


elcome to
Luther Memorial Church
of the Erie Lutheran Parish



24 DECEMBER 2024
The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve
6:00 pm & 10:30 pm



True and lasting joy

Night. A liminal time. A time when God sends messages and messengers to mortals. A time when predators are active. A time when, while the world is asleep, greater vigilance is required of the awake.

And here are these shepherds. Except for Mary and Joseph, they were the first to learn of the birth of the Messiah. Shepherds figure prominently in Scripture as metaphors for faithful leaders, good kings, and brave warriors. David was a shepherd boy called into God's service. Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd. But in actuality, shepherding was hard and dangerous work, and shepherds were not considered the elite in society. Shepherds were an out-of-bounds people, living outside of the city, and how would the news of the birth of the king be announced to them?

What about Bethlehem? The prophet Micah called Bethlehem "one of the little clans of Judah." Today, Bethlehem would not be counted among the world's great cities. In 1950, Christians made up 20% of the population. Now they are under 10%. Its economy is based on tourism, which has been decimated by conflict. Bethlehem is in the occupied West Bank, in a war zone.

To these terrified shepherds, literally sitting in the dark outside of Bethlehem, an obscure province of the Roman Empire, God chose to reveal the birth of the Messiah. What on earth were they thinking? Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in Herod's palace? Why not in Rome, where the emperor was to be soter, "savior"?

How does the angels' announcement of the birth of the Messiah sound to people living in the margins of the world today? From the centers of power, in indescribably difficult circumstances today? To those living in the shadows in Sudan, in the homes of immigrants in this country who fear deportation? To starving children in the global south? How dare we wish them "Merry Christmas"?

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11). That joy is transient and human-made, but joy, given by God, that is deep and strong and unshakable.

Joy is a sign of the reign of God. The root word for "joy" in Greek is the same as that for "thanksgiving." It comes from the same root, as does "thanks." All of this points to the nature of true joy. It is thanksgiving. Our word "eucharist," a name for Holy Communion, ties this all together in the Eucharist. Jesus' body is broken for us and Jesus' blood is poured out for us. In the eucharist, Christ is present. We are intimately connected to the source of joy and grace in this gift.

LUTHER MEMORIAL CHURCH

LUTHER MEMORIAL ACADEMY

225 West Tenth Street • Erie, PA 16501 • 814-454-0106

REV. JAY C. MITCHELL, *Pastor*

BRYAN TIMM, F.A.I.O.

Cantor

RON KING

Pastoral Asst. ~ Holy Trinity

THE REV. KAREN LUNDWALL, THE REV. BRIAN MORAN

THE REV. KAREN PARSH, THE REV. GAIL ZACKRISON

Pastors in Residence

MICHELLE THOM

Academy Administrator

BETH KELLER

SARAH PRYLINSKI

Youth and Family Ministry

JAN MACINNES

Care Ministry

WELCOME!

COME, LET US ADORE HIM!

+ Everything you need to follow along in worship is included in this bulletin. You are invited to stand and sit—as you are able—as indicated herein.

+ If you have a need to **children's** bulletins, coloring pages, crayons, or other supplies they are available on the Welcome Table. You can proceed out the door next to the pulpit and find the Welcome Table near the door.

- Children are always welcome in worship and together we make a joyful noise! However, if you have need, a staffed nursery is available down the stairs across from the Welcome Table.

+ An all-gender and accessible **restroom** is available out the door next to the pulpit, up the ramp, and to the right. Follow signs for "Handicap Bathroom." Other restrooms are available down the hallway next to Faith Chapel across from the parlor.

+ You do not need to turn off or disconnect here! However, please be mindful of those worshipping around you and turn your phones and devices to silent. Feel free to take pictures of our beautiful sanctuary or post about the sermon. However, we ask that you ask permission before taking any people pictures.

+ We welcome all to worship and to the Table trusting that it is the Holy Spirit that draws us all together. If you would like information about joining the congregation or receiving the Sacraments of the Church, be sure to talk to Pastor Jay after worship (you can usually find him next to the pulpit after the service).

24 DECEMBER 2024
THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS EVE
Holy Communion • 6:00 pm and 10:30 pm



GATHERING – “The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.”

