



Lighting the fourth Candle

The Love that this candle tells of shall endure; is always forgiving, and caring and sure. Our Lord is to come and he comes us to lead: to teach us to love in our word and our deed. Light of darkness, Love is to come, for God will send his Son. Love everlasting when he shall come down, the long awaited One.

Watch and wait for Christ's coming! We light this candle in hope (light the first candle). We light this candle for peace (light the second candle). We light this candle in joy (light the third candle). We light this candle with love (light the fourth candle).

Out of love for the people of God, the Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah, as found in the seventh chapter, verses 10-14:

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Let us pray.

God of hope, Prince of peace, Jubilee Judge, and Lord of love, your goodness is beyond our wildest imaginings. You give us more than we can think to ask, coming to us with impossible possibility in the union of flesh and spirit. Teach us to love this world and all people as you love us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. God of promise, God of hope, into our darkness come.

Call to worship

Unexpectedly, the time came! The child was born! The Saviour of the world is here! Unexpectedly, the angels told the shepherds of the new-born Saviour; the Saviour of the world is here! Unexpectedly, the shepherds went and found the child, lying in a manger. The Saviour of the world is here! We wait for Christ to come again. We wait for Christ to enter our world and lives in a new way. Come, Lord Jesus, Come! Amen...

O Little town of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) wrote this beloved Christmas hymn for the Sunday school children in his church. He wrote it after a pilgrimage to Bethlehem in 1865. Unsurprisingly, it first appeared in The Sunday School Hymnal in 1871. This first hymn had for stanza... as it become endeared to adults, the fourth stanza was dropped...

Where children pure and happy
Pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to thee,
Son of the undefiled;
Where charity stands watching
And faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
And Christmas comes once more.

Regardless of the feelings about the tune, the hymn beautifully describe the little town asleep in the December night; it also gracefully modulates from a description of Christmas into an examination of the meaning of Christmas: first in its encouragement of charity and faith, and then into the coming of Christ into the human heart.

O Little town of Bethlehem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABZkYBXvnPI>

Opening prayer

Gracious, loving and merciful God, on this Christmas Eve, as the light of your Word penetrates our hearts, as we are reminded of the gift of life and faith, as the glories of the heavenly hosts are echoed in our church, we open ourselves up to your Spirit and give you thanks.

We are grateful, Lord Jesus, that your story has become our story, and we celebrate your birth. to take to heart the wonder of your love, that we may walk in your ways and delight in your will. Help us, Lord God, to be the faithful, gracious, loving, giving and forgiving people you would have us be.

The Lord's Prayer

Carol: O Holy Night

There are many kinds of night. Some are sad and terrifying; we must be honest about their crucifying power. These nights wound the world and wound God, too. The nights are deaths after which we can only hope for resurrections.

But some nights embrace us with a holy light, coming from a placeless place within yet beyond the stars. Christmas Eve is among them. We feel a silent Night deeper than all nights and filled with tenderness and love. Amid these feeling we are touched by God's listening and empathy, by that side of God which shares in the joys and sufferings of all living beings, everywhere, with a tender care that nothing be lost. The light of shone on earth on this holy night is more than a guidance light.

It is also an embracing Light, womb-like in its splendour. It comes as a gift, an embrace, that cannot be contained by any particular form and that we do not earn through any kind of achievement. It is a blanket of tenderness filled with goodness and mercy, yet pervading the universe. It is said that the baby Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes. The universe is wrapped in swaddling clothes, too. It is God's love.

As we feel the divinity of a Night Divine we anticipate a release from bindings of sadness, of injustice, of self-hatred, of fear, of anxiety, of guilt. The bindings of any kind of oppression. "And in his name all oppression will cease."

The silence of the Holy Night gives rise to the hope for a clear blue morning. "For yonder comes a new and glorious morn." Images of a baby, lying in a manger, come to mind. We can focus on one baby but all babies are included in this baby, and this baby is included in all babies. Let images of a child, lying in a manger, represent all innocents and all innocence, including that within each of us.

As we awaken to this freshness, we may have a need to kneel down, to adore something within the holy night that is so free, so innocent, that words cannot suffice. "Fall on your knees and hear the angel's voices." We fall on our knees as we hear the angel's voices – as we join multitudes this week to sing, O Holy Night.

Carol: O Holy Night

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOIEtZwP1HO>

Bible Reading: John 1:1-9

Prayers for others

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, born into our world. As we look forward to giving and receiving gifts, we thank you for all the good things we enjoy.

We pray for people who are not looking forward to Christmas, because they are cold or hungry, or are on their own. May they receive the things they need, and find friendship and care.

As we celebrate the wonderful birth of Jesus our Saviour, which shows us your great love, we thank you for the joy of human birth. Protect and strengthen all babies and those who care for them. We pray for our families and friends: for those travelling to celebrate Christmas, and for all our loved ones. May we share with each other in happiness and peace.

In the mid-bleak winter

This tune is often added nowadays to the lyric - 'Why are we waiting?', performed spontaneously wherever queues form and delays frustrate.

It appears to be the result of a collaboration of several people. What we sing is a 19th-century version of a hymn written in the 18th century.

The invitation to "come, all ye faithful, . . . to Bethlehem", places us both among the shepherds who rushed to see the Christ child. It adds us to the long procession of the "faithful" The word faithful, in the first line - **(O Come all ye faithful)** in effect invites us to join the procession to Bethlehem – a procession many have joined during the last 2,000 years.

Of particular note is the second stanza that draws heavily upon the Nicene Creed:

True God, of true God,
Light from Light Eternal,
lo, he shuns not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

This paraphrases of the Nicene Creed:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made."

When we sing these words, True God of True God – we in effect proclaim our belief in God the Father and His son, our saviour Jesus Christ. We the faithful that journey to Jerusalem believe – that the one we are going to see – the Christ child – is the son of God. He is our saviour.

He is and was begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made." We join others in worshiping the Christ child. Sadly, one stanza was omitted from this carol – the one that emphasizes the worship of the Christ child. It said...

**Lo! star-led chieftains, Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ child bring our heart's oblations.**

Note that today we omit the last stanza – that omit greetings for the child born on Christmas morning... if you want to sing those words... join us on Christmas day, at 10:30am.

Benediction

May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy
Spirit, be among you and remain
with you always. Amen.

Video after the service

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P5x0Km1hjQ>