**Sunday, December 23, 2012**

**Welcome** – Greg Snow

**Call to Worship –** *Come, Worship the Lord*

God is here! The Messiah has come!

We open our eyes to see him and lift our hearts to worship him.

We have come to exalt the name of Jesus, our Savior and King,

and to bring glory to God the Father.

In our worship we demonstrate the mind of Christ

in declaring to God that he is the supreme authority in our lives.

We bow before him in submission to our Lord and King.

**Come, worship the Lord!**

**Song of Praise –** *Joy to the World*

 **Glory to God in the Highest –** *Luke 2:13-14*

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

**Song of Worship –** *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

**Confession and Silent Prayer**

When Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, he became like us in all things but sin. May we who have been reborn in him be free from our sinful ways.

Let us silently confess our sins to God.

*-Silent Prayer-*

**Assurance and Peace**

O God, we need Christ to renew our commitment.

**We confess that our lack of faith has made us fearful.**

May your angels sing again to us of peace for body and soul.

**We acknowledge that we have foolishly let our desires lead us astray.**

May your star once more set our course firmly in your direction.

**We have turned our faith into a lifeless ritual.**

May your manger call us again to expressions of love and devotion.

**We have carefully kept our gifts** **and have not freely given our goods and our hearts to you.**

May the Magi show us the spirit of giving.

**Lord, may your Spirit linger in our hearts** **and bring renewal in our lives. Amen.**

**Song of Worship** *– Holy Spirit*

**Prayer for Illumination**

Mighty God,

 The shepherds of old were full of your praises, saying that all they had heard and seen was mirrored by what they had been told.

Move among us now with your Holy Spirit, that we too might hear and experience the wonder and joy of the living Word as we seek to welcome the written Word into our lives.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.

**Song of Worship** *– Show Us Christ*

**Offering**

**Christmas Is Disturbing *(Source: C.J. Mahaney)*** As we prepare for Christmas Day we need to pause and prepare our souls.

During this time of year, it may be easy to forget that the bigger purpose behind Bethlehem was Calvary. But the purpose of the manger was realized in the horrors of the cross. The purpose of his birth was his death.

Or to put it more personally: *Christmas is necessary because I am a sinner*. The incarnation reminds us of our desperate condition before a holy God.

In 1992, *WORLD Magazine* published a column by William H. Smith with the provocative title, "Christmas is disturbing: Any real understanding of the Christmas messages will disturb anyone."

 In part, Smith wrote:

 *Many people who otherwise ignore God and the church have some religious feeling, or feel they ought to, at this time of the year. So they make their way to a church service or Christmas program. And when they go, they come away feeling vaguely warmed or at least better for having gone, but not disturbed.*

 *Why aren't people disturbed by Christmas? One reason is our tendency to sanitize the birth narratives. We romanticize the story of Mary and Joseph rather than deal with the painful dilemma they faced when the Lord chose Mary to be the virgin who would conceive her child by the power of the Holy Spirit. We beautify the birth scene, not coming to terms with the stench of the stable, the poverty of the parents, the hostility of Herod. Don't miss my point. There is something truly comforting and warming about the Christmas story, but it comes from understanding the reality, not from denying it.

Most of us also have not come to terms with the baby in the manger. We sing, "Glory to the newborn King." But do we truly recognize that the baby lying in the manger is appointed by God to be the King, to be either the Savior or Judge of all people? He is a most threatening person.

Malachi foresaw his coming and said, "But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap." As long as we can keep him in the manger, and feel the sentimental feelings we have for babies, Jesus doesn't disturb us. But once we understand that his coming means for every one of us either salvation or condemnation, he disturbs us deeply.

What should be just as disturbing is the awful work Christ had to do to accomplish the salvation of his people. Yet his very name, Jesus, testifies to us of that work.

That baby was born so that "he who had no sin" would become "sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The baby's destiny from the moment of his conception was hell—hell in the place of sinners. When I look into the manger, I come away shaken as I realize again that he was born to pay the unbearable penalty for my sins.

That's the message of Christmas: God reconciled the world to himself through Christ, man's sin has alienated him from God, and man's reconciliation with God is possible only through* [*faith*](http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/) *in Christ…Christmas is disturbing.*

As Smith so fitly concludes his column:

 *Only those who have been profoundly disturbed to the point of deep repentance are able to receive the tidings of comfort, peace, and joy that Christmas proclaims.*

 Is Christmas disturbing for you? Do you realize that Christ was born in order to pay the penalty for your sins? May you come to the understanding that the only true peace in your life will be found in Christ alone.

**Songs of Worship –** *In Christ Alone/Jesus, The Son of God***Message** – *“God With Us”*
 *Scripture Reference: John 1:14*

**Time of Prayer**

**Song of Worship –** *What Child Is This*

**Call to Discipleship**

Go now into the world, carrying Christmas with you into everyday life.

 Open the inn within you and make room for that gift of gifts, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

 And all of God’s people said, **Amen.**