

God dwells with us

A CREATIVE LITURGY FOR CHRISTMAS

Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed



FROM
GENERATION
TO GENERATION...
God dwells with us

*We invite you to implement this liturgy as-is, or adapt it for your context. Please attribute credit as follows:
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INTRODUCTION

In the calendar year this liturgy was created and released (2022), Christmas Eve falls on a Saturday, Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, and New Year's Day is the Sunday after. Due to how this schedule may impact your worship and attendance, we have crafted this special creative liturgy for use throughout Christmastide. You may use it for Christmas Day worship or adapt it for any worship service throughout the Christmas season. No matter when you worship, we hope this liturgy helps you create a joyful and gratitude-filled worship experience for this holy season.

MUSIC SUGGESTIONS¹

The order of worship notes where you might include hymns throughout the service.

We encourage you to select familiar and beloved carols and hymns, such as the following:

- “Joy to the World”
(Words: Isaac Watts, Tune: ANTIOCH, c.1719, Public Domain)
- “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
(Words: Phillips Brooks, Tune: ST. LOUIS, c.1868, Public Domain)
- “Go, Tell It On the Mountain”
(Adapter: John W. Work, Tune: GO TELL IT, Public Domain)
- “O Come, All Ye Faithful”
(Words: John Francis Wade, Translator: Frederick Oakeley, Tune: ADESTE FIDELES, c. 1841, Public Domain)

¹ Please find additional hymn ideas on our blog:
sanctifiedart.org/blog/from-generation-to-generation-music-ideas.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Advent wreath (*all candles should be lit before the service begins*).
- Candle snuffer (*the liturgist will use this to extinguish the Advent candles throughout the prayer of confession*).
- Taper candle (*the liturgist will use this to relight the Advent candles during the words of forgiveness*).
- One clean sheet of paper for each person (*this can be the size of a bookmark or a small card; we suggest stuffing these papers in the bulletin, leaving them at the end of pews, or passing them out as people arrive, as they will be needed for the prayer of the people*).
- Pens/pencils (*available in the pews or seats*).

ABOUT THE LITURGY OUTLINE

- *Italicized lines are notes for worship leaders.*
- Unbolded lines are to be spoken by worship leaders and, when appropriate, printed in bulletins or projected on screens.
- **Bolded lines are to be spoken by the congregation and printed in bulletins or projected on screens.**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE

Opening music as worshippers gather, determined by the staff and/or music leaders.

WELCOME

Family of faith, Merry Christmas and welcome to worship here at (*name of church*)!

Just last night we gathered together to celebrate Christmas Eve. We lit candles. We told the story. We sang along with the angels. Many of you were here with us. And now, just a few hours later, we are back! Christ has been born. God is good, and our joy overflows.

Before we share logistics about today's service, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that some among us may be a little extra tired, or squirmy, or joyful. Some of us may be eager to return home to family, and some of us may be eager to be here with our church family. Know that however you feel today, whatever joy or weariness you bring into this space, God welcomes all of it, and we do too. We're so glad you're here.

Today's service is a little different from our normal flow, since this is such a unique and special day. In today's service we will sing, we will pray, we will listen, and we will write.

WELCOME (CONT.)

A few things to note to help this service move smoothly: hopefully you received a piece of paper when you entered the sanctuary.² Hold onto that paper for later in the service, as we will use it to write prayer requests. Additionally, at the very end of the service, I am going to invite you, as you are able, to stand up and form one large circle around the edge of the sanctuary during the benediction. There may be a few moments of chaos while we transition, and that is totally okay. If you prefer to remain seated, we will encompass you with the outer circle.

Now, may we all take a deep breath and center ourselves in this place. Christ is born. God has come. We are not alone. Let us celebrate that good news. Let us dwell with God!

Please stand in body or in spirit and join me in a responsive call to worship. With energy and joy, I invite you to repeat each phrase after me. We'll repeat these lines a few times, so please feel free to shout and fill our space with loud celebration. Repeat after me. . .

CALL TO WORSHIP³

To help set a celebratory and joyful tone, we encourage you to refrain from printing these words and instead lead a vocal call and response. Signal with your hand when it's the congregation's turn. Repeat these four lines several times, growing louder and more joyful in your proclamation as you go. To add to the joy and energy, invite the congregation to stand. They can remain standing for the following hymn.

I have good news!

I have good news!

Christ is born!

Christ is born!

Joy is alive!

Joy is alive!

God is here.

God is here.

(Repeat 3x)

Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Amen.

² Alternatively: "You can find a clean sheet of paper in your bulletin."

³ Why do a repeat-after-me call to worship? Great question. We have three reasons: 1) An off-script call to worship sends the message to the congregation that this day is unlike others. 2) A call and response call to worship includes wiggly children, creating space for their Christmas Day joy and energy, while also allowing joy to ring through in an organic way. 3) A repeat-after-me call to worship fills the sanctuary with a "joyful noise" that can help create unity, connection, and energy on a day that may have lower attendance than usual. Have fun with it!

HYMN

Select a hymn from our list of suggestions, or choose another Christmas hymn that your congregation loves.

CALL TO CONFESSION

On a day like today we may want to skip the prayer of confession because today is a day for joy. Why should we pause to think and talk about the ways we as humans mess things up?

I get that argument. However, I also believe that the joy of this day is even more joyful when we are honest about who we are. We humans tend to be messy, scattered, and full of doubt at times. Knowing that Jesus was born in a manger for us, and that Jesus loves and forgives us, is even better news.

So let us confess together to God, knowing that the honest truth of our lives only makes this good news better. Let us pray:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION + WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

The prayer of confession will be centered around the already lit Advent wreath. One by one, the liturgist will extinguish the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, only to relight them from the Christ candle at the end.

Holy God, too often we feel as if change is hopeless. The problems of this world feel too big, the path forward is unclear, and we are not confident that we can truly make a difference. We give up hope.

Liturgist snuffs out the candle of hope.

Together we pray:

Forgive us for extinguishing hope.

Holy God, too often we believe that peace is a thing of fairy tales. Our spirits are anxious. Our bodies are weary. Our world is fractured. Instead of praying for peace—both in ourselves and in our society—we assume that peace is no longer on the table. We give it up.

Liturgist snuffs out the candle of peace.

Together we pray:

Forgive us for extinguishing peace.

Holy God, too often we paint joy as naive—a luxury reserved for children and pets. We forget that you ate with friends, that you went to weddings, that you laughed and rested and hiked mountains. We forget that you knew joy, and that you want joy for us in this fractured world. Forgive us for turning away from your light.

Liturgist snuffs out the candle of joy.

Together we pray:

Forgive us for extinguishing joy.