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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
December 24, 2014

Christmas Eve Opening Remarks  
A Homiletical Introduction

There's no regular sermon this evening. Instead, some opening remarks, a homiletical introduction.

We are here to celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus in our lives and world.

We have just concluded four weeks of Advent. This year we focused on the Advent concepts of hope, peace, joy and love. Tonight, the traditional concept is grace: God's grace in Jesus Christ who encourages us towards wholeness. I shall not speak about about grace. The focus is "peace."

Since tonight's service incorporates poetry, I shall highlight words from a poem I read this week. In his poem called "Peace," Gerard Manley Hopkins writes,

When, when, Peace, will you, Peace? I'll not play hypocrite  
To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes; but  
That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure Peace allows  
Alarms of wars, the daunting wars, the death of it?

Hopkins concludes the poem with these words:

...And when Peace here does house  
He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,  
He comes to brood and sit.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave birth to new possibilities of peace in her time. We embrace that peace and brood and sit with it and give birth to new possibilities for peace in our day.

We have work to do.

Imam Malik Mujahid, the Board Chair of the Parliament of Religions wrote this week, "As hate, anger, and fear is rising in the world, we all must rise with loving human relationships to create space for hope. We must work together for peace, justice and sustainability.

"Here is what the Parliament of Religions request you to do during this holiday season when we will all have more opportunity to talk to each other than normal

days. Bring up these topics during family gatherings: Climate Change, War and Violence, Widening Income Gap... What can we do at an individual level to meet these challenges? What can civil society, religious and interfaith organizations do in this regard?

We have work to do.

In conclusion, I shall read my little Advent poem, which I wrote recently to convey the spiritual mood of the Season. It incorporates the Advent themes.

### **Christmas**

God offers grace  
and we have faith

Angels smother drones  
and we have peace

The wise return  
and we have joy

Humans embrace  
and we have love

A child is born  
and we have hope

Diane Forster will now light the Christ Candle.