**Southminster Presbyterian Church**

**3rd Sunday of Advent**

**December 17, 2023**

**9:30 a.m.**

Find the link for the service on one of these sites:

1) on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthminsterGlenEllyn/>
2) our YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPgWICngOvkmR1OXgCG_wiA/live>

3) our web site: <https://www.southminsterpc.org/>

If the video feed is interrupted during the service, we will continue to record and then post the full video on Facebook and our web site as soon as possible.

 Gathering Music

Our Photo Story today is “Christmas Trees.”

 Welcome, Announcements and Moment for Mission

 Improvisational Prelude

  Hymn 104: *O Lord, How Shall I Meet You*

**O Lord how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart's delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy, a lamp within my breast,
To do in spirit lowly all that may please you best.**

**Love caused your incarnation; love brought you down to me;
Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty.
O love beyond all telling, that led You to embrace
In love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race.**

**You come, O Lord, with gladness, in mercy and good will,**

**To bring an end to sadness and bid our fears be still.**

**In patient expectation we live for that great day**

**When your renewed creation your glory shall display.**

Public domain

 Call to Worship

 Leader: Angelic voices spreading the news.

 **People: Joyous songs on a Sunday morning.**

 Leader: Memories of carols sung and music enjoyed,

 **All:** **Still echoing in our lives and prompting us to sing.**

 Hymn 83: *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (verses 1, 2)

**Come, though long-expected Jesus,**

**Born to set thy people free,**

**From our fears and sins release us;**

**Let us find our rest in thee.**

**Israel’s strength and consolation,**

**Hope of all the earth thou art;**

**Dear desire of every nation,**

**Joy of every longing heart.**

Public domain

 Prayer of Confession: (unison)

**Wondrous God, your love is wider than our sight; your grace is more wonderful than we can sing. You chose to visit us as a child in a manger, and love us as a friend. We admit that there is much in us that is not ready to receive you. Help us to pause in your presence long enough that we might hear a song that lights our hearts, that we might find you in our common tasks. Come; give us a heart of praise and a song of gladness, in Jesus Christ we pray. Now hear our personal and silent prayers. Amen.**

 (Time of silence for personal prayer and confession)

 The Good News of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:4-7)

 Leader: This is the message we have heard from Christ and
 announce to you. God is light, and in Him there is no
 darkness at all.

 **People: If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light,
 we have fellowship with one another, and with him.**

 **All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and made new.**

 Response 82: *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*  (verse 2)

**Born thy people to deliver,**

**Born a child and yet a king,**

**Born to reign in us forever,**

**Now thy gracious kingdom bring.**

**By thine own eternal Spirit**

**Rule in all our hearts alone;**

**By thine all sufficient merit**

**Raise us to thy glorious throne.**

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 The Passing of the Peace

 Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

 Leader: Lord, in your mercy,

 **People**: **hear our prayers.**

**The Lord’s Prayer:** (unison)

**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.**

Offering of Ourselves and Our Gifts

[The offering plate is at the back of the sanctuary. Please leave your gift or pledge
in the plate on your way into or out of worship.]

 Offertory Anthem: *Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending*  Sam Batt Owens

 \*Response 107: *Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn* (verse 1)

**Awake! Awake, and greet the new morn,**

**For angels herald its dawning,**

**Sing out your joy, for soon he is born**

**Behold! The Child of our longing.**

**Come as a baby weak and poor,**

**To bring all hearts together,**

**He opens wide the heavenly door**

**And lives now inside us forever.**

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 Prayer of Thanksgiving and Dedication

 **The Christmas Program: “Joyful Noise”**

 Prayer for Illumination

 Scripture Reading: John 1

 Carol 88: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (verses 1-4)

Verse 1

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Verse 2

**O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
Who orderest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show;
And cause us in her ways to go.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Verse 3

