



Holy Night

CHRISTMAS EVE PRAYER SERVICE

FOR ANYONE, ANYTIME,
ANYWHERE

As we let the eve of Immanuel embrace us – at home in your comfiest chair, outside around a fire, in the on-call room, or even surrounded by luminaries on the front lawn of the church – let us keep vigil with the Holy Family.

Christmas Eve Prayer Service

Instructions

- Instructions will be in italics
- The script of the service may be spoken by one or many voices. If you have a group gathered, you might choose to lead different parts. You can print multiple scripts, or pass around one script.
- You can also read through this service quietly, alone, and attend to the birth of Christ in silence.

Optional Supplies:

- Candles (at least one, but you can also have more and/or one for every participant) and matches/lighter
- Music
 - “Away in a Manger” – Can be sung a cappella, played on your personal instruments, or you may use any recording you like
 - “Silent Night” – check out our virtual choir singing silent night using this link, or you might sing it a cappella, or play it using any version you like.
 - “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” and/or “Still, Still, Still” are also particularly appropriate songs for this service.
- Children’s Bible and/or a children’s book about the birth of Christ (if you have young children with you)

You might open by playing “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” or “Still, Still, Still”

Tonight the world in stillness lays to hear the angels sing.

Thank you for joining us tonight for our cozy and contemplative late night Christmas Eve prayer service. Now let us still our hearts and minds, let the awe of Christmas fall upon us.

Let’s hear the **story of Jesus’ Birth:**

(If you have young children with you, you might choose to read the story from a children’s storybook Bible, or from a favorite Christmas book.)

Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ 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.

Option – Sing Away in a Manger:

1) Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down His sweet head

The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay

2) Be near me, Lord Jesus
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever
And love me, I pray

Bless all the dear children
In Thy tender care
And take us to Heaven
To live with Thee there

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

A Moment to Wonder:

Let’s take a moment to ponder and wonder with Mary about the story of this miraculous child.

You might consider these questions silently, or talk about them with those you have gathered:

I wonder... what were Mary and Joseph’s hopes for their child?

I wonder... were those hopes fulfilled?

I wonder... what are your hopes on this night?

The Coming of God ----- by Ann Weems.

Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel's song,
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found
locked in the church,
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be
with no constraints,
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,
and destruction has no power
and even death cannot stop
the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready
God will come
even to a godforsaken place
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch ...
for you know not when
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.

Candle Lighting:

Tonight, we light one candle for Christ.

Because the world is broken and the wait is long
but Christ is with us through it all.

In humble manger in a backwater town - a baby.

On a convict's cross - a king.

in every heart and every home where hope, peace, joy, and love
endure-Christ with us.

"Glory to God in the Highest heaven," she whispers,

"and peace to all on earth."

So we light one candle, because it only takes one:

Christ with us.

- *From One Candle litany by Karen Ware Jackson*

If you are indoors, dim the room and get ready to light one candle. (If you have more candles, you'll light those later.) If you don't have a candle, imagine the light of Christ kindling in your heart.

Light your candle as you speak these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

If you are lighting more candles, do so during the song: Silent Night

Let us join with Christians around the world lighting candles and keeping vigil on this night:

Silent Night – sung or played

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 Alleluia
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

3) Silent night, holy night
Son of God, oh, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy
face
With the dawn of redeeming
grace
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth

Let us pray.

In the stillness,
in the silence,
we attend to your presence, our God.
And we feel you filling us from within
illuminating our minds
warming our hearts
stirring our spirits
strengthening our hands outstretched
transforming our lives
energizing our lives
Until every fiber of our being
is filled with your presence
Blessed are you, our God
whose name is love
whose presence is light
whose heart is justice
whose gift is grace
whose life is hope. Amen

— from “Rob’s Prayers” *Uniting Church, South Africa*

Benediction

Let us leave this space in peace.

All is calm. All is bright.

You may extinguish your candles whenever you are ready.

You might allow them to burn in your home until you are headed to bed (but please be careful leaving candles lit if you might fall asleep.) If you have battery powered candles, these can make a fun night-light for Christmas Eve.

You might also choose to light luminaries outside your home or leave a lit votive on your front porch to greet the Christ-child.