The Miracles of Christmas
Christmas Eve 2017

(Start with all candles lit and lights out – 7:50 am & 10:35 am)

Musical Prelude  (Tom – start at 8 & 10:45 am for 6 or so minutes) check “key” level of songs

Brief Welcome and Instructions (so this big group can worship together peacefully)

- Because of the candles, low light and distraction please limit any going out to just what is necessary and an adult needs to accompany kids.
- also because of the low lights, the words to the songs are in each person’s bulletin. All of the Christmas carols are in the hymnal & the song numbers are in the bulletin if you want the music for singing parts.

We are in candlelight this Sunday morning to remind us of how quietly the eternal Son of God came into this world. While it is a quiet time, it is not a solemn or sad time – in fact it is a most joyful time. So don’t worry about sounds or squirminess, instead sing out in joy!

So with those details out of the way, I want to welcome each of you to our Christmas Eve Candlelight service here at the Barre EFC. This is meant to be a simple time TOGETHER – something that can be easily reproduced in families and small groups should persecution come. Our whole environment here is to help give us a sense of the peace & wonder of the incarnation – the quiet coming of God into our world as a baby. Let’s start with singing Silent Night #184 (v 1-3).
The miracle of fulfilled prophecies

The big miracle we celebrate every Christmas is the **incarnation** – God becoming a man in the person of Jesus. That is nearly impossible to understand if you’ve never heard it before. So God also gave us some other miracles to confirm that Jesus really is God incarnate who came to bring salvation and forgiveness of sins through His death of the cross and bodily resurrection from the dead.

The first area is the **miracle of fulfilled prophecies**. A coming Messiah or Savior was foretold hundreds of years earlier – yet despite this long time gap, people were still anxiously waiting the coming of this Christ.

READ Luke 2:25-28 (reading 1)
READ Luke 2:29-33 (reading 2)

Wow! Hundreds of years after the prophecies were written, devout men and women knew that God would surely fulfill His promises. Let’s sing about this anticipation of the coming redeemer

"**O Come, O Come Emmanuel**" #171 (v 1 & 2)

Simeon wasn’t the only one who was expecting the prophecies to be fulfilled.

READ Luke 2:36-38 (reading 3)

Anna had been anticipating the coming redeemer for decades. And since she is from the tribe of Asher, the 10 tribes were not lost in Jesus’ day. While Simeon, Anna and others looked forward to the coming Messiah – little did they realize how unique this coming & this person would really be.

READ Luke 1:34-37 (reading 4)
God does a miracle so Mary will give birth to a very special child – a virgin birth where the Son of God left the glories of heaven to come down to earth to take on the human body of that little baby in the womb.

"Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne" #169 (v 1, 2, 5)

The miracle of God’s love for the unlovely
Another powerful miracle we see repeatedly is that God shows special care for those who are nobodies – those looked down on, forgotten or considered unlovely! Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds – they were all “nobodies” in their day. God comes close to them as He’ll come close to us through Jesus. He is Immanuel - God with us.

READ Matt 1:22-23 (reading 5)

Let’s sing of this wonder!!!

"O Holy Night" #183 (v 1 & 2)

Even the place where this special baby was to become born had become relatively insignificant at this time.

READ Matt 2:4-6 (reading 6)

In Jesus’ day, Bethlehem had become just an insignificant, sleepy little town clearly overshadowed by Jerusalem – the nearby city that was large, active, important, and thriving! Let’s not forget the miracle God must do to move Mary & Joseph from their own home town to Bethlehem – God uses the plans of a world ruler!

READ Luke 2:1-5 (reading 7)

Let’s Sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” #192 (v 1&3)
The miracle of the star & God’s protection

Another miracle of Jesus’ birth is the star that appeared to lead the Magi to the Lord.

READ Matt 2:1-2 (reading 8)

The star wasn’t a spotlight like some Christmas cards show, but God miraculously spoke to these foreign scholars through light specks in the sky they studied. Amazing – God speaks our language – whatever it is. Let’s sing *The First Noel*. It’s easy to think this Carol is about the angels – but most of the verses are on God’s miraculous leading thru this star.

“The First Noel” #188 (v 2, 3, 4, 6)

READ Matt 2:9-12 (reading 9)

God also must miraculously protect the baby from those who wanted him killed. King Herod had no intention of worshipping *this prophesied one* sent from God. He wanted to get rid of any potential claim to be King, so Herod will actively try to have the baby killed. Some of those gifts of the Magi provided the funds for their escape as well as point to the specialness of this new King.