**O come, O come, thou Lord of might,**

**Who to thy tribes on Sinai’s height**

**In ancient times didst give the law**

**In cloud and majesty and awe.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Verse 4

**O come, thou Root of Jesse, free**

**Thine own from Satan’s tyranny;**

**From depths of hell thy people save**

**And give them victory o’er the grave.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Public domain

  Undisclosed Laboratory

 Auntie’s Living Room

 Scripture Reading:  Luke 2:1-5

 Carol 145: *What Child Is This* (all 3 verses)

**What child is this, who laid to rest,**

**On Mary's lap is sleeping?**

**Whom angels greet with anthems sweet**

**While shepherds watch are keeping?**

**This, this is Christ the King,**

**Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;**

**Haste, haste to bring him laud,**

**The babe, the Son of Mary!**

**Why lies he in such mean estate**

**Where ox and ass are feeding?**

**Good Christian, fear; for sinners here**

**The silent Word is pleading.**

**Nails, spear, shall pierce him through;**

**The cross be borne for me, for you.**

**Hail, hail the Word made flesh,**

**The babe, the Son of Mary.**

**So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;**

**Come, one and all, to own him.**

**The King of kings salvation brings;**

**Let loving hearts enthrone him.**

**Raise, raise the song on high.**

**The virgin sings her lullaby.**

**Joy, joy, for Christ is born,**

**The babe, the son of Mary!**

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 On the Road with Mary and Joseph

 Checking into the Hospital

 Carol 121: *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (verse 1)

**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.**

Public domain

 Auntie’s Living Room

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 Scripture Reading: Luke 2:6-7

 Shepherds and Angels

 Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-19

 Burger King

 Too Many Kings

 Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-11

 Carol 151: *We Three Kings of Orient Are* (all 3 verses, as indicated)

Verse 1 - children

**We three kings of Orient are**

**Bearing gifts we traverse afar,**

**Field and fountain, moor and mountain,**

**Following yonder star.**

**O star of wonder, star of night,**

**Star with royal beauty bright,**

**Westward leading, still proceeding,**

**Guide us to thy perfect light.**

Verse 2 – Derek Buckley

**Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,**

**Gold I bring to crown him again,**

**King forever, ceasing never**

**Over us all to reign.**

**O star of wonder, star of night,**

**Star with royal beauty bright,**

**Westward leading, still proceeding,**

**Guide us to thy perfect light.**

Verse 5 – congregation and choir

**Glorious now behold him arise,**

**King and God and Sacrifice:**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Sounds through the earth and skies.**

**O star of wonder, star of night,**

**Star with royal beauty bright,**

**Westward leading, still proceeding,**

**Guide us to thy perfect light.**

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 Enter King Herod

 Pastor’s Response

 Carol 136: *Go, Tell It on the Mountain* (all 3 verses)

Chorus

**Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!**

Verse 1

**While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.**

**Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!**

Verse 2

**The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior’s birth.**

**Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!**

Verse 3

**Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.**

**Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!**

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 Lighting the Advent Wreath

Lighters: 1. We light these candles as a sign of the coming of Christ.

 2. Advent means coming.

 3. We are preparing ourselves for the days

 4. when the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,

 5. the desert shall rejoice and blossom;

 6. like the rose it shall blossom abundantly,

 7. and rejoice with joy and singing.

 Leader: Jesus is the light of the world.

 **All:** **Let us walk in the light of the Lord!**

 Carol 134: *Joy to the World* (verses 1-3, as indicated)

Trumpet introduction

Verse 1 Children/bells

**Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
Let earth receive her king;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

Verse 2 choir and congregation

**Joy to the world! the Savior reigns;
Let all their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

Verse 3 choir, congregation, bells, trumpet

**No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.**

Public domain

 Charge and Benediction

 Leader: Now go and serve the Lord,

 **All: For we are blessed to be a blessing!
 Amen! Amen!**

 Postlude:

 Carol 134: *Joy to the World* (verse 4, as directed)