Please stand and face the procession at the doors.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE NATIVITY OF THE CHRIST

☐ This twenty-fourth day of December,
after ages beyond number had run their course from the creation of the world,
when God in the beginning created the heavens and the earth
and formed humankind in the divine image;
long after the great flood,
when God made the rainbow shine forth as a sign of the covenant;
twenty-one centuries from the time the promise was given
to Abraham and Sarah our forebears;
thirteen centuries after Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt
and through the Sea dry shod
and the prophet Miriam danced with tambourine
in freedom on the safe side of the sea;
eleven hundred years from the time of Ruth and Naomi, Deborah and the judges;
one thousand five hundred ten years from the anointing of David as king,
in the fulfilment of the times and years and months and days
discerned by the prophets;
in the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad;
the seven hundred and fifty second year from the foundation of the city of Rome;
the forty second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, the Caesar;
while the whole world enjoyed a span of peace,
in the sixth age of world,
Jesus Christ,
Eternal God and Child of the Eternal Creator,
desiring to sanctify the world by most graciously and mercifully coming,
being conceived by the Holy Spirit
and nine months of growth having past in the womb of his mother
the Blessed Virgin Mary,
was born in Bethlehem of Judea as was prophesied of old.
Now in our own time is the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Eternal Word Incarnate, God made Flesh.
Come, now, let us adore him!

1 O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant! O
 2 The high - est, most ho - ly, light of light e - ter - nal,
 3 Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,
 4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing;

come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem;
 born of a vir - gin, a mor - tal he comes;
 sing, all ye cit - i - zens of heav - en a - bove!
 Je - sus, to thee be . . . glo - ry giv'n!

come and be - hold him, born the king of an - gels:
 Son of the Fa - ther now in flesh ap - pear - ing!
 Glo - ry to God . . . in . . . the . . . high - est:
 Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing:

Refrain
 Ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus, ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus,
 O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him,

ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus Do - mi - num.
 O come, let us a - dore him, Christ the Lord!

GREETING

- P** Glory to God in the highest!
- C** And peace to God's people on earth!
- P** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C** And also with you.

CAROL OF PRAISE

ELW 289

Angels We Have Heard on High



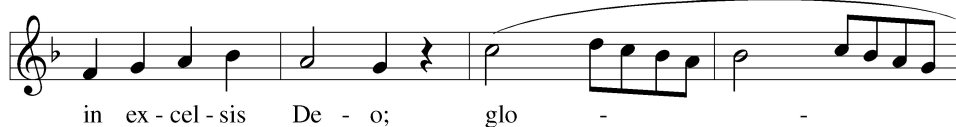
1 An - gels we have heard on high, sweet - ly sing - ing o'er the plains,
2 Shep-herds, why this ju - bi - lee? Why your joy - ous strains pro-long?
3 Come to Beth - le - hem and see him whose birth the an - gels sing;



and the moun-tains in re - ply, ech - o - ing their joy - ous strains.
What the glad-some tid - ings be which in - spire your heav'n - ly song?
come, a - dore on bend - ed knee Christ the Lord, the new - born king.



Glo - - - ri - a



in ex - cel - sis De - o; glo - -



- - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o.

Text: French carol; tr. "Crown of Jesus," 1862
Music: GLORIA, French carol

PRAYER OF THE DAY

- P** Let us pray.
Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Please be seated.

WORD – “God speaks to us in Scripture reading, preaching and song.”

FIRST READING: Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ³You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne and dominion of David. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

L The Word is made flesh.

G Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 96

Refrain: (*Sung once by the choir, then repeated by the congregation and sung where indicated by R.*)



¹Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord all the earth.

²Sing to the Lord, ... bless the name of the Lord;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.

³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.

⁴For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods. **R**

⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you O Lord have made the heavens.

⁶Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.

⁷Ascribe to the Lord you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord honor and power.

⁸Ascribe to the Lord the honor due the holy name;
bring off 'rings and enter the courts of the Lord. **R**

⁹Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the Lord all the earth.

¹⁰Tell it out among the nations: "The Lord is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved
will judge the peoples with equity."

¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it;
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

¹²Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming O Lord,
for you come to judge the earth.

¹³You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth. **R**

SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14

¹¹The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴It is Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

☐ The Word is made flesh.

☑ Thanks be to God.

Please stand as you are able to greet the Gospel.

CAROL

ELW 290

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Refrain

Go tell it on the moun - tain, o-ver the hills and ev - 'ry - where;

go tell it on the moun - tain that Je - sus Christ is born!

