

(stately horn music) ("The First Noel") (stately horn music) ("God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen") (stately horn music)

- And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and we beheld His glory. Welcome to this joyous service of worship on Christmas Day. Let us stand for the greeting. We who knelt in the stable. (faint speaking) Let our hearts give thanks and our hands rejoice. (faint speaking) Enter the house of the Lord.

Congregation: The house (faint speaking). ("Come All Ye Faithful") ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ Christ the Lord ♪ ("Come All Ye Faithful") ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ Christ the Lord ♪ ("Come All Ye Faithful") ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord ♪ ("Come All Ye Faithful") ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him ♪ ♪ O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord ♪ ("Come All Ye Faithful")

- Let us pray. Oh, holy God, once more you have sought us out and brought us to the manger where unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. You are a wondrous God, giving to those of us who dwell in darkness a light shining in the Bethlehem sky, freeing our hearts from fear, freeing our voices to sing with angels and our feet to run with shepherds to the Christ child. On this glorious day, you have brought us here to pay homage to you, the ruler of heaven and earth as we remember your great gift of yourself to the world. Confront us here again with your message of hope, joy, and peace. We pray in the name of Christ who came to us as a child who lived as a man, died and rose as our savior and is with you and us now and forever. Amen, you may be seated.

- Let us pray together the Prayer for Illumination.

- [Margaret And Congregation] Open our hearts and minds oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your word with joy this day.

- Amen. The Old Testament is from the Book of Isaiah Chapter 9 Verses 2 through 6. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shine. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder, for the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian for all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire, for a child has been born for us, a son given to us. Authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, Prince of Peace. ("Gloria In Excelsis Deo") ("O come, O come, Emmanuel") ("Gloria In Excelsis Deo") The Gospel is from Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 1 through 11. In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while

Quirinius was governor of Syria. 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 first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region, there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night. 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 savior "who is the Messiah, the Lord." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- I bring you good news of great joy. Church doesn't get much more joyful than this, Christmas, and on a Sunday. All of today's Scriptures, you will note, speak of joy and the hymns Joy to the World. Of course, if you've been to church before, you know that joy can sometimes be a challenge for the church. On most Sundays, the church tends to overdo the imperative mood, filling the air with should and ought and must, do this, don't do that, so some Sunday you come to church feeling fairly good about yourself. Well, we'll fix that. After we have enumerated what's wrong with you and the world, you leave church feeling worse than when you came. I've got a friend who's a psychotherapist and he says that depression is an ecclesial-genic illness. (congregation laughing)

Church makes you depressed. This past fall, a group of students asked me to give a talk and at the end of the talk, one of the listeners said, "Your talk was good, "but it was rather depressing. "You're so critical." And I overheard another student mutter, "Well, he's a preacher. "He's paid to be depressing." (congregation laughing)

But not today, not, no, not this day of joy. And joy can be a challenge, particularly around here, around the university. In academia, joy is uncool. Aristotelian balance, that is the way to go. Oh, our students may work hard, may play harder, but not the faculty. An unrestrainedly joyful person has got to be a bubble brain who hasn't yet taken a mature, sober, balanced, intelligent look at life because after you have pondered the incongruities of life, the absurdities, the discrepancies, a kind of world-weary urbanity sets in and that's why around academia, pessimism always sounds more intelligent than optimism, than joy, more intellectual, but not today, not this day of joy. I think one reason why we are so often devoid of real joy is that joy, real joy, is not self-induced. As many people learn to their sadness this time of year, you can't have joy by wandering every night in December in a shopping mall, you can't switch on joy with a yuletide TV Christmas special. The gift that you thought you just had of have, now that you've got it, how long did that joy last, what, 15 minutes? You'd have to feel very sorry for a person who claimed to feel real, deep, abiding joy after receiving a salad shooter this morning. (congregation laughing) Joy, real joy, is always reflexive, it is responsive, a kind of spontaneous human outburst because something has happened. Joy, it isn't a goal, it isn't an achievement like an M.A. degree. Joy is a byproduct, a kind of gracious spinoff. Let's all get together and do a little joy. No, no, you can't do that, it's a gift, it's a response to something that happens to you. You felt it when the doctor came in to say that that shadow on the X-ray was just that, a shadow, nothing more. Or when she said yes and you knew you didn't deserve it. It was a gift received, joy. And that is why Isaiah

