



Christmas Eve Celebration

As most of you already know, our leadership at both congregations, St. John's, Brandonville and St. John's, Ringtown have decided reluctantly, because of the current pandemic, to refrain from holding indoor worship services on Christmas Eve. It is heartbreaking for all of us to think of not gathering together in our beautiful, sacred sanctuaries to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to be together singing our favorite Christmas hymns, hearing the Christmas gospel and taking part in the candle lighting ceremony. Still, in the face of a pandemic which is growing presently, and which is expected to cause vast community transmission by late December, we believe this is the best decision we could make to keep our greater community and you, our dear members, safe. Simply put, it is difficult to imagine a full worship gathering on Christmas Eve, in our sanctuaries, which would be safe for those who attend and which would allow for most of our treasured Christmas Eve traditions such as the singing of Christmas carols, sharing in Christmas greetings with friends and neighbors, celebrating Holy Communion safely, passing the light during our candle lighting portion of the service and even allowing everyone who wishes to attend to enter the building. We all grieve the loss of this worship experience this year. In order to share the Christmas story in a meaningful way, we are in the process of creating a Christmas Eve worship experience which, we hope, will give us a chance to capture some of our traditional Christmas feel. Here is what we are planning for Christmas Eve this year:

1. A full Christmas Eve service at each church building will be recorded prior to Christmas Eve. Each service will include parts of our traditional Christmas Eve liturgy, hymns, Scripture readings, and sermon recorded in our chancel settings. Both worship services will include music played on our church organs to enhance the worship experience. We expect each service to last about one hour. This recording will be available to all on our YouTube channel on Christmas Eve.
2. Everyone will have access to the written form of this worship service. The liturgy, similar to our Christmas Eve worship booklet, will be typed out and sent to our members/friends via email or regular mail. Those for whom we have email addresses will receive the worship service via email a week prior to Christmas Eve. Those who do not have email will be mailed a copy of the worship service to have on hand well before Christmas Eve. Everything, including the words to the hymns, will be available in this worship liturgy so that you can sing along and fully follow the recorded worship experience.
3. Weather permitting, we will attempt, at both church locations, on Christmas Eve, to hold a candle lighting with prayers and the singing of Silent Night outside in the parking lot of each church building. Bill Rudolph, a member in Ringtown, has built a chamber for our Christ candle which will enclose the candle in glass and, hopefully, allow us to bring the candle outside so that we may light it and have it available for the brief gathering. Those who gather will be expected to mask and distance as we hear the Christmas Gospel, pray, come forward individually spaced to the Christ candle to light our individual, hand-held candles, hear a Christmas Gospel reading from John and sing Silent Night, concluding with a Christmas benediction. We anticipate this outside opportunity to last about 15 minutes, depending upon how many are in attendance. We will do our best to hold this worship experience short of heavy rain or snow.

In this unique and disconcerting year, we will do our best to share with all of you the joy and wonder of Christmas and to celebrate this holy time of the year as a congregation. While it is disheartening for many of us to think of missing out on some of our most cherished Christmas traditions and worship experiences, the truth remains that Christmas is, and always has been, what each of us believes this season to be. Absent the festive wrappings which have accrued around the season, at the center of our celebration is the wonder and majesty of the story of a God who loves us so much, this God takes on human form to be born among us and to restore relationship with us. This we can celebrate any time and any place. And know that, even though we may not be together in person as much this year, we are joined in Spirit, in the Spirit of the one who came down to grace our lives, about whom the angels sang, whose birth was noted by lowly shepherds and who lives among us still. As we celebrate him, we are bound together in the embrace of his promise, his life, his present and his future.

May God's gift of Jesus embrace you and your loved ones as you celebrate the joy and wonder of Christmas.

Pastor Jay