

PRELUDE

Mary Had a Baby

Noel Rawsthorne

CHORAL INTROIT

African Noel

Liberian Folk Song

INVITATION

*OPENING HYMN

The First Noel

**The first Nowell, the angel 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.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, 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.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Born is the King of Israel.**

OPENING PRAYER

God, we continue to linger in the straw amid the shepherds. We continue to gaze at love's pure light, taste the joy of this holy moment in the air, sense a peace deep in our souls, and a hope that warms our whole lives. We hold our breath as if we could stop time so we would never need to leave. We know that the work of Christmas is as Rev. Howard Thurman wrote, "To bring hope to every task we do, to dance at a baby's new birth, to make music in our elder's hearts, and sing to all the colors of the earth." May these words, this prayer inspire our living this final week of this year and guide us in the weeks of 2022. In the name of the One we still greet this morning with anthems sweet, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE

In the Bleak Midwinter

**What can I offer, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him – Give my heart.**

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

John 1:29-34

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

SERMON

Amazing Peace by Maya Angelou

Readers: Priscilla Crumel, Dale Moore, Clarence Rogers, Lynne Woodman

Images by Carol Fields

ANTHEM

Carols Around

Carl Nygard

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

Amazing Peace (see insert)

written by Carol Fields

**Amazing peace, how sweet the thought! To hope for such a thing!
A new-born babe, the shepherds sought. Such peace His light could bring!
One day we hope that peace may come for people 'round the earth.
For dark and light, not just for some, because of Jesus birth.**

**'Twas in a simple stable bed our Christ was laid to rest.
'Twas love that shone inside that shed, for God had sent His best!
So pray for peace, amazing peace as Christmas time draws near.
And pray that wars might fi'nally cease, because that babe appeared.**

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

God Rest You Merry

Wilbur Held