

(soft music)

Man: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. In him was life and the life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. This true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He came to his own home and his own people received him not, but to all who received him who believed in his name, He gave power to become children of God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. And from his fullness have we received grace unto grace." Praise be to God, the Lord be with you and let us pray. Almighty God to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthy magnify your Holy Name. Almighty God you have poured upon us the new Spirit of your incarnate Word. Granteth this light kindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives through Jesus Christ to whom lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen. (soft music) (choir singing indistinctly) And dearly beloved we have come together in the presence of Almighty God to set forth his praise, to hear his holy word and to ask for ourselves and on behalf of all others, those things which are necessary for our life and salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship the Lord our God, let us with obedient and penitent hearts confess our sins that we may obtain forgiveness by God's infinite goodness and mercy. Oh God, Lord of the nations you have given life to the world. We humbly confess our failure to love and to serve, forgive our foolish ways, forgive our hard-heartedness, forgive our love of affluence, forgive our love of self, forgive our complacent ways, forgive our commitments, forgive our uncaring attitudes. We have become captives of this age of the status quo and the pleasure seeker. Our eyes no longer see the world in the need of your life giving love. On this first day of a new year untie the cords of fear, fear of ridicule, fear of loss of status, fear of failure, which bind our hands keeping them from work in your kingdom. Send your fire of purification to cleanse us and inspire us to go forth to those who yet need your word of hope. We have received, but not given. We have heard, but not responded. We have been loved, but not loved in return. Help us we cry. Let your forgiveness melt our cold hearts and send us on your errands of mercy to the peoples of the earth. In the name of the Christ who was sent that we might believe and live we pray. Almighty God have mercy on us. Forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us in all goodness and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us in eternal life. Amen. The Holy Gospel of the Lord, according to St. Luke. "And Mary said, 'tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord, rejoice, rejoice my spirit in God, my Savior. So tenderly has He looked upon his servant humble as she is. For from this day forth, all generations will count me blessed. So wonderfully has He dealt with me the Lord, the mighty one. His name is holy, his mercy sure from generation to generation toward those who fear him, the deeds his right arm has done disclose his might. The arrogant of heart and mind He has put to rout. He has brought down monarchs from their thrones, but the humble have been lifted high, the hungry He has satisfied with good things. The rich sent empty away. He has ranged himself at the side of Israel his servant. Firm in His promise to our forefathers. He has not forgotten to show mercy to Abraham and to His children's children forever.'" "There was at that time in Jerusalem, a man called Simeon. This man was upright and

devout. One who had watched and waited for the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been disclosed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit he came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child, Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, he took him in his arms, praised God and said, 'this day Master though giveth thy servant his discharge in peace. Now thy promise is fulfilled for I have seen with my own eyes, the deliverance which thou has made ready in the full view of all nations. A light that will be a revelation to the heathen and glory to thy people, Israel'. The child's father and mother will fall wonder at what was being said about him." Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, 'this child is destined to be a sign which men reject and you too shall be pierced to the heart. Many in Israel will stand or fall because of him. And thus the secret thoughts of many will be laid bare'. There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was a very old woman who had lived seven years with her husband after she was first married and then alone as a widow to the age of 84, she never left the temple, but worshiped day and night fasting and praying. Coming up at this very moment, she returned thanks to God. And she talked about the child to all who were looking for the liberation of Jerusalem." The Gospel of the Lord. (soft music) Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human, Jesus to reconcile and make new who works in us and others by the Spirit we trust God who calls us to be the church to celebrate life and its fullness to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen our judge and our hope in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you. (Congregation chattering indistinctly) Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, you who hold all the ages in your hand and to whom a thousand years are as a day, what can we make of this past year? The poverty, hunger, injustice, oppression in war would afflict all peoples the trifles and tragedies that compound our lives. The suffering of bodies, the torment of hearts, the anxieties of mind, the fears and confusions with which our uncertain futures are plagued. In this season oh God, most high, most holy, most near open our lives so that our joy might be full. Deliver us from quibbling doubts and unbelief that in humility and trust, we might come to know that peace and hope, which passes all human understanding though who has come so many times and found no resting place. Forgive us for our overcrowded lives. Our vein haste and preoccupation with worldly desires. Come again and though our minds are overlaid with many concerns, find a place, however humble, where you can begin to work your wonders. Be patient, oh God, and guide us to walk in ways that we may do your will, where we have failed grant us strength and the will to strive again, where we have lost the way grant us new visions, where we have made faltering steps, steady us and guide us to higher ground. Everywhere be our companion that we may not grow weary and well-doing or vain in self satisfaction. Time hastes away and another year is gone. We tremble at the mystery of it and stand silent and humbled before a new day. As we pray those prayers deepest in each of our own hearts. We pray also for your church, her people and ministers, may they be faithful. We pray for priests among the nations and for justice for all people. We pray for this university, all who teach and all who learn. We pray for the sick, the hungry, the poor, the suffering, and those who suffer from any adversity. We pray for those who are dying and for those who have died. Grant us all your grace, liberate us from yesterday's limits, deepen our desires for justice and peace. Exalt our hopes for a new world. We do not know what the new year will bring, but we pray for faith, hope and love. That we might reverently and wisely live for your purposes. This we pray for ourselves and all those we love wherever they might be. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray.

