

**ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE
"PAPER BAG PAGEANT"
December 24, 2022, 5pm
Created by The Rev. Micol Cottrell**

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

NARRATOR:

Welcome to our first paper bag pageant. The way we do it is pretty simple. On the steps are a lot of paper bags. They don't have my lunch in them – instead they contain character names and costumes.

If you want to be in our pageant, you simply choose a bag. Who you will be in the story will be a surprise, you will have very simple roles, improvising the movements as I read the story. Have fun! Have you ever seen the show "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" When they pick out a prop and improvise? This is like that.

Now, if you don't want to be in the pageant, you're not off the hook. The congregation gets to be the *choir*, the landscape, and the villagers. I'll let you know what you have to do. While we get ready, we'll leave you with this commercial message brought to you by *It Came Upon* glass polish – nothing makes your glass midnight clear like It Came Upon.

Please join in singing **It Came upon the Midnight Clear**, #44 in Voices United.

HYMN: VU 44 *It Came upon the Midnight Clear*

1. It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold,
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heaven's all-gracious King!"
The world is solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

2. Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled;
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

3. Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;
and warring humankind hears not
the love song which they bring.
O hush the noise, and cease your strife,
to hear the angels sing.

4. For, lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

NARRATOR:

I have heard that the actors are ready. Let's give them a warm welcome as we prepare to tell the wonderful story of Jesus' birth. (*Children and adults enter and take places at the front of the church on the pews.*)

In times past, whenever the people of God were oppressed, or troubled, or had gone astray, God would raise up for them a deliverer who would rescue them from oppression and restore their freedom as God's people. But at the time of our story, it had been many long years since such a deliverer had appeared, and the people were ruled by one foreign power after another and a long line of corrupt and cruel kings.

But the people did not forget great King David of centuries ago, a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who became Israel's greatest king.

SIGN: "Ooh Ahh"

NARRATOR:

And so, the people were looking for a messiah from the line of David, someone anointed by God as king, who would deliver them from all that was oppressing them and restore the kingdom of Israel.

SIGN: "Applause"

NARRATOR:

Now according to the Gospel of Luke, the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way:

SCRIPTURE READER (Luke Chapter 1):

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."

SIGN: "Nazareth"

NARRATOR:

Let us go to Nazareth. Here we are! (*"Nazareth" sign holder walks across front of church with Narrator following and then stays at the side, holding sign.*)

We find Mary doing some housework. Mary was sweeping and singing to herself. Oh, oh Mary, what's that... Here comes someone to visit you... look it's an angel.

Mary looked up and saw the angel, jumped in surprise, and said, "Who are you?"

The angel looked at Mary, shook her hand and said, "Well, hello... I'm an angel of God and I have an incredible offer just for you... You've heard of God, the maker of such great things as the world... Well God is with you and wants you to have a son and call him Jesus."

SIGN: “Ooh Aah”

NARRATOR:

Mary looked at the angel and said, “Sure.” Thank you, Mary and Angel. Have a seat.

SIGN: “Applause”

NARRATOR:

The Gospel of Matthew tells the story a little bit differently:

SCRIPTURE READER (Matthew Chapter 2):

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.” (*Enter Joseph.*)

NARRATOR:

Down the street from Mary, we find Joseph (come on out Joseph) hard at work. He is a carpenter. There he is now, hammering away making something wonderful. What are you making Joseph? Joseph picks up a piece of wood, hammers in some nails... then picks up another piece of wood, hammers some more nails in... well look at that, he’s made a baby crib... Hey Joseph, you may just want to hold onto that.

While Joseph was at work, some of the villagers (*Narrator looks at the audience*) – that’s you, audience – came up to him and said, “Hey Joseph, Mary’s pregnant!” (*Congregation repeats, “Hey Joseph, Mary’s pregnant!”*)

Joseph is shocked. He hits his hand with the hammer. Oh, Joseph that’s got to hurt. Joseph, you look tired. Are you tired? Maybe you should lay down and have a nap. (*Joseph lays down and falls asleep.*)

Listen, you can hear him snore. Joseph is dreaming. Let’s take a look at what he is dreaming about. He’s dreaming that he’s sleeping... But look who’s coming. It’s an angel.