“We Three Kings” #197 (v 1-5)

God’s miracle hidden

God’s greatest miracle – the incarnation – was hidden unless a person was willing to see the greatness of what God is doing. Many miss God’s greatest miracles because they have their own plans, or they are just too busy. Wise people will tell you, if we aren’t looking, we will rush by the most important things of life.

READ Luke 2:6-7 (reading 10)
Talk about “hidden”, who would have thought that the little baby wrapped in rags and lying in animal feed box was God incarnate – God come down in human form? The one who would save us from our sins! Let’s sing #186 to remind us of the simplicity with which God came to this earth.

“Away in a Manger” #186 (v 1 & 2)

The miracle of the angels
One of the most common remembered miracles at Jesus’ coming is the appearance of angels. Angels are God’s messengers and God’s assistants who do His work throughout the Universe. They can show up looking like a normal person or overwhelm people with blinding glory. The main group angels appeared to that first Christmas were the shepherds – they were outcasts in Jesus’ day. They were looked down on by society. So God spoke, not only to the wise men, but equally to outcasts!

READ Luke 2:8-10 (reading 11)
Let’s sing about this (whoever wants can be the echo)

“While by Our Sheep” #191 (v 1-3)

If God would entrust such an important message to the shepherds of Jesus’ day, that means you and I can never be too much of an outcast or too insignificant to be used in special ways by our Lord. Listen to the incredible message the angel gives.

READ Luke 2:11-14 (reading 12)

Let’s sing of the all surpassing greatness of Jesus whom the angel announced.

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing” #181 (v 1, 2, 4)
The miracle of changed lives

The final miracle we want to remember today is the miracle of changed lives. God came down to this earth so people can be transformed.

**READ Luke 2:15-16 (reading 13)**

God wants the wonder of the incarnation to grab us as it grabbed Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the Magi, and the shepherds. The more the miracles of God amaze us, the more our faith grows and the more we want to please God with our actions. So let’s ask this important question in song ...

“*What Child is This*” #180

This baby is God come down in human form — *God with us*. This Jesus will later go to His death to pay the penalty for your sins and my sins. This Jesus is alive today and offers all of us the gifts of forgiveness, adoption as God’s child, a place in heaven, a new nature, the Holy Spirit inside us, purpose & direction in life and a whole host of other things. We receive these gifts by repentance and faith — “Dear Jesus I have done wrong. Please forgive me. I do believe you are God come down in human form and I want to follow you. Please come into my life.” There are no magic words, it is the attitude of our heart. Jesus definitely transforms the shepherds and they are full of joy.
Giving our unique gift to Jesus

II Peter 1:1-12 by memory
Let's now bring a very unique gift to Jesus as a church. Of the 7 billion people on planet earth, we are probably the only ones doing this time, this year. Let's bring our effort of memorizing God's word.

**REPEAT II Peter 1:1-12 by memory**

Feel God's pleasure with this gift we have worked on for 3 months! This is exciting which is exactly how the shepherds felt

**READ Luke 2:17-20 (reading 14)**

Let's sing that joy that all who recognize *God incarnate in faith* experience.

"Joy to the World" #170 (v 1, 2, 4)

**Special Christmas Story**

It often takes tough situations or discouraging times for us to truly be willing to rely on God's great power and personally experience His miracles. This year's story is called "*Why Be Afraid?*" and it is a loose rendition of Helen Grace Lecheid's short story.

**READ!**

**Our special response to God's miracles**

Aunt Anna experienced a miracle of God – Jesus was with her in her most difficult moment transforming it into a time of peace and joy. God is always at work around us. Jesus is worthy of our trust, our hopes and our lives. Thank you for being a people who have given your time
and attention this past hour to Jesus. Let's conclude with *O Come All Ye Faithful*, then 2 minutes of silence so you can speak to God in your mind – it may be praise, confession, thanksgiving or even just quiet listening! Then I will share the benediction and you can greet one another – we aren't able to leave this room silently because we don't have enough room. Jesus was definitely pleased with our praise, attention and gift today.

*“O Come All Ye Faithful” #178*

Silence (2 minutes)

*Benediction!*