the Prophet speaks of joy. Israel is in bondage, everything is dark, garments rolled in blood. The Scripture, the Old Testament comes from a scene of the battlefield and Isaiah sings that people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Joy. A friend of my recalls when he was a boy in Austria, his family gathered around the radio during the Nazi time in the dark days of World War II and they were surprised to hear the announcement that Allied troops had landed in Normandy and his mother just spontaneously began to weep and she fell to her knees for joy and he remembered the whole family just gathering hands, spontaneously kneeling around the radio. When you get news, deep news, joy. In Luke's story of the birth of Jesus. In those days, a decree went out from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. There's not much joy there. What you're reading here is a story of oppressed, occupied people. Why were these Jews being registered? Well, the Roman occupation forces can't keep up with these occupied Jews without having them registered. Even if you were a woman like Mary, even if you were expecting a baby, you had to make the long journey back to your husband's hometown and you had to be registered 'cause the emperor said it and that was law. And then in the dark of night, out back in the manger, a baby cries. There is the flutter of wings and shepherds huddling in the dark, cold, are terrified, but the angel says to them, "Don't be afraid, "I bring you good news of joy." And that's why we sing and that's why we're here, Christmas's gracious inclusion. It's a break with the ordinary humdrum expected. Here we are, paying taxes, going about our work on the night shift, getting engaged, having babies, and then something intrudes and we're joyful because something has happened not of our own creation. God has intruded into the natural expected order of things. Christmas is a delightful disruption of the way things usually go. At the incarnation, things are cut loose, they're unglued. Luke says it happened during the Enrollment when Augustus was emperor, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. There's nobody more powerful than the emperor. Nothing is more fixed and final than imperial decrees. That's an old story, the story of the first Christmas. It's the old, same old story of political oppression and political violence and those on the bottom who must obey and those on the top who make decrees and give orders. It was in Bethlehem, but you know it could have happened just as well in Bosnia. It was Augustus Caesar, but it could have also been your boss at the office or the geography teacher during third period or an oncologist. We're always being jerked around by external decrees. What do you do when your life is out of your control, when you're jerked around by forces outside your control, by some external decree handed down from the top? Seems to me there are at least two possible responses. One response is active rebellion, resistance. Get a lawyer, hire a surgeon, get a plan, take matters in hand. When the Emperor Augustus commanded this enrollment, we know that there were massive revolts among the Jews. They did not just passively accept these imperial Roman pagan decrees. During the time of Jesus, it is estimated there may have been as many as 60 different revolts and rebellions, violent attempts to overthrow these Roman overlords. Pick up a gun, take matters in hand, use your initiative, act for change. I find it interesting that none of these political revolts are reported by Luke. He depicts Mary and Joseph just plodding towards Bethlehem rather than rebelling against Rome. What could they do? They were poor, they were on the bottom, they were powerless against so great a force as Emperor Augustus and his legions. Isaiah doesn't call Israel to arms, doesn't urge them to organize and resist, crushed as they are under the heel of Assyria. What hope in that? See, it's interesting that neither Isaiah nor Luke are telling a story about what we do. It's not a story about our initiative against the problems of life 'cause we already know that story. So we got here at the university by taking initiative and having plans and having a program, and while that may lead to temporary solutions, some forward movement to some of the problems that bedevil us in life, a new administration in Washington, this or that

piece of legislation, rarely does it lead to real joy because joy, deep throated, abiding joy, is a byproduct of the story of what God does. Mary broke into song, the shepherds danced back to work. Isaiah declared holiday, having witnessed the amazing undeserved, unexpected intrusion of a loving and living God. People are joyful because God has moved, because there is this force loose in the world greater than ourselves. Last night at Bethlehem, we so sensible, down-to-earth, dull, modern, flat people living in a thank you, mother, I would rather do it myself sort of society, we learn to our surprise somebody else is active in the world and our battles with emperors and our struggles with malignancies of body or soul, Christmas means it wasn't all left up to us. See, I know, I'm a pastor. I know it is not all right in your life. There are secrets, deep, dark things that trouble you. When bright Christmas is over, you've got to trudge back to the January facts of life. Your strings are being pulled by forces greater than your ability to control, I know. You can't be helped by that which is merely of your own devices, so that is why I say to you, Isaiah, Luke, the carols say to you do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy. To you is born this day a savior, Christ the Lord. (organ music) (choral music)

- The Lord be with you.

- And also be with you.

- Let us pray. You may be seated. Oh glorious God, we are filled with joy and gratitude this morning for the gifts of your mystery and love, for the prophets who dream dreams and foretold your gracious coming in a child, for Mary, who knew deep in her heart that you were involved in the birth of her child, for Joseph, who after doubts of her fidelity could accept the truth about the little one in Mary's womb, for the beauty of the manger, a simple place transformed by the newborn baby. May the angels' joy be our joy, the shepherd's amazement our amazement, their courage our courage. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

- Hear our prayer.

- We confess that in spite of the joy, we too feel sadness on this day, sadness that too often we fail to respond to the needs of our bodies and spirits as well as to the needs of the world. Forgive us and help us to live out the remainder of the season in thanksgiving, blessedness, and praise as we celebrate your transforming and incarnational grace. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- Bring a lasting peace to all people of the world, especially those in Bosnia, in the Middle East, in Ireland, in Africa, and in Russia, and may our national and world leaders rise to the task of carrying out the visions of good will, justice, and compassion to all people everywhere. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- Especially bless the infants of the world, those who are so helpless, so vulnerable, so dependent. Give their parents joy in their birth and the strength and the means to care properly for them, as the lonely shepherds

found company with the angels, so too may all the lonely people of the world find an angel to care for them in their times of need. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- May the one who fled with his parents from Herod's slaughter abide with the poor and the homeless in our cities and with the refugees in the bitter trials of their exile from the war-weary places of the world. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- Grant to persons who commit violent acts and the victims of those crimes confrontation with your redeeming, forgiving love. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- Whenever a healing touch is given to the sick and dying so that health is restored and comfort is given, disclose the glory of him who heals it and made the blind to see. Lord, in your mercy.