**He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.**

**Participants and Technical Crew**

Pastor Wendy Boden
Liturgist: Andrea Schmidt
Deacon Greeter/Fellowship: Angela Smith
Musicians: Tom Anderson, Southminster Choir, Southminster’s children, Derek Buckley,
 David Kozich,
“Joyful Noise” participants: Grace Hammer, Elspeth Parks, Joe Parks, Jake Falkman, Samantha
 Falkman, Troy Hammer, Caroline Linde, Jay Lerch, Del Meester
Worship Associate: David Kozich
Tech support: Chris Kozich, Blair Nelson

Flowers today are from Sue Knisely in memory of her parents, Evelyn and Howard Duell.

If you are present for worship, following the service you are invited by the deacons to gather for **in-person fellowship** in the narthex. Coffee and canned beverages will be served; masks and social distancing are at your discretion.

If you are online, we’re glad to have you! Using the comments section on Facebook, you can say hello, ask for words of peace, or request prayers.
 **Sunday Morning Adult Ed. Bible Study, 11:15 a.m.:** Join us by using this link: <https://meet.google.com/fna-eojg-uye>. If you’re already at church and wish to join us, find Blair at his computer in the parlor/library.

You are invited to join us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/SouthminsterGlenEllyn/>), where we have a live sharing of “**Heart to Heart**” with Pastor Wendy Boden at 4:20 p.m. most weeks Tuesday through Friday.

Even though we have returned to in-person worship, we will also continue to be live on **Sunday morning for worship** at 9:30 a.m. (slideshow beginning at 9:15) on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPgWICngOvkmR1OXgCG_wiA/live>

or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/SouthminsterGlenEllyn/>

If you are watching from home on Facebook, please check in and say hello so we can see that you have joined us. This is one way to make worship less “remote” and strengthen community at Southminster.

*The live video will appear about 15 minutes before the scheduled start time.*

*If for any reason the feed falters, rest assured that a recording will be posted to Facebook and You Tube as soon as possible.*

You can also find links to recordings of the weekday sessions, special services, and Sunday worship posted on our web site: <https://www.southminsterpc.org/> or by going to our YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPgWICngOvkmR1OXgCG_wiA/videos>

**Photo Stories/PowerPoints help us feel connected!**Photo Stories/PowerPoints help us prepare for worship, connect with one another, and make sure that our at-home people get both sound and sight. Coming up we’ll be looking for these:
 **December 24: “Nativity Scenes”** –Please send us your photos by Thursday,
 December 21.
 **December 31: “Timekeepers”** – Clocks, watches, calendars, hourglasses, sundials…
 ways we keep time! Please send us your photos by Thursday, December 28.

**Send photos to our dedicated email address, used just for photos:****PhotoStory@Southminsterpc.org****.** (If you only have hard copies of your photos, please leave them in the photo box on Pastor Wendy’s desk, labeled with your name and the date they are to be used.)

**Notes from Blair Nelson:**
**Adult Education**: This Sunday we begin studying our last minor prophet, Malachi. So, this will be a good time to join us, if you haven’t before. If you can’t be with us in person after worship and fellowship at 11:15 a.m., join us virtually through this link: <https://meet.google.com/fna-eojg-uye>. This will be our last class in 2023! We will resume in January.

