



**December 22, 2024**

**Co-Pastors: Rev. Ross Baker and Rev. Amanda Baker**

**Worship Musicians: Cheryl Doty, Abby Worley & Sue Woods**

**Sarah Beth Pringle & Mrs. Johnson, Sanctuary Choir**

**Acolytes: Sadie Chanley & Kate Thuma**

**Advent Four**

**Bethlehem: A Place of Humility**

**We Set Off**  
*(Gathering)*

**(Love)**

**Welcome**

Welcome to our KVOE listeners and to those watching online.

My name is **Carrie Riggs** and this morning I am your worship reader.

Welcome to Emporia First United Methodist Church. We are all beloved children of God.

Together, we are a Christian community committed to accepting, valuing, and loving all.

We seek to live, grow, and serve as Jesus taught us: loving one another, transforming lives, and making disciples. Let us now worship.

**Prelude**

**Light for the Journey**

*(Threshold Moment)*

**Carrie Riggs:** It is time we got to Bethlehem. First, a decree set by Rome; second, a declaration of birth for an elderly couple in Jerusalem; third, a girl surprised by news of pregnancy in Nazareth! And NOW it all culminates in our travels to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is the ancestral home of mighty King David as well as his humble and faithful descendant: Joseph, the carpenter.

Bethlehem was called “little” by the prophet Micah who recognized that something of great worth would come from a humble place. As a champion of the “least of these,” Jesus’ ministry would shine light on the worth of humble people and places. Let us ask, how will we show this kind of humble love to others?

You are invited to rise in body and/or spirit as the four Advent candles are lit.

**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.**

**We’re on our way  
We’re on our way  
Dream of the day  
When [love] holds sway  
With all the earth  
In all our hearts  
We’re on our way  
This is the day.**

*Advent Reader(s): **The Thompson Family***

The journey continues, and this candle will help light our way.

**We are on our way to more love.**

So many are in need of grace, in need of loving acceptance.

**We are a people who can bring Good News.**

Stories of generosity are markers and signs that  
goodness is the nature of God.

**God’s light goes before us, we are not alone.**

**We’re on our way  
We’re on our way  
Dream of the day  
When [love] holds sway  
With all the earth  
In all our hearts  
We’re on our way  
This is the day.**

**Opening Prayer and Words of Assurance- Rev. Ross Baker**

Holy and Living God, we pray for hearts and minds  
to open wide to merciful acts in your name.  
Too often, we clench our fists in fear that what we have  
will not be enough for us.  
Give us the humility to make more room.  
Call us to a “generosity of grace.”  
Call us to be generous—not to a fault—but to a future  
where all have a place and a home where they are deeply loved.  
We pray this in the name of your Son,  
Jesus, the Christ, your Love Incarnate. **Amen.**

Let this be a marker of assurance that we are moving in a faithful direction:  
God is with us every step of our way toward the Love of Bethlehem.  
Jesus is being born into our lives even now.  
The Spirit is transforming us in this place.

Peace be with you!  
**And also with you.**

As people forgiven and freed,  
I invite you to pass the Peace of Christ among you  
[and those worshiping remotely, we are glad you are on the journey with us!].

## **The Peace**

### **Opening Hymn/Song**

*["Love Came Down at Christmas" UMH 242](#)*

<p><b>The Place and Its Message</b> <i>(Proclaiming)</i></p>
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### **The Children Show Us the Way**

*[Congregation invited to sing vs. 1 “O Little Town of Bethlehem” as children come forward]*

### **First Scripture Reading- Carrie Riggs**

Romans 13: 8-11

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know*

*what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone; the day is near.*

## **The Word in Music**

***I Believe*** by Mark Miller - Sanctuary Choir

### **Gospel Reading- Rev. Ross Baker**

Luke 2: 1-14

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar 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 firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.*

*Now in that same region there were shepherds living 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 will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,*

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"*

### **Sermon- "Bethlehem: A Place of Humility" - Rev. Ross Baker**

#### **Guided by Prayer**

***"Lead Me, Guide Me" (chorus only)***

***TFWS 2214***

**Rev. Amanda Baker:** We begin our prayer time today remembering that when we need guidance the most, we can turn to God in prayer. Today we are guided by Love.

**Lead me, guide me, along the way.  
For if you lead me I cannot stray.  
Lord, let me walk each day with you.  
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.**

**Rev. Amanda Baker:** Let us pray:

God of Love, we come to you today longing for your presence in our lives and with all those who suffer—in body, mind, or spirit. We pray this day for...

God of Love, we come to you today so deeply grateful for celebrations, triumphs, and even small steps toward the lives we seek and the world we desire. We pray this day for...

Holy God, we know you are near. We know that every step along the way to Bethlehem in this Advent season is a step closer to renewed life in Jesus, the Christ. We know that your Spirit resides within us, growing day by day into the fullness of Love. In this moment, we pause in silence, marking your presence with awe and asking you to fill us, guide us, along our journey.

*Moments of Silence*

May we live by the prayer you taught us...

*Lord's Prayer*

**Gifts Along the Way**

**Offering- Rev. Ross Baker**

**Music: Silent Night**

Sarah Beth Pringle & Mrs. Johnson, Flute, Piano & Vocal (one verse)

**Doxology**

*[to the tune of "Away in a Manger"]*

**Praise God for these gifts that we offer today  
and bless them for good in the world, this we pray.  
Praise Jesus, the Christ-Child, our Hope and our Stay,  
the Spirit, our Keeper, our Guide on the Way.**

**Moving On**  
*(Sending Forth)*

**Announcements- Rev. Amanda Baker**

**We Set Off: A Proclamation for the Continued Journey**

**Rev. Ross Baker:** We have checked the signs and markers to make sure we are moving in a faithful direction. With love, we reside here in Bethlehem, knowing that the Light of Christ shines through the night. We are not alone. Humble places can be full of abundance. The story continues, and we claim our place in the narrative. We have come to Bethlehem to see, hear, sense, and know that love, not fear, perseveres.

**Closing Hymn/Song**

*["Angels We Have Heard on High" UMH 238](#)*

**Benediction- Rev. Ross Baker**

Soon we will gather once again to sing with the angels about  
the love that came down to Bethlehem.  
Our journey to the stable...

And now as you go forth from this place,  
know that all the places you encounter in the world  
will contain signs and markers of God's work among us.

So keep your senses alert,  
your perception wide,  
and your heart open  
to new discoveries along the way.

**O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray,  
cast out our fear, and draw us near; 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.**

**We're on our way  
We're on our way  
Dream of the day  
When [love] holds sway  
With all the earth  
In all our hearts  
We're on our way  
This is the day.**

**Postlude**