¹ While shep-herds kept their watch-ing o'er si - lent flocks by night,

Refrain

be - hold, through-out the heav-ens there shone a ho - ly light.

Text: African American spiritual, refrain: John W. Work Jr., 1872–1925, stanzas, alt.
Music: GO TELL IT, African American spiritual

GOSPEL: Luke 2:1-20

☐ The Holy Gospel according to Luke.

☑ Glory to you, O Lord.

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the

glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

P The Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to you, O Christ

CAROL

ELW 290

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Refrain

Go tell it on the moun - tain, o-ver the hills and ev - 'ry - where;

go tell it on the moun - tain that Je - sus Christ is born!

2 The shep-herds feared and trem-bled when, lo, a - bove the earth

3 Down in a lone - ly man - ger the hum - ble Christ was born;

rang out the an - gel cho - rus that hailed our Sav - ior's birth.

and God sent us sal - va - tion that bless - ed Christ - mas morn.

Refrain

Text: African American spiritual, refrain; John W. Work Jr., 1872–1925, stanzas, alt.
Music: GO TELL IT, African American spiritual

Please be seated.

MESSAGE FOR THE YOUNG AND YOUNG-AT-HEART (6:00pm)

God Gave Us Christmas

Lisa Tawn Bergren, Author

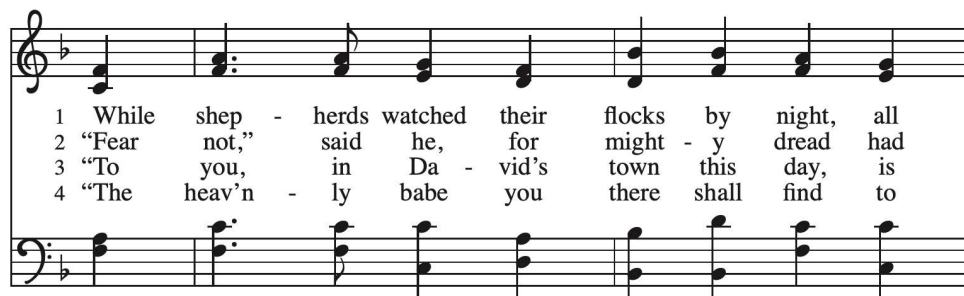
David Hohn, Illustrator

Please stand as you are able to proclaim the Word of God in Song.

CAROL OF THE DAY

ACS 913

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks



1 While shep - herds watched their flocks by night, all
 2 "Fear not," said he, for might - y dread had
 3 "To you, in Da - vid's town this day, is
 4 "The heav'n - ly babe you there shall find to



seat - ed on the ground, the an - gel of the
 seized their trou - bled mind: "Glad tid - ings of great
 born of Da - vid's line the Sav - ior, who is
 hu - man view dis - played, all hum - bly wrapped in



Lord came down, and glo - ry shone a - round.
 joy I bring to you and hu - man - kind.
 Christ the Lord, and this shall be the sign:
 swath - ing bands, and in a man - ger laid."

5 Thus spoke the seraph, and forthwith
 appeared a shining throng
 of angels praising God, who thus
 addressed their joyful song:

6 "All glory be to God on high,
 and to the earth be peace;
 good will to all from highest heav'n
 begin and never cease!"

Text: Nahum Tate, 1652–1715

Music: WINCHESTER OLD, Este's *Psalmes*, 1592; arr. George Kirbye, 1560–1634

NICENE CREED

A Siblings in Christ, as we contemplate the Sacred Mysteries of this night,
 let us confess the faith of the Church:

C We believe in one God,
 the Father, the Almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth,
 of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 the only Son of God,
 eternally begotten of the Father,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 true God from true God,
 begotten, not made,
 of one Being with the Father;
 through him all things were made.
 For us and for our salvation
 he came down from heaven,
 was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
 and became truly human.
 For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
 he suffered death and was buried.
 On the third day he rose again
 in accordance with the scriptures;
 he ascended into heaven
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
 and his kingdom will have no end.
 We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
 who proceeds from the Father,
 who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
 who has spoken through the prophets.
 We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE PRAYERS

You may kneel, sit, or stand as is your custom.