**Men of Southminster**: Be sure to have Wednesday, January 17, at 7:30 p.m. on your calendar for a dessert fellowship. We will up our sugar content and get to know each other better. A couple of the guys will share about their lives and God’s role in it. Want to be one of them? Contact Blair N.
 **From the Worship Ministry:
Add these December worship services to your calendars:** ***- Longest Night Service*** at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 21, is a special service acknowledging challenges during the holidays, when Christmas may not seem “merry.” (This service will not be streamed.)
***- Christmas Eve*** is on a Sunday this year, which means there will be two services on December 24!
 + Sunday morning service at the usual 9:30 a.m. time.
 + ***The Christmas Eve service will again be at 4:30 p.m.!*** It will be a traditional service including Scripture, carols, choir, and candle lighting.(The earlier time accommodates choir members and others who wish to gather with their families later that evening.)
The **flower chart** for the first half of 2024 is posted in the Narthex. If unable to sign up at church, contact Sarah Allen (ridesrowdy@aol.com) with your requests. The cost of flower arrangements will stay at $35 for 2024. If you are donating your flowers, mark the chart with an X. Deacons deliver flowers that are donated.
The flower chart for July to December 2024 will be posted after Easter.

If you ordered a **poinsettia**, please be sure we have your payment. You may take the plants home after the Christmas Eve service on Sunday afternoon, December 24, or pick them up in the narthex on Tuesday, December 26, from 10-11:00 a.m. (Someone will be at church only during that hour.) If unable to pick up, please arrange for someone else to do so. There will be no home deliveries.
 **From the Mission Ministry: Christmas Offerings**As we prepare to celebrate of the birth of our Lord, our thoughts turn to helping others. **We at Southminster collect two special offerings at Christmas-time.**

The first offering is our **local mission offering**. This offering stays here at Southminster to help our Mission Ministry support our local missions with 75% going to the general mission and 25% going to one of our local missions chosen by the Mission ministry. This year that 25% will be donated to Walk-In Ministry. You can donate using the local Christmas offering envelopes with a red poinsettia design.

The second offering is a denomination wide offering. This offering is sent in its entirety to the Presbyterian Church (USA). 50% of these funds is used to support current and retired church workers with critical financial needs. The other 50% goes to make it possible for students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. You can donate using the lavender Christmas Joy envelopes.

Envelopes for both offerings will be placed on the offering stand in the Sanctuary for you to pick up. They also will be mailed to you with your December statement. If you choose to mail a check in to Southminster without using the envelopes, be sure you indicate on your check to which offering your donation is being made or how much of your check should go for each offering.

Both these offerings should be received by Christmas Eve and will be dedicated at the beginning of our service on
December 31.

**Women’s Circle: Looking Ahead!**Presbyterian Women will hold a **Purse Auction** on Sunday, February 4, 2024. We are looking for donations of purses that you do not want to keep but that are in good condition. The collection boxes will be out starting on December 31. Also needed are items that might be placed inside the purses, such as scarves or jewelry.

**The 2023 Church Financial Records must be closed promptly at the end of this month**. Any deposits, donations or pledges that need to be recorded in calendar year 2023 or bills to be paid from the 2023 budget must be into the church office no later than noon on Tuesday, January 2nd. If you have any questions, please contact Treasurer Tom Frey.

**Jubilee Bucks:**
We finished the year with a large order in time for the holiday season! Our total of “free” money for this year was $1,969.86! Our first order for 2024 will be on January 7.
 **Donations for PRC (People’s Resource Center)**:
Southminster has been faithfully providing donations of food items and personal care products for PRC for many years. If you would like suggestions for what to give, PRC has provided a list of the items that are most needed. Copies are printed on bright green paper and are in the stand on the nametag shelf (main hallway – across from the offices). You can view the list online at the PRC website: <https://www.peoplesrc.org/give-food-or-goods/>.
Many thanks to all who continue to support PRC’s mission to meet our communities’ needs, neighbor to neighbor.

**Care Notes:** “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” -Philippians 4:6
Even though we aren’t all together for worship, we are still collecting prayer requests! Please email or leave a message on our answering machine at 630-469-9149 if you won’t be present to fill out a prayer request slip.

