

WELCOME AND GREETING- LAYNE

Welcome to Christmas Eve at McBIC! I'm glad you've chosen to join us for our Christmas Eve service. I'm McBIC's Lead Pastor, Layne Lebo, and it's my privilege to welcome you tonight.

I want to make sure you're all prepared to participate in our candle lighting at the conclusion of the service. If you didn't get a candle or a glo-stick for your children, please raise your hand and our ushers will see that you get one.

Since we won't meet between tonight and the end of the year, blue offering boxes are available at each of the doors for you to place your financial contributions in. I'm especially excited about our end-of-the-year giving project that supports a local ministry called Peace Promise whose mission is, *"recovering hope and strengthening the lives of those impacted by sexual exploitation in our community,"* and a global ministry of church planting among the Isaan people in Northeast Thailand. To support this project, write "end of year project" on the note line of your check or you can make an electronic contribution on line.

During the Christmas season we've been focused on the theme, "Light in the Darkness," and we'll continue focusing on that theme tonight as we're reminded how Jesus's birth brought light into a dark world 2,000 years ago and continues to bring light to our world today.

Listen to these words from John's Gospel chapter 1:

Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn't make. Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it.
John 1:1-5 Living Bible Translation

Prayer—*Jesus, tonight we thank you for coming to our world as Immanuel, God with us—as a baby born in Bethlehem. We thank you that you are the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." We thank you for being the light who penetrates the darkness of our world. May your light shine brightly in our hearts and in our world tonight. AMEN.*

MOVEMENT #1- ANGEL TO MARY

Cody: Tonight Advent reaches its final destination- the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But before we can fully celebrate the Light of the World that Jesus was and is, we must recognize the darkness that His light overcame. Before Jesus, the Israelites were frantically searching for a savior- they had heard about him in prophecies and knew the Scriptures pointing to his arrival. Yet they waited in darkness for this promised Messiah to arrive. Imagine for a moment a world without Jesus' presence. Without his life, his ministry, his ground-breaking example of love and healing for all. This dark world is where we meet our main characters- a young Jewish man and an even younger Jewish woman, soon to be married to one another. What may have started as an ordinary day became monumental as this young girl, named Mary, has an encounter with an Angel of the Lord.

The angel Gabriel went to Mary and said to her, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mary walks through an appropriate range of emotions in this passage- at first she is frightened, then confused, and eventually, willing. Have you experienced this before? A calling from the Lord that doesn't seem to make sense at the time? Mary is a young Jewish girl without a husband, and yet God calls on HER to carry the Light of the World in her womb. God's callings in our lives don't always seem clear to us at first, but when we step into what He has for us, we eventually see what His plan was all along. Let's hear a few stories of folks who have felt like Mary in their calling, and what happened when they willingly said YES.

TESTIMONY VIDEO- SOPHIE + COLLINS'

Cody: So Mary says yes to this wild, scary, beautiful adventure and with that YES, some of God's light enters into the darkness. But as Katrina and Mike shared- there was work to be done- things weren't automatically easy for Mary and Joseph. After nine months of waiting, it was time for Jesus to be born.

To continue this part of the story, I'm going to ask Jen and Tammy to make their way to the stage, and any children in the audience who would like to join us for a special message, please come up as well.

MOVEMENT #2- JESUS' BIRTH- TAMMY AND JEN

We are so glad you are here to celebrate Christmas with us! We just heard about the angel telling Mary she was going to have a baby who was God's son, Jesus. This was amazing news because the people of Israel had been waiting for a VERY long time for the Savior of the world to come. It was such a long wait that it felt like they were in darkness.

How do you feel when you are in the dark? Yes! When we are in the dark, we can feel lost, scared, unsafe and hopeless. We can't find our way in the dark. This is how the people of Israel must have been feeling too while they waited for Jesus to come.

Mary and Joseph knew the Light was coming to the world because the angel had told them. What happens to the darkness, when the light comes on? That's right! It disappears and the light takes over. This was the hope that Mary and Joseph were looking toward when they were preparing for Jesus's birth. Here is how it happened...how Jesus became the light in this world filled with darkness.

Read the scripture passage from Luke. When we get to the part where Jesus is born, we (Jen and I) switch on our lights. The helpers also begin to pass out the tea lights to the kids.

The Light had come!! Jesus was here and the darkness was finally lit! How does light help us? Yes! It helps us to see and find our way, to feel safe, and it brings us hope. These are exactly the things that Jesus brought to the world.

Sometimes we might feel like the world feels dark even now. We must remember

that Jesus came. He is the Light and when we ask Him into our hearts and love Him, we carry His light too. We can be Jesus's light to the world.

