is it today?...It's Jesus! It's his birthday we're celebrating. Soooo... what did you get Jesus? What do you think Jesus wants for his birthday?
- As it turns out, Jesus wants *you*! Actually, Jesus wants all of us. And Jesus wants us to have good things and to be good people.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them what they got Jesus for Christmas. And ask them what they think *YOU* should give. Merry Christmas and thanks be to God!
- Don't forget to pray!

(5:00) Anthem

"Mary, Did You Know?" Arr. Russell Maudlin

(11:15) Anthem

"Calypso Lullaby (Mary's Little Boy Child)" arr. Joel Raney; Soloist: David Ealy

Sermon: "Jesus Arrives"

Even with Jesus' birth we should still be waiting.

So, let's just cut to the chase: **babies are pretty useless.**

Oh, don't get me wrong, they're cute (until they're not). They can make a lot of noise and an incredible mess. Babies are very skilled at being a writhing, crying, mound of moving flesh.

But they can't read or write. They can't walk much less run. They can't drive. Babies can't get on the shooting range with you and they can't run a lighthouse. Babies are terrible at languages. They certainly can't speak. They can't fly or grant you magical powers. Babies can't take out the trash, do the dishes or clean the bathrooms. They can't even take care of themselves. In fact, babies can't even be co-dependent: they are *completely* dependent. Babies are useless.

But if usefulness was the only measure for a person's value, we would all be in trouble. How many of us over many times have proven ourselves useless? How often have we failed to follow through, made mistakes, or just plain sabotaged an agreed upon plan? How many times has apathy, laziness or even stubbornness ruled the day of our thinking and actions?

But God's affection for us isn't wrapped up in all of that. **God's concern with us is in what's possible.**

You can see it in everything created. First of all, stuff *grows*. There's no such thing as instant redwoods or even squash. There's a process. Things move from seed to sprout to bloom. Animals develop. Seasons change over time, not instantly. Even death can exact a toll of time. **Things take time.**

This is especially true of relationships. Trust takes a LOT of time to restore, faith takes time to be established and love sparks but takes time to become a fire, no matter what the poems say. It's no wonder then that the way God addresses the ills of humanity and the fate of the entire planet is through a baby.

We love babies for the same reason God does: everything's possible. We don't know what they'll be when they grow up but we pour our love and care into them. We don't know what their preferences or quirks or talents will be, but we prepare them as best we can to explore. We have no idea what their health, the choices, their beliefs will ultimately be, but we grow with them (at least we should be).

That means, for all of the waiting Mary—and really, every one else ever—did, there was still more waiting to do. But it's not like DMV kind of waiting. You know...when you stand outside for however long, only to go inside and take a number for—wait for it—more waiting.

In fact, the opening song **to the musical, The Band's Visit**, describes the human conundrum perfectly:

Waiting. What's new here?
You're waiting, I'm waiting
'Cause that's what we do here
Same as we do every day
For something, I don't know, to happen
No, just something different to happen
Just waiting for something to change

Just a change

...But no one's complaining
We're experts at waiting

Time's like a river sometimes
Time's like an ocean
The sofa is my boat
And I'm just drifting right along

Time is like syrup
And I'm the bug stuck
In the syrup
Just trying to find out
What I'm doing wrong

You know what I think
There's two kinds of waiting
There's the kind where you're
expecting something new
Or even strange
But *this* kind of waiting,
you keep looking off out into the distance
Even though you know the view
is never going to change
You wait....

Waiting, for something
For anything to happen
Just waiting for anything to
Wait...

Yikes!

Our waiting for the coming of the Christ should not have been like that. And our waiting for what comes next shouldn't be like that either. **In fact, like the measures Mary took** to get ready—having THAT conversation with Joseph, the visit with Elizabeth, everything she had to do to carry Jesus to term, traveling to Bethlehem, changing the birth plan (seriously, you KNOW the manger was not plan A)—for all the waiting Mary did before Jesus arrived, she had more waiting to do.

She had her faith in God to maintain, to grow. She had the challenges that surely came with raising Jesus. And as we read ahead, what happened to Joseph? We know he was around long enough for Jesus to have siblings, but we really don't know what happened to him. Maybe it was too much for him. Maybe he passed away. All we know for sure is Mary was a single parent at the wedding of Cana, a single parent at the cross. Could she even conceive of the resurrection? Much less the Church that would grow afterwards? All of that required more than just being a spectator. It required more than just waiting-in-line-at-the-DMV kind of faith. It required her participation, her struggle, her wrestling with God. She had to wrestle with the meaning of Jesus in her life. Mary wasn't just a mother (as though you could say such a thing). Mary was all of us.

You see, we all should be wrestling. We all should be growing. We all should be contemplating how Jesus must grow and how we must grow alongside. We all should be asking our questions, seeking answers, knocking on every door God shows to us. We should all be considering discipline and correctives for us as well as our children. We all should be practicing making use of the divine authority we share to change the world around us. We should be making mistake after mistake after mistake as we try to even understand the faith God has given us. And we should be living in the very themes of Advent: maintaining hope, practicing love, reacting with joy, and living as peacemakers, people who try to make things right. **THAT's how we wait, y'all.** Even with Jesus' birth we should still be waiting.

And while wait, we do not do so alone. Because if Emmanuel means anything, if the birth of Jesus Christ means anything at all, we do NOT wait alone. God waits with us, now and always.

Thanks be to God! Merry Christmas!

(5:00 & 11:15PM) Hymn

"What Child Is This?" GTG#145

Service of Candlelight

(slides change to "dark mode" and the lights dim)

Read: John 1:1-5 (CEB)

Jesus is the light.

- ¹ In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.
- ² The Word was with God in the beginning.
- ³ Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being
- ⁴ through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.
- ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

- **Let us pray:** You are the God of our hopes, the author of Love, the inspiration for Joy and your will is peace, Lord: Thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ! As we celebrate his birth, may our lives honor his coming. May we make room, everyday, for Christ to be born in us. Help us be mindful as we move from this night into the flurry of choices and circumstances that will surely try to steer away from you. But in this moment, with the lighting of candles, having sung the songs, heard from your Word and faced with the symbols of your grace, help us rejoice and draw your peace into our hearts. Christ has arrived, O Lord. You have determined that we do also. Thank you, Lord. And Merry Christmas, Great God. In the name of the one who is born to us and among us. Amen.

- (light a candle as we sing)

- **Sing: "Silent Night" (GTG#122)**

- **Pray:** ...Thank you for believing in us, Thank you for transforming us. Thank you for teaching us, even how to pray when words fail 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. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

(5:00PM) Special Music

"Go, Tell It on the Mountain" arr. Donald Moore; Trio: Sean Cooper, David Ealy, Noah Melton

(11:15) Song for Christmas

"Will You Come to the Manger?" by Sally DeFord; Duet: Lora and Noah Melton

Hymn

"Joy to the World" (GTG#134)

Sending & Benediction

Even with Jesus' birth we should still be waiting.

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart, Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guide your hearts and minds this day and forever more. Amen!

Sing: "Jesus, Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child" (GTG#126)

Jesus, Jesus, O what a wonderful child.
Jesus, Jesus, so holy, meek and mild;
New life, new hope the child will bring,
Listen to the angels sing:
"Glory, glory, glory!" Let the heavens ring.

Postlude

"Go, Tell It On the Mountain"
arr. Victor Labenske