

Joyful Night

A service to share with family or friends,
in person or across the miles, using technology.

Joyful Night is based on a simple booklet
first shared in a small parish in France in 1968.
It was created for parishioners to use
in their homes on Christmas Eve,
before attending Midnight Mass.

But it can be used whenever it suits your schedule
during the days leading up to Christmas.

“In the joy of the moment,” the pastor wrote,
“it is a chance to pray
and to embrace God’s love for us.”

Feel free to customize it as it suits you.
You may select one or two people to lead and read,
or you may prefer to assign parts to each participant.

While the service includes
the blessing of the Christmas tree and of the creche,
— be sure to turn off the lights on the tree before beginning —
gather wherever it’s convenient
and move around to different locations in your home as needed.
The original booklet suggests dimming the lights.
Candlelight or Christmas lights could enhance the setting.

The hymns included can be sung *a cappella*,
with musical accompaniment
or with pre-recorded music.
Again, whatever works for your situation.

The goal is to incorporate a memorable and meaningful
spiritual aspect into your Christmas celebration at home.

It just might become a cherished tradition.

Leader:

We gather, Lord, to give and receive gifts at Christmas, but we rejoice because:

All:

It is you, O Lord, who is coming.

It came upon the Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

And you, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way, with painful steps and slow:
Look now! For glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.
Oh, rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!

Reader/s:

We are waiting with the faith of countless generations before us. With the faith of our ancestors, of family members and dear friends who, though far away, join us in worship and anticipation. With the faith of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of John the Baptist, of all the prophets and holy men and women of the Bible who, like us, firmly believed the coming of the Messiah would bring an era of peace on earth, and peace between heaven and earth.

After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God banished them from the Garden of Eden. But God also gave them a solemn promise, saying to the serpent:

"Because you have done this...I will make you enemies of each other, you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel."

Leader:

God's words described our eternal struggle with evil, but also assured that, in the end, we would be saved. In numerous passages of the Bible, written over centuries, many details were provided concerning the time and manner of the Messiah's coming.

Reader/s:

In Genesis, we read of King Melchizedek, who appears with a gift of bread and wine, just as the Messiah — which means the anointed one — would be both priest and king. Other Scriptures associate the coming savior with the poor, describing him as the shepherd of his people. Yet it was known the Messiah would be powerful and his rule would last forever.

The prophet Hosea associated the Messiah with peace and Zechariah wrote of the humility of one who, though triumphant, would arrive “humble and riding on a donkey.” Michah spoke of glory, peace, and the savior’s birthplace, Bethlehem.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie,
above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight!

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!

Leader:

No prophet, however, gave more details about the coming Messiah than Isaiah.

“The Lord himself will give you a sign,” he wrote. “It is this: the virgin is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel (God with us) ...

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and for those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone ...

For there is a child born for us, a son given to us, and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him:

Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace.”

Reader/s:

But Isaiah also spoke of the Messiah being scorned by his own: “Without beauty, without majesty we saw him, no looks to attract our eyes, a thing despised and rejected by us, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.”

Leader:

Why this long wait, at once anguished and joyous? God made everything in creation beautiful, harmonious and magnificent, but we, through our sin, destroy the beauty and ruin the harmony.

All:

Lord, by our sins, we have contributed to disharmony. Come, Lord Jesus, bring us peace and forgiveness.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O Come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel!

Reader: Come Lord Jesus, come.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: Many are still caught in the darkness of sin.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: We, too, give in to sin and pride.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: That we may know how to love one another and care for others.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: So that people throughout the world suffering from oppression
may know your justice and peace.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: So that we will have the courage to share with those who hunger.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader: That we stay united through your love.

All: Come Lord Jesus, come.

Reader:

Lord, you do not allow the prayers of the lowly and the poor to go unanswered. To all, you wish to bring peace, and during this holy time of the year, you come to us by being born in a stable near Bethlehem. You are the savior, the light of the world.

Let us light a candle near the manger

Leader:

Lord, we ask your blessing upon this scene + in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Give us the eyes to see ourselves present among those who come to worship. May we welcome you into our hearts in a new way, keeping our focus on the salvation you bring to each of us during this Christmas season.

Silent Night

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.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

And now, we light the Christmas tree!

Leader:

O God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of new light. Bless this tree + in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We adorn it with lights to honor he who comes to enlighten us. Let us see in this tree your beautiful simplicity and humble strength. And let this tree remind us of our responsibility for the care of the earth.

O Christmas Tree

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
thy leaves are so unchanging.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
thy leaves are so unchanging.

Not only green when summer's here,
but also when it's cold and drear.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
thy leaves are so unchanging.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree
your boughs can teach a lesson.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
your boughs can teach a lesson:

That constant faith and hope sublime,
lend strength and comfort through all time.

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
your boughs can teach a lesson.

Leader and/or Reader/s:

Listen, now, to the Nativity of Our Lord from the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 2,
verses 1 to 20:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph, too, went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David, a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

And suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." The angels went away from them to heaven; the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

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 th'angelic host proclaim: "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Joy to the World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness,
and wonders of His love,
and wonders of His love,
and wonders, and wonders, of His love.

O Come all Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, born the King of Angels!
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

*Adeste fideles laeti triumphantes,
Venite, venite in Bethlehem.
Natum videte, Regem Angelorum;
Venite adoremus, venite adoremus,
venite adoremus, Dominum!*

Leader/Reader/s: Let us thank the Lord Jesus for the joy he brings us.

All: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Leader/Reader/s: Lord Jesus, you have come among us.

All: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Leader/Reader/s: You have come on earth to bring us true light, true joy, true happiness.

All: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Leader/Reader/s: By your birth you have become brother to us all.

All: Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Leader/Reader/s:

Your mother is also our mother. During this holy season, we ask her to pray for us and with us here assembled, with those who are not with us, with those who have left for eternal life, and with believers throughout the world.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of they womb, Jesus.

All:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen.

Leader:

May the grace of God be with us all the days of our lives, and the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and eternal joy.

All: Amen

Leader/Reader/s:

We offer this season's joy, the joy of the gifts we will give and receive, and our whole lives.

Christmas is filled with wonders. A virgin becomes a mother. A village carpenter finds himself as the guardian of the Savior of the world. An angel choir fills the nighttime sky with glorious music. Shabby shepherds are the first to hear the news of salvation.

But the greatest wonder of Christmas, the glory of Christmas, the incredible miracle of Christmas, is the incarnation: God became human!

This time together has brought us closer and reminded us why we celebrate Christmas. We look forward to sharing Mass, reunited in the house of the Lord with our brothers and sisters in the parish and throughout the world, whether in person or using technology.

Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to all people of good will!

Angels we have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high,
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply,
Echo back their joyous strains:

Gloria, in excelsis Deo,
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

The Diocese of Erie extends gratitude to the priests of St. Louis Parish in Robertsau, France, and to Gerard Brault, 1929-2020, who adapted their work and used this prayer service with his family for more than 25 years.