



This Most Wondrous of Nights

A Christmas Eve Communion Service

This liturgy is built around the beautiful carol “In the Bleak Midwinter” (Voices United 55). The words of the Sanctus-Benedictus are neatly substituted with the words of the hymn, which also speak of the angels’ adoration and praise. If other options that support the theme and tone of the liturgy are employed—“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” (VU 44), “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (VU 64), “See Amid the Winter’s Snow” (VU 76)—then the Sanctus-Benedictus can be replaced.

The carol verses act as a response to the communion prayers and encourage congregational participation. This is particularly helpful when children are present, which is more likely on Christmas Eve.

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

God of all times and places, we gather at your table of grace to recall your vision of hope for all people and for your world.

Through Abraham and Sarah, you revealed your promise in the surprise of a child. Through your prophets, you called your people to make way for peace and justice. In Jesus, you revealed your way of forgiveness and love. Through the ever-circling year, your Word discloses to us—again and anew—your promise for the restoration of all creation.

As we gather to share this sign of hope and fulfillment, we remember Jesus, the child born into obscurity, amid fear and uncertainty. We remember the fragility of that revelation, as well as the hope he stirred and imagination he inspired, and we sing...

*(VU 55, v.1) **In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow; snow on snow.
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.***

We remember Jesus, the One who blazed a new and risky path of extravagant generosity and of passionate concern: temple-shaker, world-maker, rule-breaker, risk-taker; the author and finisher of our faith.

We remember Jesus' self-giving love and the offer of himself for others, even those who gave him over to death, and we sing...

*(VU 55, v.2) Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.*

On that night, in the midst of great confusion and fear, Jesus broke bread with friends, saying, "This is my body, which I give for you and for all. When you do this, remember me."

With a blessing, he took the cup and offered it to them saying: "This cup is God's covenant which is given for all. When you drink this, remember me."

*(VU 55, v.3) Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
a breast full of milk, and a manger full of hay.
Enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.*

Come to us, life-giving Spirit of God. Bless us, these gifts, and what we do here, so that we might sing your song of love for your people and for your world.

Prayers of the People

God of All, we pray for your people.

For those who are afraid and oppressed, may you give courage.

For those suffering conflict and fear, may you bring peace.

For those who long for food and water, may they be filled.

For those who long for justice, may it be fulfilled.

We pray also for ourselves and our community.

That those in hospital and in care feel your strength.

That those who are alone and anxious feel you near.

That those who are ill in body and in spirit be comforted.

That our friends and family be blessed by healing and love.

Hear our prayers, O God,
and in your mercy, answer.

We pray these things, trusting in God's faithfulness revealed:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

*(VU 55, v.4) What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise man I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him—give my heart.*

Prayer after Communion

God of shepherds and kings, you gather us by the light of the star of promise.
You lead us not only to hope for the future,
but to trust in your presence and renewal of life in every time and place.

Guide us this night, by the light of that same star.
Lead us to the manglers of this world,
where uncertainty is met with the renewal life
and the transformation of this world is most deeply felt
in love, one with another.

Be with us on this most wondrous of nights, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.

*—Rev. Andrew O'Neil,
St. Paul's United Church, Riverview, NB*