

Alternate Lessons and Carols Service with Communion

PRELUDE

OPENING SENTENCES

HYMN

O Come, All Ye Faithful vs. 1, 3

PH* 41

READING: Gen. 3:8-15, 17-19 *Sin's consequences*

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' ¹¹He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹²The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' ¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

'Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.'

¹⁷And to the man he said,
'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
"You shall not eat of it",
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;

* PH denotes *The Presbyterian Hymnal*

you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.'

CONFESSION OF SIN

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (vs. 1)

PH 9

ASSURANCE OF PARDON: Genesis 22:15-18 *God promises blessing for the whole earth through Abraham's faithfulness.*

Hear the good news! Our God provides blessing for the whole earth through Abraham's faithfulness by choosing to provide and bless a people who are humbly obedient, as God speaks through Genesis 22:15-18:

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

HYMN

Comfort, Comfort You My People vs. 1-3 (from Isaiah 40:1-8)

PH 3

READING: Isaiah 11:1-4 *The Promise of Redemption and Restoration*

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,

the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

HYMN

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming, vs. 1-2

PH 48

READING: Luke 1:26-35, 38 *God's angel appears to Mary with an annunciation.*

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁸Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

HYMN Canticle of the Turning¹

or

Song of Mary

PH 600

READING: **Luke 2:1-7** *God's promise comes to pass*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called

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Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and swaddled him and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

HYMN

Once in David's Royal City vs. 1-2

PH 49

READING: **Luke 2:8-16** *Good news of Emmanuel comes to those on the margins of society.*

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

¹⁵ 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.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

HYMN

Angels We Have Heard on High vs. 1-3

PH 23

READING: **Matthew 2:1-11** *All nations' wisdom bows down to God's Wisdom from on High.*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

READING: “The Journey of the Magi” by T.S. Eliot²

REFLECTION (*Outline*)

Today’s lessons represent God’s story of which we’re a part.

It’s a story of darkness and light, of birth and death, as the Magi in Eliot’s poem know. Though the story is ultimately a journey in honor of birth, it is also one of death. As Eliot asks, :were we led all that way for Birth or Death?”

Christ’s birth is the death of ourselves as royal sovereigns so we can no longer be content with living the life of luxury where silken servants serve sherbet.

But with the death of ourselves at the center of the universe, there is a new beginning, a new world, a new birth of Christ, God-with-us.

READING: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

² from T. S. Eliot’s *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (Faber, 1974),. Worship leaders are granted permission to read this orally by Farer & Farer, who hold the rights to Eliot’s estate. However, you can only print the title of the poem, not the poem itself, in the bulletin or on screen without securing copyright permission from the U.S. publisher Harcourt.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

HYMN

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence, vs. 1, *a capella*

PH 5

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND HOLY COMMUNION

We thank you, very God of very God, that you are a Creator who blesses the earth with the beauty of your goodness. When we sin and misunderstand your intentions, you bless us with mercy, promising new life. In Jesus you take on our frail flesh in order to wrap us in your divinity.

Bread of life, born in Bethlehem, house of bread, laid out in a feeding trough among the poor and hard-working animals whose toil feeds others, pour out your Holy Spirit upon these gifts of our labor that, in communion with your body, we may be bread for a hungry world, cup of life for those in death's despair. This we ask in Christ, through Christ, with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. May all glory and honor and majesty be yours now and forevermore. Amen.

Our story is not all pretty. There are thorns among the rose. On the night of his betrayal, arrest, beating, and mock trial under cover of night, our Lord ate his last supper with those whom he loved unto the end. While he was at table, he took bread, blessed and broke it, saying "This is my body for you. Take, eat, in remembrance of me." He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of all sin. Whenever you drink it, do so in remembrance of me."

HOLY COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION:

You have fed us like a mother pelican out of your own body's blood. We have incorporated your body into our bodies at this table spread with the mysteries of divine incarnation. Together we are part of your body. May we rise from this

place refreshed, renewed, and empowered to serve the world you so love through Christ our Lord, who taught us to live as we pray, saying,

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*in the language closest to your heart*)

HYMN Rise Up Shepherd and Follow vs. 1-2

PH 50

CHARGE AND BLESSING

POSTLUDE AND DEPARTURE TO SERVE