- Hear our prayer.

- Bring to all humankind the joy that the holy family brings to us on this sacred day in the name of the infant child whose name is called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, amen. As we bring our offerings on this birthday of the Christ child, may the warm glow from the generosity of gift giving and receiving abide in our hearts and with compassion may we reach out to all people everywhere. (organ music) ("Gloria in excelsis Deo") ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ (choral music) ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ (choral music) ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ ♪ Gloria ♪ ♪ In excelsis deo ♪ (organ music) ("The First Noel") ♪ The First Noel, the angels did say ♪ ♪ Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay ♪ ♪ In fields where they lay keeping their sheep ♪ ♪ On a cold winter's night that was so deep ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Born is the King of Israel ♪ ♪ They looked up and saw a star ♪ ♪ Shining in the East ♪ ♪ Beyond them far ♪ ♪ And to the earth ♪ ♪ It gave great light ♪ ♪ And so it continued ♪ ♪ Both day and night ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Born is the King of Israel ♪ ♪ And by the light of that same star ♪ ♪ Three wise men came from country far ♪ ♪ To seek for a king was their intent ♪ ♪ And to follow the star ♪ ♪ Wherever it went ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Born is the King of Israel ♪ ♪ This star drew nigh ♪ ♪ To the northwest ♪ ♪ O'er Bethlehem ♪ ♪ It took its rest ♪ ♪ And there it did ♪ ♪ Both pause and stay ♪ ♪ Right o'er the place ♪ ♪ Where Jesus lay ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Born is the King of Israel ♪ ♪ Then entered in ♪ ♪ Those wise men three ♪ ♪ Full reverently upon their knee ♪ ♪ And offered there ♪ ♪ In His presence ♪ ♪ Their gold and myrrh and frankincense ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Noel, Noel ♪ ♪ Born is the King of Israel ♪ (organ music) ♪ Hark the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn king ♪ ♪ Peace on earth and mercy mild ♪ ♪ God and sinners reconciled ♪ ♪ Joyful, all ye nations rise ♪ ♪ Join the triumph of the skies ♪ ♪ With the angelic host proclaim ♪ ♪ Christ is born in Bethlehem ♪ ♪ Hark, the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn king ♪ ♪

Christ by highest heaven adored ♪ ♪ Christ the everlasting Lord! ♪ ♪ Late in time behold Him come ♪ ♪  
Offspring of a virgin's womb ♪ ♪ Veiled in flesh the Godhead see ♪ ♪ Hail the incarnate deity ♪ ♪ Pleased as  
man with man to dwell ♪ ♪ Jesus, our Emmanuel ♪ ♪ Hark, the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn  
king ♪ ♪ Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace ♪ ♪ Hail the son of righteousness ♪ ♪ Light and life to all He  
brings ♪ ♪ Risen with healing in His wings ♪ ♪ Mild He lays His glory by ♪ ♪ Born that man no more may die ♪ ♪  
Born to raise the sons of earth ♪ ♪ Born to give them second birth ♪ ♪ Hark, the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory  
to the newborn king ♪ (organ music) (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (choral music) ♪ Hallelujah ♪  
♪ Hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪

- Oh gracious God, the presents are opened, the Christmas banquets will soon be ready. We thank you for  
the humanity of Christmas, the presents, the food, the excitement of being together, the joy of family and  
the sacredness of worship. We ask that the important things found again on this Christmas day may be  
lasting, that the sins of the birth and incarnation may continue, that the feeling for mystery may grow, that  
the delight in gift giving may lead us to give ourselves to Him whose birthday we celebrate in the name of  
the one who taught us to pray, saying,

- [Margaret And Congregation] 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 trespasses as we  
forgive those who trespass against us and lead us to into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the  
kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen. ("Joy to the World") ♪ Joy to the world, the Savior  
reigns ♪ ♪ Let men their songs employ ♪ ♪ While fields and floods ♪ ♪ Rocks, hills and plains ♪ ♪ Repeat the  
sounding joy ♪ ♪ Repeat the sounding joy ♪ ♪ 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 ♪ ("Joy to the World") ♪ He  
rules the world with truth and grace ♪ ♪ And makes the nations prove ♪ ♪ And wonders of His love ♪ ♪ And  
wonders of His love ♪ ("Joy to the World") ♪ And wonders of His love ♪

- May the grace, joy, and peace of Emmanuel, God with us, be yours this day and evermore. Amen. (organ  
music) (congregation chattering)  
(organ music)