**Friends,
You are all invited to offer prayer for people whether they are members or not. It would be a joy and very helpful to know how people are doing. If you have submitted a person to be prayed for, can you send an update to the office, please, once in a while? Thank you! Pastor Wendy**

**Joys and Concerns**  **The flowers today** are from Sue Knisely in memory of her parents, Evelyn and Howard Duell.
**We give thanks to God for joys:**
 - Elise Henkels’ brother, Curt, is continuing his recuperation at home. He was originally told he would remain hospitalized through Christmas.
 - Nalani Johnson graduated summa cum laude from Arizona State on December 12
  - Linda Wolf Jeziorski, as she continues to heal
**We pray for the whole world and our nation:**
  - We pray for an end to gun violence in our nation. In the first 10 days of December, there were 15 mass shootings (involving 4 or more victims), leaving 31 people dead and 39 injured. Click on [data from the Gun Violence Archive](https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/reports/mass-shooting) to see the current national statistics for mass shootings.
 - We remember the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, which was 11 years ago on December 14, and we pray for safety in our schools and any place where people gather.
  - We pray for our nation as we continue to wrestle with race relations.
 - All throughout the world who are recovering from earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters
  - We continue to pray for peace in the world, especially Ukraine/Russia, Israel/Gaza, and the Sudan
**Blessed are those who mourn:** - The Schmidt family on the sudden death of Parin’s Aunt Ruth
 - The family of Alan Meyer, who died after a long illness
 - The family of Mary Lou Issert, who passed away after a 25-year battle with breast cancer
 - We continue to pray for the Baldwin family in the death of Blair’s uncle.
 - The family of Nancy Eberhardt, a former Southminster member, who died November 7. Her Service of Witness to the Resurrection was held at Southminster yesterday.
  - We continue to pray for the family of Grace Van Beveren
  - We pray for Joan and for the Koska sons and their families, mourning the loss of Ed.
  - The family and many friends of Dan Bohi, and especially Deb, Jessica, and Megan and their families
**We lift up those who are affected by cancer, as well as their support systems:
*Please help us pray for your family and friends by updating your loved ones’ information with the church office. We support them and you in their journey.***
 - We continue to pray for: Bobby B., Frank B., Rod B., Annette C., Tom G., Dean L., Frank L., Jan M., Nikki M., Rebecca M., Tim O., Helen S., Marta S., Gerry S., Beverly W., and others we name in our hearts. **We pray for all who are recovering or dealing with mental or physical health or other challenges:**
 - Faith and others who are depressed
 - Floyd Rogers, recovering from an infection
 - Ann Anderson asks prayers for Dan, who is facing a heart transplant
 - Heidi Shierry’s cousin, Bailey, recovering from 3rd degree burns; it is a long journey!
 - Derek Buckley asks prayers for healing and speedy recovery for Ruth Ewing, who is hospitalized with MERSA.
 - Prayers for all who have Covid
  - Pain relief for Paul Anderson
  - Jim Smith, recovering at Brookdale
  - We pray for those who are in hospice care: Gail Johnston at Du Page Convalescent Center (If you send a card to Gail, please mail it to Andrea Schmidt, whose address is in the directory.); former President Jimmy Carter.
 - We continue to pray for Viola’s family, Miles, Mary, Maykel, Edem, and others we name in our hearts.
**We pray for the Jeremiah 29 discernment task force and all of us as we seek God’s will for Southminster in the 21st century.** May we all be attentive to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

**Caring for you!**Our **Congregational Care Committee** is ready to assist in time of need. If you need assistance from the Congregational Care Ministry or Helping Hands) in December, call Angela Smith (630-235-1376). You may call Pastor Wendy Boden on her cell or home phone (if she has shared the numbers with you) or leave a message for her at the church office: 630-469-9149. Email Wendy at wendy@southminsterpc.org. (Please note that she can only read email when she is in the office.) You may also call your deacon if you need help from the church.

**Office Schedule: The church office is closed on Mondays and Wednesdays.**Barb’s regular schedule is to be in the office Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from approximately 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. while her son attends his day program on those days. Mondays and Wednesdays she works from home.

