

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP

By Michelle Butterfield Kocis



Call to Worship:

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6 NRSV)

Hymn: #159 – Oh come, all ye faithful

Opening Prayer: (in unison)

God of light, guide us out of darkness and into your light. Let your light shine through us and around us as we worship you today. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 2:8–12

Hymn: #139 – Hark! The herald angels sing

Message: Christmas Dinner

The theme of “God with us” echoes through my heart during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. As a minister I always want my congregation to sing carols, hymns, and songs that remind us of this Christmas promise.

My heart is constantly singing,
 ‘Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His name is called Emmanuel.
 God with us, revealed in us, His name is called Emmanuel.’ (Book of Praise: #114)

The message and promise of “God with us” that I found in scripture (and song) as a child, teen, young adult and grown up, has always given me hope and security in my faith. It is the one promise I know to be true! God has been present in my life in so many ways—through family and friends, scripture and song, texts and emails, strangers and neighbours. They all have given me messages of hope, patience, endurance, provision, encouragement, joy, and comfort. They are gifts from God. However, my experience of these gifts and the presence of God did not necessarily happen just at Christmas. Actually, most of these moments happened during ordinary times. We celebrate God with us during Advent and Christmas and yet experience God with us all year long, in all our moments.

During the Christmas season we are always encouraged and conditioned to give generously to others. I’d like to think I do my best, however can I do better? Of course, we can always do better. Last year I was looking up Christmas songs that I remember playing on the radio when I was a kid like “Old Toy Trains” (Nana Mouskouri), “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus” (Jackson 5), and “Mary’s Boy Child” (Bony M). It was then that I came across Peter, Paul and Mary’s song, “Christmas dinner.” This is the song that made me ask myself, “can I do better?”

Peter, Paul and Mary’s “Christmas Dinner,” is a modern parable about the power of human compassion and connection, dare I say an example of “God with us.” Set in an unnamed city that could be either a scene from a Dickens’ tale or 20th-century Toronto, the parable is about a “cold and shivering” homeless lad wandering the streets alone on Christmas Eve. It describes the boy looking through the windows of homes where people are gathering to feast on “turkeys and ducks and geese and cherry pies.” He doesn’t linger long until he comes upon the home of an older woman sitting alone at an empty table lit by candlelight. The boy rings her bell and offers to share with her what little he has for dinner, and she responds in kind. This is the moment, the moment when I asked, “Can I do better?” It’s that moment when compassion and generosity speak to a kind of abundance that money cannot buy.

I must admit, I have been hesitant to join the Christian cry at Christmas—put Christ back in Christmas! And this song may be one of the reasons why. Emmanuel was not born into a sanitized world; “God with us” was born into the real world with all of its *dirty* complications, problems, and difficulties. Even Christmas songs like

“Christmas Dinner” without a mention of baby Jesus or Emmanuel can communicate God’s gifts and the presence of “God with us.” This parable reminds us of God’s presence in the world beyond our church buildings, worship services, and religious language. We’re reminded of how Jesus came to us, lived among us as one of us. Think of it, a Christmas song that doesn’t mention baby Jesus shows us the power of the Incarnation, of “God with us” and reminds us that God came to us for the ordinary times and continues to dwell among us.

“God with us, *revealed in us*, His name is called Emmanuel” I have to say, this parable inspires me to do better this Christmas and every ordinary day. The song “Christmas Dinner” demonstrates for us, “God with us, *revealed in us*,” revealed—in—us. Christmas time or anytime, God is with us, God is revealed in us! As I reflect on this parable, I know I can do better!

My prayer this Christmas and New Year is: Emmanuel, be with me each day as I begin. May your light and love be revealed in my every thought, word, and deed. Grant me the courage to set aside society’s expectations for Christmas. Grant me the courage to set aside the church’s expectations for Christmas. Guide me to be a “God with us, revealed in us” follower of Christ. Display in me your kind of compassion and generosity and bless me with your presence each step of the way. Amen.

Collection of Offering

Prayer of Dedication:

Generous God, bless our time,
talents and treasures so that
when the candles are blown out,
when the ringing of the bells has ceased
when the angels and shepherds have gone home,
we may continue to shine your light into the world
through the giving of these offerings. Amen.

Responsive Prayer:

Leader: Loving God, you came, God Immanuel, as an infant, to dwell among us. We give you thanks for your presence.

All: God is with us.

Leader: At Christmas time we remember those within our group who are grieving. We remember those who are struggling with financial issues or health issues. We pray for those who are lonely. Help us to be with the broken hearted and to share what we have.

All: God is with us. Be with those who are suffering.

Leader: We pray for our world. We pray for countries that face violence, disease, and hunger. Bring peace to areas of the world that are in

conflict. Bring new life and generosity to the earth so that those who are hungry can be fed.

All: God is with us. Be with our world.

Leader: We pray for our church, our WMS group, and our community. Be with our leaders and help them to make wise choices. Be with our church during this season, and help us to welcome members, friends, and others into our midst.

All: God is with us. Help us share your presence with others. Amen.

Hymn: # 153 – Joy to the world

Responsive Blessing:

Leader: God with us, bless us as we leave this place to serve.

**All: Bless us to be bearers of God with us,
light, love and peace.**

Leader: Where there is a need,

All: may we meet it.

Leader: Where there is injustice,

All: may we fight it.

Leader: Where there are shadows,

All: may we be light.

Leader: Where there is hopelessness,

All: may we offer hope.

Leader: Where there is hatred,

All: may we be love.

Leader: Where people forget,

All: may we remind them that God is with Us! Amen.

Resources:

Link to Peter, Paul & Mary song “Christmas Dinner by candle light”

<https://youtu.be/-DfEpCQKsyc>

