

“Draw Deep the Breath of Christmas”

Christmas Eve – 6:30 pm Worship Service, December 24, 2005

Luke 1:5 - 2:20

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[The Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Prayer.

There appeared to Zechariah,
a priest of the temple,
an angel of the Lord.¹
Gabriel appeared
when the Lord's longing desire
for a Savior
and Zechariah's longing desire
for a child
joined together and became one.

Gabriel appeared
to the right of the altar.
Zechariah trembled with fear.
“Do not be afraid”
the angel sensed his apprehension.
“for your prayer is heard.
Your wife Elizabeth
will bear you a son,
and you shall call
his name John.”
“He will make ready for the Lord
a people prepared.”
Zechariah drew deep
the breath of Christmas
and Elizabeth conceived.

Gabriel was returned by God
sent to the backwater
Galilean city of Nazareth
to a virgin
engaged to to local carpenter
and her name was Mary.²
“Hail, O favored one!”

1 Luke 1:11-17

2 Luke 1:26-35

Gabriel announced.
Mary trembled with fear.
Can you blame her?
“Do not be afraid”
the angel sensed her apprehension.
“You have found favor
with God.
You will conceive in your womb
and bear a son,
and you shall
call his name, Jesus.”
“He will be great,
and will be called
the Son of the Most High;
and the Lord God
will give to him
the throne of his father David,
and he will reign over
the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom
there will be no end.”

“But I have no husband,”
Mary wondered,
“How can this be?”
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High
will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born
will be called holy
the Son of God.”
Mary drew deep
the breath of Christmas
and conceived
the Savior of the World.

A cousin,

John was born.
Elizabeth's barrenness ended.
And the baby
drew deep his first breath
and it was the breath of Christmas.

A cousin,
Jesus was born.
The world's darkness ended.
"The Word became flesh
and dwelt among us."³
And the baby
drew deep his first breath
and it was the breath of Christmas.

Angelic intervention did not cease.
An angel appeared
(undoubtedly Gabriel)
to lowly shepherds
tending to their flocks at night.⁴
Like Zechariah and Mary
they were filled with fear.
"Do not be afraid"
the angel sensed their apprehension.
"Behold,
I bring you good news
of a great joy
which will come to all the people;
for to you is born this day
in the city of David
a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord."
They went with haste
and found the Christ child
just as had been told them.
They peered
into the lowly manger
saw the baby
wrapped tightly in swaddling cloths
and drew the shepherds
the deep breath of Christmas.

Astrological visions

3 John 1:14

4 Luke 2:8-20

appeared to wise men in the East
like an angel
rising as a star
over the manger
where the Savior lay.⁵
The star
drew them to come
led them to Bethlehem
gave them the understanding
that a child King
had been born.
Entering the barn
they saw the baby
"with Mary her mother,
and they fell down
and worshiped him."
The wise men
drew deeply the breath of Christmas.

There is sufficient fuel
to feed the Grinch's complaints:
Commercialism that begins
before Halloween;
Secular renditions
on screen and over the airwaves
of animated talking snowmen
and holiday music parodies;
Materialism's greed
whose appetite
can never be satisfied;
and Expectations
for office etiquette,
returning gifts of equal value,
and to get the cards out in time.

Children's pageants
choral cantatas
and special services
have little chance to
break open the hearts
of committed curmudgeons.

I hear Scrooge's objections

5 Matthew 2:1-12

all the time,
and they sound like this:
“the age of miracles is over”
“angles are just a bunch of phooey”
“if God is so great, then why did He allow ...
(you fill in the rest)?”

Complaints and objections
plunge death and despair
deep into the souls of
the weak and the ignorant,
bringing shadows
bringing darkness
bringing a night that knows no end
to a world that thrives on terror
and feeds on fear.
Complaints and objections
slam us so hard
they can knock the wind right out of you.
They can take your breath away.

“Do not be afraid”
the angel Gabriel
whispers in your ear.
“Do not be afraid”
the angel Gabriel
proclaims to the world.
“Do not be afraid”
the angel Gabriel
appears and announces this night:
The Word is made flesh
and dwells among us!
A child is born
and his name is Jesus!
The Spirit of God
has stirred
and a new wind blows;
Gabriel and the Heavenly host
have appeared;
Light has come into the world;
and in him there is
no darkness at all.
In him there is no transgression.
In him there is only a desire to
take your transgressions away.

In him there is only a desire to
to save you into eternal life.
“For God so loves
this world,
that He gave
His only Son,
that who-so-ever believes in him,
will not perish
but will be given
everlasting life.”⁶

“Do not be afraid,”
children of the loving Father.
“Do not be afraid,”
disciples of the new born Son.
“Do not be afraid,”
the Spirit blows a new wind.
Breath deeply
the Spirit's breath
this Christmas Eve night.
Join with Zechariah and Elizabeth,
Mary and Joseph,
Shepherds and Wise Men,
and
Draw deep
the breath of Christmas.

Merry Christmas, God's beloved!
Amen.

6 John 3:16