- A** With shepherds and angels, we lift our voices to God for the Church, those in need, and all of God's good creation:
A brief silence.
- A** Eternal God who was born to save your people, we pray for your Church. Strengthen our leaders, especially Elizabeth and Michael--our bishops; Jean--our dean; Jay--our pastor; and all who serve your people. Give us all confidence to sing your praise, tell of your glory, and ponder your dwelling among us. Make us faithful witnesses of your presence among us: come, Lord Jesus,
- C be born in us anew.**
- A** Eternal God who was born to rule the nations in peace, we pray for all who rule, govern or lead: give them hearts full of compassion, justice, and peace. Grant lasting peace to all lands where bombs and guns sound a lullaby especially for Ukraine and Russia, Palestine and Israel. Make us your peacemakers in our time: come Lord Jesus,
- C be born in us anew.**
- A** Eternal God who was born amid animals and straw, we pray for your creation. Accompany us in darker nights and colder days, comfort all who seek shelter from the weather, and empower those who work for clean water and abundant food for all. Make us grateful and generous stewards of your whole earth: come, Lord Jesus,
- C be born in us anew.**

A Eternal God who was born with healing in your wings, we pray for the sick and suffering. Grant your wholeness to those in need of healing whom we name now, here you may name those you know aloud or silently, and all who need healing. Uphold those who care for others, grant wisdom and understanding to those who share your gifts of science and medicine, and accompany those who will die this night. Make us signs of your wholeness and grace: come, Lord Jesus,

C be born in us anew.

A Eternal God who was born among the destitute and forgotten, we pray for the lonely, the forgotten, and those who have no one to pray for them. Shine your holy light into the lives of those who do not find joy in this season and those who cannot look with hope to your coming. Encourage those who wonder, watch, and wait. Make us signs of your love: come, Lord Jesus,

C be born in us anew.

A Eternal God who was born to die, we give you thanks for all who have gone before us in lives of faith and holy living. Sustain us with your promises until we come with Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, and Angels to worship the Prince of Peace. Make us one in the promises of baptism: come, Lord Jesus,

C be born in us anew.

A Into your wounded hands of Love, Eternal God, we place all our prayers trusting in the mercy and grace of the One who was born this night, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

THE PEACE

P The peace of the Christ Child be with you always.

C And also with you.

Please be seated.

MEAL – “God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.”



THE OFFERING IS RECEIVED

An offering is received for the ministry of the church. Our offering at Luther Memorial supports our ministry locally, as well as that of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. You may make your checks payable to Luther Memorial Church. Additionally, you may visit <https://bit.ly/LMCDonate> or scan the QR Code and scroll to the bottom of the page to give electronically.

MUSICAL OFFERING – “Carol of Hope”

D. Besig/N. Price (6:00pm)

MUSICAL OFFERING – “Gesù Bambino”

M. Schweizer (10:30pm)

*Maureen Ferrara, violin
Daniel Bainbridge, cello*

Please stand as you are able.

In the Bleak Midwinter

1 In the bleak mid - win - ter, frost - y wind made moan,
 2 Heav - en can - not hold him, nor . . . earth sus - tain;
 3 What . . . can I give him, poor . . . as I am?

earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;
 heav'n and earth shall flee a - way when he comes to reign;
 If I were a shep - herd I would bring a lamb;

snow had fall - en, snow on snow, snow on snow,
 in the bleak mid - win - ter a sta - ble place suf - ficed
 if I were a wise . . . man I would do my part;

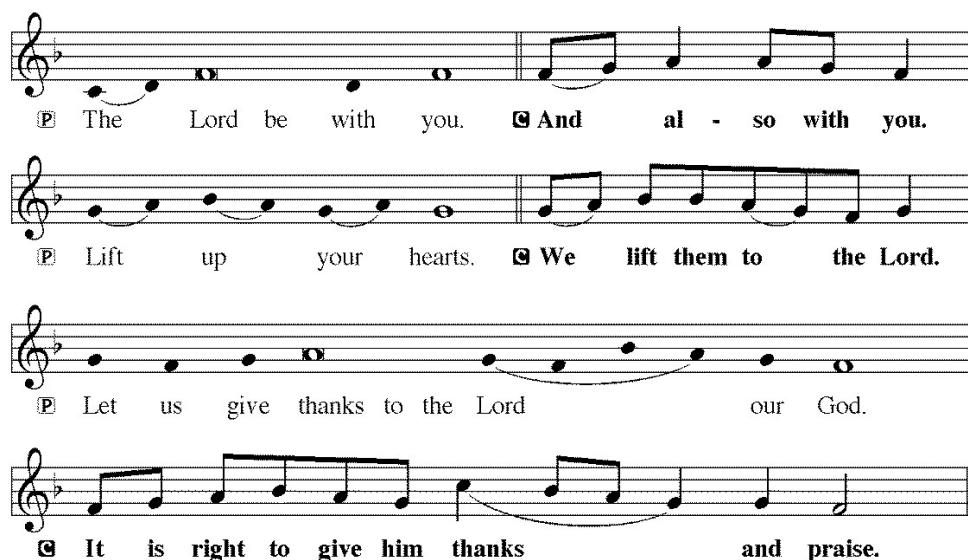
in the bleak mid - win - ter, long a - go.
 the Lord . . . God al - might - y, Je - sus Christ.
 yet what I can I give him— give my heart.