**Note holiday schedule changes!**
Both Christmas Day and New Year’s Day are on Mondays, so Pastor Wendy Boden
 will take the Tuesdays of those weeks (December 26 and January 2) as her
 Sabbath days.
Barb plans to be out of the office December 26-29. She will return to the office Tuesday,
 January 2.
***The worship bulletins for December 24 (Christmas Eve morning and evening) and
 December 31 will need to be completed and sent out before Christmas
 weekend. If you have any music or worship items for any of those services or
 announcements that need to be included in the bulletins, they need to be
 turned in no later than this Wednesday, December 20, at 11:00 a.m.***
There will be no eNotes on Wednesday, December 27.
BUT, December 27 will still be the deadline for the January *Dialog*!
Let’s plan to have the January *Dialog* go out a day later than usual, on Thursday,
 January 4.

Grace and peace to you! Remember that we love God, neighbor, and one another. Our address is 680 South Park Blvd., Glen Ellyn, IL 60137 if you would like to set up an online account with your bank or mail in your pledge. Online giving through Vanco is also now an option –for details contact Ron Birchall.

**Dates to remember this week:**    **Sunday, December 17 – *3rd Sunday of Advent***
 **Worship/Christmas Program** at 9:30 a.m. in person and also live on Facebook
 **In-person Fellowship** in the Narthex following the service
 **Adult Ed. Bible Study** at 11:15 a.m. either by joining Blair in person
 in the McHenry Parlor/Library or online via Google Meet
**Monday, December 18 – Pastor’s Sabbath
Tuesday-Friday – Pastor Wendy’s Heart to Heart** on Facebook live at 4:20 p.m.
**Tuesday, December 19** A.A. meets at 7:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall
**Wednesday, December 20
*All information for Longest Night, December 24 morning, Christmas Eve, and December 31 bulletins is due by 11:00 a.m.* eNotes** go out
 **Pastor’s Prelude Bible Study** at 4:00 p.m. at Donna Marton’s home
**Thursday, December 21
 Longest Night Service** at 7:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary **Choir rehearsal** follows the service
**Friday, December 22**
 A.A. meets at 6:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall
**Next** **Sunday,** **December 24 – *4th Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve***
 **Worship** at 9:30 a.m. in person and also live on Facebook
 **In-person Fellowship** in the Narthex following the service
 **No Adult Ed. Bible Study
 Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols** at 4:30 p.m.

**Bearing Fruit – December 17, 2023**

**“It’s about the birth of Jesus”**
The sermon today is in the form of a play. It is not a performance. Rather, God is the audience, and we are all participants. During this time we are worshiping God. The service, like all our services, will be posted on Facebook. Please do not take pictures during the service, though screen shots are welcome.

At the heart of the Christmas program is the basic tenet of Christianity called the Incarnation, the belief that God took on human flesh in the form of Jesus and was born as a baby. The scripts may vary from year to year, but the basic story never changes. It’s about the birth of Jesus. A Christmas program is a way for children and adults to embody the story and make it personal.

Today the Christmas Program replaces the sermon, but the Word of God is still the focus. Across the United States and even around the world, programs are offered as a way to experience the story of the incarnation. Interest in the circumstances of Christ’s birth goes back to the gospels. St. Francis of Assisi staged a reenactment of the nativity including live animals! Programs across the country and across time run the gamut, from small Sunday school programs to large-scale Broadway-style productions, but the focus should always be on what God is doing in our world through Jesus Christ.

Think back to a time when you may have first heard the scripture stories read to you, and then think again what it might mean to you if the Christ came to live with us in our modern world. Today’s Christmas program is presenting the question “What might it mean if Christ came to us today?” The world was harsh in Jesus’ time, and it is hard in our time as well. Let us remember the work of Christmas so that we may bear the fruit of God’s love in season and out of season.

Take a moment to read Howard Thurman’s words below:
*The Work of Christmas
When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.*