All: Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be your 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 trespasses. As we forgive those who trespass against us, lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Man: We invite you following this service to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Memorial side chapel.

- Greetings in the name of Christ. We have been planning our theologian in residence program for this January and February. During this time, we will bring five people, Jewish and Christian theologians and scholars who will help us by looking at the Holocaust to begin in this community, our Jewish-Christian conversation, because of this planning, I have become more aware of how our American culture is at least superficially Christian. This Christmas, one of our popular comedians sang about our holidays, secular and sacred. She began with Christmas and mentioned Easter. The 4th of July Groundhog day, Flag day. Everything I could think of, so many it seemed that none could have been missed, but there was no mention of a Jewish holiday. Another illustration of this was when Andrew one of Bobby and Jackie Young's children asked them why they were always Christmas sales, but you never had a Hanukkah sale. Such omissions are not a disservice to the Jewish community. In fact, this climate may be a disservice to those in the Christian community. For all our emphasis on selling more at Christmas does not make it easier for us to see the Christ child to celebrate God's coming to us as a human being born as a baby. And every year we worry that we may lose this child and all of the Christmas packages and all of the wrappings and that our celebration of the simplicity and wonder of the birth of the baby in a manger may be marked by the extravaganza of our festivals and the inordinate giving to those who are not in need. Much of our celebration makes it difficult for us to say with Simeon, "I can now live in peace for I have seen with my own eyes, the deliverance which God has made ready", all like Anna to talk about the child, to all of those who are looking for their liberation. 2000 years of celebration has made it no easier for us to comprehend the mystery and the wonder that our longing, our search for deliverance for liberation is found in this child who became the man, Jesus, whom we call the Christ. Simeon and Anna were both devout people who while waiting for the Messiah, spent their time in worship and in prayer. Our church gives us with the advent season a special time for prayer, for preparation, for waiting expectantly as we prepare to celebrate and give thanks to God for the birth of Jesus who was and is our deliverance and our liberation. Not only to celebrate and give thanks, but to pray that the Spirit of the Christ will be born in us this year. For most of us need to receive this gift again and again. And the Magnificat, a collection of Old Testament verses we hear Mary's exaltation. This exaltation placed in the beginning of Luke's gospel as a part of the birth story is a foretelling of the coming work of Jesus. The power of the mighty one will be shown in caring for those who need to be cared for. This is how God always has acted. This is how God always will act to put down the arrogant of heart and mind, to bring to note the monarchs on the throne. To lift up the humble, to satisfy the hungry and to send away the rich. Most of us who are worshiping in this congregation may not see ourselves as monarchs on a throne, or as the arrogant of heart and mind, or as the rich. However, if we are honest, we know that we are identified more with those people than we are with those who are symbolized in the words hungry and humble, but we are not the comfortable people. We are not contented. There is a longing and a yearning, which brings us together in our worship as we look for our deliverance, for our liberation, as we search for meaning. We puzzle because

