

Bedford Presbyterian Church

105 West Main Street, Bedford, Virginia

From 1844 to 2023 (179 Years)

December 24th Evening Service



WELCOME

Rev. Philip Parker

PRELUDE

“Clair de Lune” with “Silent Night”

Christy Boone

CALL TO WORSHIP

“Isaiah 9”

Video Clip

***OPENING PRAYER**

Rev. Bill Rutledge

One: God of deep and dazzling darkness, here on this night of silence and mystery, we need to hear that You love us.

All: We need to hear again Your promise never to leave us; we need to hope in You.

One: Hear our prayer for all who weep tonight, and those who wait beside the dying. (pause)

Hear our prayer for frightened children, for anxious parents and families in distress.

(pause) Hear our prayer for nations at war, for hungry refugees and those unjustly oppressed. (pause) Hear all our prayers.

All: God of deep and dazzling darkness, our world is in Your hands and so are we. We rest in You. In Christ our Lord’s name. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

John and Sonya Smith

***HYMN**

“Once in Royal David’s City”

Hymn 183

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In unison)**

Rev. Rutledge

God of Joy, we come to celebrate again the arrival of Love Incarnate here in our very midst. Your glorious arrival is enough to cause the forests to sing for joy, yet we still find reasons to complain and sigh. Your light of salvation is bright enough to illuminate every corner of our lives, yet we still find ourselves shrouded in worry and doubt. Your gift of love is big enough for the whole world, yet we still find it difficult to extend Your love to those whom we deem to be unworthy.

God, You invite us into the light of the stable where the overlooked and forgotten have gathered to celebrate the miracle of Your love. Let us experience Your presence tonight as we gather around the manger to worship our Lord and Christ. Amen.

***WORDS OF ASSURANCE (Luke 2)**

ONE: Friends believe the good news of the gospel:

ALL: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Through Jesus Christ we have been born again to new life.

***HYMN**

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Hymn 180

DUET

“Light of the World”

Ella & Maggie

SERMON

“A JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS”
The Story of the Christ Child

Rev. Parker

John 1: 1-4 & 14, Luke 2:1-7, Philippians 2:5-8

PART 1- “A JOURNEY FROM HEAVEN”

During the month of December we have been on a journey to Christmas. Along the way we have met a number of individuals who were a part of that first Christmas. We have yet to meet, however, the One who is the very reason for our journey, the Christ Child. He too was on a journey to Christmas, a journey which began not here on earth, but in heaven. What was it like to dwell in that spiritual realm? What was it like to experience a oneness with His Heavenly Father? What was it like to be the One through whom the universe came into existence? What was it like to experience eternity without beginning or end? What was it like to enjoy fellowship with angelic beings? What was it like to possess unlimited power and authority? In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we are given the opportunity to catch a glimpse of Christ before He came into our world. We are given the opportunity to see Him as the voice and presence of God Himself, the very Word which the Lord spoke when He said, “Let there be light.” Harkening back to that moment before even time itself was created, John writes in the first four verses of his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” Then in verse 14, John adds this additional declaration, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Can you imagine, even for just a moment, what it was like for Christ, the anointed One of God, to voluntarily surrender all of His power and majesty, to lay aside His robes of glory and enter into our little world as a little baby in Bethlehem? It’s almost beyond our ability to comprehend. It would almost be like a father and son looking down upon a scene of chaos and death as two colonies of little ants are fighting one with another. Moved by compassion for these tiny creatures, the father sends his son down into their world. It’s a difficult, sacrificial journey because in order to reach out and deliver these ants from their self-inflicted violence, the son must become like them. He too must become a lowly ant. That’s what Christ did for us when He stepped out of heaven and took upon Himself the flesh and blood of a lowly human being, a lowly human being like you and me

HYMN

“Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne”

On Screen

PART 2 – “A JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM”

The journey of the Christ Child into our world began with a heavenly announcement to a young woman named Mary, who was living in Nazareth of Galilee. She would give birth by the Holy Spirit to a son named Jesus, whose name meant “God’s Salvation.” During the nine months of her pregnancy the child within her would face a multitude of experiences just like any other prenatal infant, all of that came to a conclusion as Mary and Joseph made that long trek to Bethlehem recorded for us in Luke 2:1-7. Luke the Gentile doctor provides us with this account, “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census what took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” What must that journey have been like for the Christ Child? The long trip on foot, at best riding with His mother on a donkey? Then the birth experience itself? What did He hear, what did He see, what did He feel as He entered into our world? Being truly human, He knew nothing of His previous existence. He was just like any other new born baby. Recognition of His divinity would come later as He

studied the Scriptures and became aware of His divinely appointed mission in life. Now He was just a little new born baby. He smelled the straw of the makeshift bed in which He had been laid. He heard the soft bleats of the sheep and the gentle bellowing of the cattle nearby. He had truly entered into our world and had done so in a most humble manner. He had not been born in a palace, not even an inn. His nursery was a stable, perhaps a cave beneath Bethlehem's township. To say the least, it was an inauspicious beginning.

HYMN

"The Friendly Beasts"

On Screen

PART 3- "A JOURNEY OF DELIVERANCE"

Why did the Son of God come into our world in such an unpretentious manner? Why did He humble himself to be born as a tiny babe in a stable and to grow up in a place where everyone said, "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" Perhaps this illustration will help us to understand why Christ humbled Himself to become like one of us. A king in an ancient kingdom would frequently dress himself in the clothing of his subjects, not the rich and magnificent robes that he wore in the palace. He would then go out and mingle among his subjects, speaking and visiting with them incognito, discovering how they lived and what they needed. His servants and ministers in the palace were horrified. Something could happen to their monarch. If recognized, he might be accosted or even killed. They did their best to dissuade him from these foolhardy and dangerous adventures. But he paid them no mind. He said to them, "How else can I really know those for whom I am responsible. How else can I really know and serve those who live within my realm." Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Christ came to live among us and to become like one of us.

There is another reason as well. Paul expresses it in his letter to the Philippians. Encouraging the Christians in that city to exhibit a Christ like demeanor he said to them, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). If you want to know the reason why Christ came into our world, the one reason above all other reasons, here it is. His journey to Christmas was a journey of deliverance. He came to save us from our sins and to restore our relationship with His Heavenly Father. That is why He came into our world and that is why we have gathered together this evening to celebrate His birth. He came to rescue us, to redeem us, to save us, even at the cost of His own life on a cross.

HYMN

"I Wonder as I Wander"

Hymn 225

***WORSHIP SONG**

"A Christmas Alleluia"

On Screen

COMMUNION

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

***HYMN**

"Silent Night"

Hymn 186

(Choir exits with lighted candles, followed by the congregation)