SIGN: “Ooh Aah”

NARRATOR:

Joseph jumps up and says “Who are you!!! (*Angel enters.*) The angel asks, “Are you Joseph?”

Joseph looks at the angel puzzled and answers, “yes.”

The angel responds, “Joseph, I’ve got an offer you can’t refuse. You know God?... Well God thinks you’re one great fella... Don’t get mad at Mary, that’s God’s baby... Things are going to be A-OK!... God’s going to take care of you... Don’t be afraid... God is in control!”

SIGN: “Applause”

NARRATOR:

Thank you, Angel. I think that Joseph will sleep better tonight. Have a seat you two.

Joseph slept better after that. He married Mary and they were getting all ready for the new baby. But, before long something else happened that interrupted their lives.

The Gospel of Luke says: (*Mary joins Joseph.*)

SCRIPTURE READER (Luke Chapter 2):

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in

Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. *(Mary and Joseph pack a suitcase.)*

NARRATOR:

We'll watch Mary and Joseph again. Mary and Joseph are getting ready for the trip to Bethlehem. Mary is packing a few last things, as Joseph brings their Donkey to the door. *(Enter Donkey.)*
Come on up donkey, it's your turn. Hello Donkey, how are things going? _____ Are you ready for the long hike to Bethlehem? _____ Mary, do you have everything? _____ Great.

Mary puts the bags on Donkey's back and Mary, Joseph, and the Donkey head out on their long walk. Up the Aisle you go. It was a long walk. They walk through the whistling wheat... *(narrator whistles)*

How about you whistle with me, congregation? *(narrator whistles again)* ... past the flowing rivers... *(model sound of water "shh")* ... through the wind storms... *(wind sounds – "whoosh")*.

(Mary, Joseph, and Donkey circle the sanctuary and back to the front.)

SIGN: "Bethlehem"

NARRATOR:

Finally, Mary and Joseph make their way into Bethlehem.

They look all around them at this busy city. Joseph, did you by chance make a reservation for tonight? ____ No! well, you better start asking people if you can stay with them? Joseph and Mary walk around asking the villagers – that's you congregation, – if they can stay with them. All the villagers shake their heads and say, "Nope, there is no room here". Mary and Joseph, how are you feeling? _____

They walk to the last inn *(walk to the front)* and see the Inn Keeper. Come on out Inn Keeper. *(Enter Inn Keeper.)*

They ask him/her if he/she has a room for them. The Inn Keeper shakes his/her head and says "Nope, No Rooms... Don't you know that all the rooms are gone in Bethlehem?... But you can stay in the barn..."

So, Mary and Joseph and the Donkey went to the barn. Mary had her baby – show us the Baby Mary –...

SIGN: "Ooh Aah"

NARRATOR:

...and they laid him in a manger.

SIGN: "Applause"

NARRATOR:

Thank you, Mary and Joseph. Now a commercial from our sponsor Royal David's City Tourism Council. Spend a day, spend a lifetime in Royal David's City!!! Please join as we sing, Once in Royal David's City #64.

HYMN: VU 62 *Once in Royal David's City, vv. 1, 2*

1. Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattleshed,
where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.

2. He came down to earth from heaven who, with God, is over all,
and his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall.
There among the poor and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy.

NARRATOR:

The Gospel of Luke continues the story by telling us:

SCRIPTURE READER (Luke Chapter 2):

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. *(Enter Angel.)* Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace a peace among those whom he favours!” 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.” So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. *(On the left side, enter Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus. On the right side, enter Shepherd(s).)*

Well, what a day Mary and Joseph have had. Things are calming down for the happy couple so let’s leave them alone so they can rest a bit. Across town, on a lonely hill, shepherds were taking care of their sheep. The sheep run around and the shepherds bring them back together. The sheep just baa and baa and baa. The sheep slowly fall asleep. Then the Shepherds fall asleep. Some of them snore. *(Enter Angel, appearing to Shepherds.)*