we know we have been given, we already have been given our deliverance and our liberation, but we also know that we still search for its completeness and we continue to find this search fulfilled in Jesus the Christ, the fulfillment is not always as we expect and does not always come to us as we expect, but this is where our search leads us. Once we have seen the child, we become involved, caught up and our life is lived responding and participating in God's liberating action and deliverance for the whole world. Such action is new and fresh everyday. Today, this day, we are called to devotion of being a servant as Mary and Simeon both described themselves. This was the work to which Jesus was called, a work to which He calls those who follow him. Now, for those of us who are drawn to the Christ, not because of great physical needs, but because of our longing for the fulfillment of the meaning and purpose of all our lives. For those of us who come to Christ because of this, the servant image is most important. We must be servants. If we are to help bring hope to our world so fractured by the separation between the powerful and the powerless, the well fed, overfed people, and those who are hungry. Those housed in all cooled well heated homes and the homeless, those who live in freedom, and those who live under oppression. We who take the role of the servant can participate in the healing of this broken world, can help bring to all people of the world, deliverance and liberation, which would then mean we would have a world of peace and justice and righteousness. To be a servant though, is as difficult for us as it is important for us for it requires a radical reordering of the structure of our lives. A change in how we see ourselves and how we see others and how others see us. Much of our life is ordered as a hierarchy, our work, and often our family life. Many of us find ourselves enjoying the benefits of a life which is structured so that more power and privilege goes to those at the top of the structure. And we who are at the top are not eager to give this up. We can move only as we are convinced that life lived in another way offers to us not deprivation, but the fulfillment of the deliverance and liberation for which we long and search. Those who have seen the Christ are ready to hear the word, which is spoken to us through the life and ministry of Jesus. This word is, that we will not find our ultimate happiness, the meaning which makes life worth living and wealth or in special privilege, opposition, or in having power over other people. But only as we live our lives in a loving serving relationship to others. Now talking about a loving serving relationship is less jarring to us than talking about being a servant. The image of a servant makes us uncomfortable because we think of it, not as Jesus lived it, but as our structures define it. A defining which implies subordination and inferiority. A relationship in which one person, the person who is being served has power over the person who is the servant. A power which is destructive because it flows in one way only. There is no mutuality, such defining is contradictory to Jesus's understanding of being a servant. Of the way he lived his life. It may be that the word servant has such strong connotations of inferiority and subordination that we will need to find another word to describe Jesus's mood of being in this world that mood to which he calls us. Women and blacks have much trouble accepting the servant image because we have been in the limited, restricted serving roles with very little power. And we are suspicious of anyone who tries to talk us into what seems on the surface, a continuation of this road. And the temptation has been for some who are on the bottom to leave the structures as they are, but to try to get on the top, such a reversal offers no hope. Knowing this, a woman has written a counterpart to a song that I used to sing as a youth, "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder". Singing instead, we are dancing Sarah's Circle, but we have lived in this culture so long in which the image of success is that of climbing up a ladder of getting ahead in the world. Where the model of the servant is that of taking orders given by the superior to the inferior till we're frightened by any thought of change. And we say, "there's nothing wrong, Life would be chaotic otherwise". And we find examples, why change is not needed, or why

a change has already happened? And we become defensive and we make jokes. All of this evading the call, which comes to us this day. Those who have seen the child, those who can say with Simeon and Anna, "I have seen the deliverance for which God has made ready. I have found the person who offers our liberation, not just ours, but the whole world". These people are enabled to become servants. We can become servants if we know who we are, if we know whose we are. When we know that our value and worth is given to us by God and is not dependent on our having power and authority over other people, then we can be a servant. This is a gift which is given to us to be lived out in loving and serving our brothers and sisters. And it is only as we know ourselves to be persons not objects. As we accept others as persons of equal worth, not as objects to be used. And as we are accepted by others, as persons not objects that we are enabled to live in a relationship of servanthood to each other. Now all three of these dimensions are critical or crucial that we accept ourselves, that we see and accept others. And that others accept us as persons not objects to be used. Now, such awareness is a part of God's grace of God's gift to us, which we claim and reclaim at this Christmas season. And just as this gift came to us in a specific person so our response will be in specific actions. It's easy to love everybody generally, but it's not very helpful. God's liberation and deliverance did not come as a theory or as a discourse on love, but through a specific life lived out in specific acts of servanthood of love. And so we hear the call again, to move from this Christmas time to loving and serving our neighbor. An important part of this call is the need to look again at our holy scriptures to understand what it really means to be a servant. And in light of these readings to look at our lives and discover how we are using other people, how we are misusing our power and all of us here have power. Ours may be the power of wealth, of position, of prestige, of being needed, of charisma and charm, but we all have power and we deceive ourselves when we deny it. So let us seed the power which is ours in the light of the child in the manger. And at this time, renew our covenant with God, hearing a part of the covenant service which John Wesley developed. One which is used by many Christian communities. On one side of the covenant is God's promise to fulfill in and through us what was declared in Jesus Christ. On the other side, we pledged to live no more unto ourselves, but to God who came to us and who calls us to be servants, that the purposes of Jesus's coming might be fulfilled. Hear that again, on one side of the covenant is God's promise to fulfill in us and through us, what was declared in Jesus Christ. On the other side, we pledge to live no more and to ourselves, but to God who came to us and who calls us to be servants, that the purposes of Jesus's coming might be fulfilled. Let us pray. Oh, holy and loving God. We take upon ourselves with joy, the role of being your servant and in promise to engage ourselves to seek and do your will. We are no longer our own, but yours use us for your work of liberation and deliverance. We pray in the Spirit of Jesus, the Christ. Amen. (soft music) (choir singing indistinctly)

Man: Present yourselves as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (soft music) Accept oh Lord this offering of our love and of our lives. Now offered more fully unto you, use these gifts and us to the end that your kingdom come and your will be done on earth even as it is in heaven through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (soft music) (choir singing indistinctly) Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen. (soft music)