

Hangings of the Greens

• *Joy To The World (Unspeakable Joy)*

Welcome – *Clint Ables*

Through the centuries Christians have observed a time of waiting and expectation before celebrating the birth of the baby Jesus. It's a season when people decorate and send messages proclaiming joy and best wishes. It's a time of peace when we take a breather from the troubles of the world and listen to God's still small voice through the wonder of the season.

It's a time of joy when we get to share in the celebration, give gifts, sing carols, and express hope for tomorrow. And it's a time of love when words seem kinder, and tempers are more controlled. It's a season of giving and forgiving as we remember God's grace toward us and pass it on to others. This season is a time for reflection and preparation.

As we decorate our worship space, let us make room for the birth of Emmanuel—"God with us." Let's celebrate together the birth of our King.

• *Emmanuel God With Us*

Hangings of the Greens – *Johnson Family*

The garlands we hang in the sanctuary have long been a part of Christmas observances. Laurel and bay leaves symbolize victory and triumph; the evergreens and the cypress symbolize eternal life; holly is a symbol of joy and peace; wreaths of holly represent the unending, timeless nature of such qualities. These greens remind us of the timeless nature of the Christmas message and the eternal dimension of the gospel.

It's important that in all the frantic activity of this season that we focus on the One whose birth we celebrate. Today you will be reminded of some ways we can see Christ in the symbols of Christmas. We will recall the redeeming work for which Jesus Christ came as portrayed in the seasonal decorations to which we are so accustomed. We do this with the hope that each of us will continue to be reminded of our precious Savior each time we step into this worship center and perhaps even see Jesus in the many bright and cheerful displays of the holidays.

May the trimmings of Christmas be a testimony to the hope found in Jesus Christ.

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life..."
(I John 5:11-13)

• *God So Loved*

Hangings of the Wreaths – *Norman Family*

Of all the Christmas symbols, none is more familiar than the evergreen. Its use during this season is common throughout the world, both as simple decoration and as the Christmas tree. Long before the birth of Christ, evergreens were used as an emblem of eternal life. Isa 60:13 says "The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious." Now, as a Christian symbol, the evergreen represents Jesus Christ, who *is* eternal life.

Speaking to Nicodemus in John 3:14-21, Jesus said... *"as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that*

he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

The Poinsettias – Tucker Family

Poinsettias are the flowers of Christmas. They are growing things; their beauty is alive in splendid color. They call us to celebrate the world about us and share its beauty in the place where we worship. The poinsettia is a vivid plant, full of meaning. A cluster of small yellow flowers springs forth from among crimson leaves, which themselves contrast sharply with the remaining green leaves of the plant. The star-shaped formation of the red leaves suggests the guiding star of Bethlehem. The crown of yellow flowers reminds us of him who was born the infant king. The blood-red leaves foreshadow the cruel cross that lay ahead for the King of Glory. And underneath, the carpet of green, the reflection of abundant life.

• *What Child Is This*

Hanging of the Choir Green – White Family

Music is so richly interwoven with the history and tradition of Christmas that it provides one of the greatest joys of this celebration. Mary, whom God would use to bring the first Christmas to all the world sang...

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... His mercy extends to those who fear him.

And Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist sang...

Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Worship ushered in the first Christmas. When the birth announcement of Jesus Christ was given the angels proclaimed, *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.* Christians have been singing this same good news ever since that first Christmas.

One of our finest holiday customs is singing Christmas carols. Let's dedicate our songs this season to the God who gives us reason to sing today, tomorrow, and forever. As we sing let our souls glorify the Lord as our spirits rejoice in our Savior.

• *O Come All Ye Faithful*

The Giving of Gifts – John Spencer

"Magi from the east came. And when they saw the child, they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts. Gift giving as Christmas is inspired by those wise men who presented the newborn King with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even closer to our hearts is the precious gift of salvation given by the birth, death and resurrection of Christ the King.

We who have the gift of salvation are given the divine privilege of sharing with those who have not accepted His love. He who 'lavished' us with eternal, abundant life asks us to share the message of good news with all we come in contact with.

We give our gifts this morning, our tithes and offerings, so that others will have the opportunity to know the hope that is in Christ.

• *We Three Kings – RICKY leads*

Decorating the Tree – Lauren Foster and Courtney Watson

Our Christmas tree is decorated with gold and white symbolizing Jesus' majesty and purity. It is covered with lights, which remind us that He came into a world of darkness and became our Light of the World.

Pointing upward our tree reminds us that our God came down from heaven to be with us. The gift of the Christ child was an invitation to have a relationship with our divine Creator who not only lives in heaven but also abides in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The branches of our tree point out to remind us of our Christian community, our family of faith. God's Son came, lived, died, and was resurrected so that we might have a renewed relationship with his Father and with each other. It is God's desire that we live out the true meaning of Christmas among ourselves, today and every day.

Atop our tree is a star. This star reminds us that Christ came to be a guiding light. His shining radiance dispels the darkness of sin and death as it points us toward our loving heavenly Father.

The Wise Men *"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him."* (Matthew 2:10 – 11)

The Nativity – Turner Family

The first recorded use of the Christmas crèche goes back many centuries to 1223 in Italy when St. Francis of Assisi used a life-size nativity to explain the birth of Jesus to non-believers. Today we display the nativity to remind us of the beautiful story of Christ's birth, to remind us that Christ came for all: the humble shepherds and the wise kings. When we display a nativity in our sanctuary, it is an attempt to remind us of the simple, yet profound story. God reaches out to all of humanity—the powerless and powerful, the meek and the proud, the outsiders and the "wealthy." Those that visited Jesus included wise men as well as shepherds, there was a mother and a father, there were angels and innkeepers. We join these witnesses and kneel at the manger, overwhelmed by God's expression of love for us.

Many of you will display a nativity like this one with the Wise Men, shepherds, Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. It is a picture what is recorded in the Bible in these words:

⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

• *Away In A Manger*

Candles – Lock Family

The Christmas season is symbolic of light, beginning with the star that guided the Wise men to the house where Jesus lived. The Christian use of candles is symbolic of Christ as "Light of the World." As such, Jesus illuminates our spiritual darkness. When we choose to be a disciple, we become light to the world.

The Apostle John (1 Jn 5:20) spoke of Jesus in these words:

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Jesus left heaven and came into the world to give us insight and understanding of the true nature of God. He is a God who loves us and reaches out to us. Jesus is the light of the world who reveals to us how we can have a personal relationship with the God of the universe.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The light of the world came to us to invite us into his eternal family. So, this holiday season, let the candlelight remind you and fill you with joy for Jesus, the light of the world has come for us.

• *Silent Night* – **CLINT** leads