We are going to hear a song that describes how the world felt in the darkness and then tells about the hope that came when Jesus, the Light of the World, was born. When you are tapped, bring your light up and place it in the manger. Jesus IS the light that has come to the World!

Special Music: "Light Of the World (Behold)"- Olivia Hopkins

MOVEMENT #3- SHEPHERDS- CODY + DEB

Cody: So the light of the world had officially arrived. Though the birth wasn't easy or standard, Joseph and Mary delighted in this gift of a newborn baby in their arms. But Jesus' presence wasn't just meant to be a gift to mom and dad- his coming into the world was news for all to hear. God decided to use an unlikely group of people to spread the word.

"There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

So the Shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."

Imagine you're one of these shepherds for a moment. You're working the night shift at a less-than-ideal job, just trying to stay awake. You smell like sheep and grass and sweat. You're one of MANY young shepherds doing the same job all over the countryside. And yet... a messenger from God appears to YOU. The promised Messiah that your family has heard about for generations has finally arrived, and he has chosen YOU to visit.

I love this unexpected choice to use ordinary shepherds. At Christmastime we even call them LOWLY shepherds. These were not the elite, the A Team. But God chose them to have a front-row seat to the presence of the Savior. I wonder if some of them even held this new baby in their arms. A dirty, humble shepherd holding a dirty, humble baby. An unconventional picture of divine royalty.

There are times we feel much too lowly to be in the presence of God. Like there's no possible way he would choose us, know us, love us. And yet, Jesus' first human visitors were just like us- mess and all. I'm going to invite Deb Finefrock to the stage to share with us her story of accepting the presence of Jesus, as she brings even more light into the darkness.

DEB FINEFROCK TESTIMONY

Cody: Jesus coming to Earth in human form meant that this God that we worship was now available to us a personal, intimate savior and friend. ALL people had access to the love, grace and forgiveness that he brought. Including our next characters, the wise men. Cindy will join me on stage to continue the message of light through a mysterious star in the night sky.

MOVEMENT #4- MAGI- CINDY

With Jesus' birth, the light of God entered the darkness of our world—a light that brought hope and joy and the fulfillment of a promise made long ago. And with His birth, **a light appeared in the darkness of the night sky**, calling wise men from the east to the city of Jerusalem in search of a newborn king. “We saw his star as it rose,” they said, “and we have come to worship him.” From Jerusalem, the star guided the wise men on a journey to the town of Bethlehem. There, they found Jesus. Filled with joy, they bowed down and worshiped him, offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But a single star does not illuminate the darkness of night, and Jesus' birth did not immediately vanquish the darkness of the world. In the heart of King Herod was great darkness: a willingness to wipe out a generation for the sake of his own power and to protect his throne from this newborn king. In a dream, God warned Joseph of this darkness, instructing him to take Mary and Jesus and flee to safety in Egypt until the time God would call them back to Israel.

More than 2,000 years later, we continue to live in a world plagued by darkness—the darkness of war, hatred, death, and division. And in the shadows of our own hearts, we might find jealousy, fear, shame, or hopelessness. We continue to live

in a world that so desperately needs the light that Jesus brings—the light He invites each of us to be and to carry into the darkness around us.

Jesus calls us to be the light of the world, to shine like a city on a hill, but sometimes responding to that call may feel like following a star as it travels across the night sky. As we've heard in tonight's stories, the path may seem confusing and the destination unknown. But the Lord goes before us, guiding the way as we share His comfort with the wounded, His healing with the broken, and His good news of salvation with the world.

His light offers hope in the darkness. And when we shine His light into the world, like stars in the night sky, we have the opportunity to help lead people out of the shadows of shame, fear, and despair and into the light of Jesus' glorious presence, where they can experience joy, peace, and life. For "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

As you and I carry His light into the world, I offer this prayer for each of us—a prayer that may have resonated in the hearts of the wise men as they followed the star:

"A Prayer of Unknowing" by Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that, if I do this, You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Cody: As I invite the worship team to join me on stage, let me put this question before you: Do you feel the tensions held within this Christmas Story? The confusion and hesitation of Mary, the Shepherds asking "who me?" in response to their invitation to see Jesus, the Wise Men debating their loyalties to King Herod or this new baby King, the need for Joseph and Mary to flee their home for safety. There are challenges in this story, but in each instance, these heroes of our faith chose to bring LIGHT into the darkness at each step. They said yes to their callings,

told everyone they knew about the Savior, and worshipped the one true King. Have you welcomed this light into your life? Are you willing to bring this light to the areas of darkness in our world? Will we be people who praise and glorify this King without reservation? Let's pray.

Special Music: Light of the World (We The Kingdom)- Worship Team