

December 24, 2019
Christmas Eve Welcome

On behalf of the officers, members and staff of Westminster Presbyterian Church I bid you welcome to this Christmas Eve Family Service/ the 83rd consecutive Service of Lessons and Carols. We are honored that you decided to spend this magical evening with us. We are delighted to see out of town college students and family members home for the holidays. We hope your celebrations are happy and safe and filled with all the blessings you and your loved ones need for a prosperous and healthy new year.

On our behalf I want to thank Music Director Garrett Martin, Mr. Matt Marco, our talented Westminster singers and instrumentalists for making this another Christmas Eve to remember. Garrett your creation of tonight's repertoire and months of preparation is a blessing to Westminster and Western New York. We are grateful for your leadership and for each one of you in the choir loft!

I also want to thank Chuck and Mary Rice whose gift in memory of Chuck's mother Viola Proudfoot Rice has made tonight's worship service possible. We are grateful Chuck and Mary for your deep generosity.

Shakespeare referred to this night, in the first scene from Hamlet as "so hallowed and so gracious a time." We think of time as progression, moment following moment, day following day in a relentless flow that clocks and calendars measure. But we experience time also as depth, as having quality as well as quantity.

It is a hallowed time the old playwright says, a holy time, a time in which life grows still like the surface of a river so that we can look down into it and see glimmering there in the depths something timeless and precious.

And it is a gracious time meaning a time that we cannot bring about as we can bring about a happy time or a sad time but a time that comes upon us as grace, as a free and unbidden gift; a time of such holiness that for once, even the powers of darkness are powerless.

And to the character who speaks those words, comes the reply "So have I heard and do in part believe" speaking not only for himself but we trust for Shakespeare and perhaps even for us. At Christmas it is hard even for the unbeliever not to believe in something if not in everything. Peace on earth, good will to all; the mystery of being a child; the possibility of hope not even the canned carols piped through the malls can drown out.

For a moment or two, the darkness of disenchantment, cynicism, doubt, draw back at least a little, and all the usual worldly witcheries lose something of their power to charm. Even if we cannot manage to believe with all our hearts, on this night we can believe that this is, of all things, the thing most worth believing. And maybe that is actually closer to what believing truly is than we know.

We hope this holy and gracious moment tonight will inspire you to be generous with our annual Christmas offering. The recipient this year is Emergency Financial Assistance Program of Catholic Charities; their mission is to keep families in their homes when job loss, death of a loved one, or medical bills causes temporary financial hardship and threaten a family with eviction. In this time of a world refugee crisis when we remember the holy family who were themselves homeless in Bethlehem your gift will extend the good news of Christmas to those in great need in our community. Thank you for your support!