As they sleep an angel appears. Come on out, Angel. The angel nudges the shepherds and wakes them up. The shepherds jump up in fright. The angel says to them “Do not be afraid. I’m here to tell you some good news. A baby is born who is the Messiah. You will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Then in the sky a lot of angels, a whole multitude of angels appeared flapping their wings – that’s you, congregation. Flap your wings. And then, as fast as they appeared, the angels disappear. *(Exit Angel, Shepherd(s) toward Mary and Joseph & baby Jesus & Donkey.)*

The Shepherds look at each other, look at their sheep and hurry off to find the baby. They ask the town people if they have seen a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger. The Townspeople – that’s you, congregation – shrug their shoulders and shake their heads. The shepherds run towards a barn and find Joseph, Mary, and their Donkey In front of them is a baby wrapped in Cloth.

HYMN: VU 75 While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks, vv. 1, 2

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.
2. “Fear not,” said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind;
“glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and humankind.”

NARRATOR:

Now according to the Gospel of Matthew:

SCRIPTURE READER (Matthew Chapter 2):

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, '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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem... for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then 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.'

When 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. *(Enter Wise One(s) to centre.)*

NARRATOR:

There were three wise ones from the east, who were star gazers (look up in the sky, wise ones). One day as they are looking in the sky, a star appeared. Star, where are you? Come on out! *(Enter Star, between Wise Ones and Mary and Joseph. Star slowly guides the Wise Ones to Mary and Joseph.)*

The wise ones picked up their lamps, and three gift baskets and began their journey, following the star. They walked past a field of wheat... *(Narrator encourages Congregation to wave hands like wheat.)* ...by a flowing river... *(Narrator models water sounds "shhhh.")* ...and through a blowing desert. *(Narrator models wind sound "whhhh.")*

The star leads them to Bethlehem.

SIGN: "Bethlehem"

NARRATOR:

They ask the town's people if they have seen a baby. The townspeople say no. They finally see a barn with a lot of people in it. The barn is filled with Mary, Joseph, Donkey, the shepherd, and the sheep. The three wise people approach and give the baby gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Well, that's the story. But wait, there's more! The shepherds and kings went forth into the town to tell everyone what they have seen and heard, and the townspeople and the guests at the inn come to see for themselves what has been going on.

SIGN: "Applause"

NARRATOR:

And Mary and Joseph pondered all these things in their hearts. *(End of pageant.)*

DEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE CHRISTMAS JOURNEY IN PRAYER

You gather us together to hear your promise of love.

As we gather, we offer our concerns and our dreams, our hopes and fears... *(silence)*

Like the shepherds who sought the stable, we seek your promise of peace.

We pray for your people broken by violence,

those who live with fear, and those who live without hope.

We remember (places/events in the world), and we pray for your courage and peace... *(silence)*

Like the wise ones who dedicated their gifts, we remember those in need.
We pray for those who are lonely, hungry, or forgotten;
for those who are ill in body and in spirit;
for those who are confused or afraid.
We pray for your joy and love, for all your people,
especially those we remember now... (*silence*)

Holy One, you came as a child, offering renewal of spirit and of living.
May our prayers be a new beginning: for healing, truth, and trust.
May we embody love that is forgiving, compassionate, and gracious.
May we send back the angels' song of peace and joy.
We pray these things in the name of Jesus who became the Christ,
along with the traditional version of the Prayer Jesus taught...

THE PRAYER JESUS TAUGHT

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kin-dom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kin-dom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING

HYMN: VU 67 *Silent Night*

1. Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

2. Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight:
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah.
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born.

3. Silent night! Holy Night!
Son of God, loves pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

"Paper Bag Pageant" created by The Rev. Micol Cottrell.

Dedicating Ourselves to the Christmas Journey in Prayer from AdventUnwrapped.ca. The United Church of Canada, © 2016.

Thank you to: Rev. Dave Le Grand for leading the worship service; Tracey LeGrand for her musical leadership; Suzanne Nykilchyk and Jen Bruneau for assisting with liturgy preparation and also for baking the "Happy Birthday, Jesus" cupcakes; all the Pageant Helpers and Cast; Jen Bruneau, Maureen McGuinness, and Suzanne Nykilchyk for the sanctuary décor; and Mallon Appianing and Roger Pile in the Audiovisual Booth.