Text: Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1830–1894
 Music: CRANHAM, Gustav Holst, 1874–1934

OFFERTORY PRAYER

- A** God of heaven and earth, from the beginning, you have called forth life, in which you take delight. The trees, the fields, and the seas sing for joy. Bless now these gifts, received from your bounty, that we may join the chorus of creation to tell of your salvation from day to day.
- C** Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING DIALOG



♩ The Lord be with you. ☩ And al - so with you.

♩ Lift up your hearts. ☩ We lift them to the Lord.

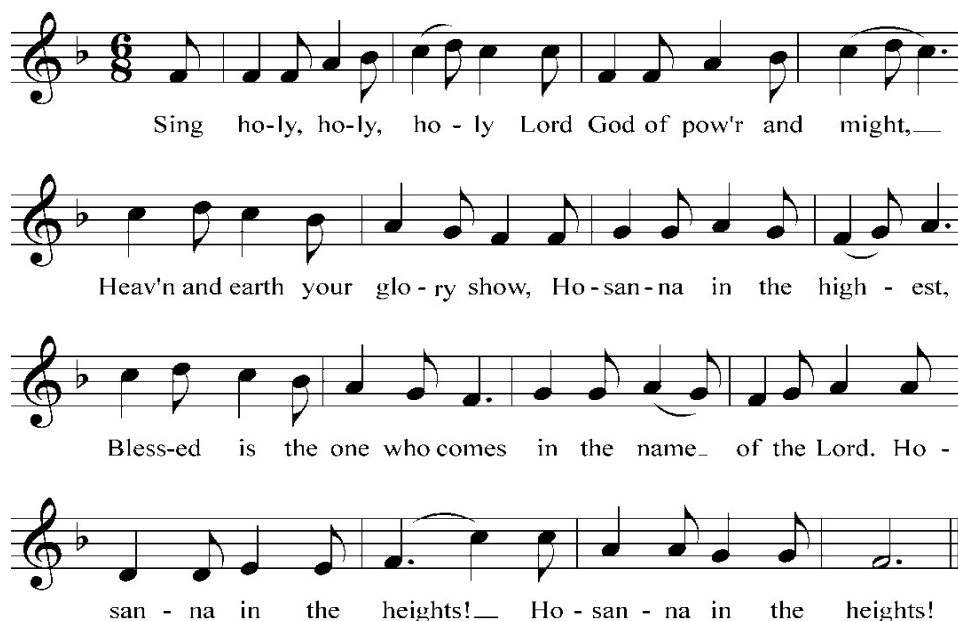
♩ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

☩ It is right to give him thanks and praise.

PROPER PREFACE

♩ *It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. In the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh you have opened the eyes of faith to a new and radiant vision of your glory, that, beholding the God made visible, we may be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:*

SANCTUS



Sing ho-ly, ho-ly, ho - ly Lord God of pow'r and might,—

Heav'n and earth your glo - ry show, Ho - san - na in the high - est,

Bless-ed is the one who comes in the name_ of the Lord. Ho -

san - na in the heights!— Ho - san - na in the heights!

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

♩ We sing a new song to you, O God of our salvation, for you have done marvelous things. Since the beginning of time, you have spoken your Word, and your light shines in our darkness. Glory to you, O God:

☩ **Glory in the highest!**

P The seas are thundering with praise, the rivers are clapping their hands. The hills ring out with gladness, and the trees are shouting their joy. Glory to you, O God:

C **Glory in the highest!**

P Your Son rules in truth and justice, victorious and merciful is he! We praise your majesty lying in a manger, Jesus Christ, born of Mary and lauded by angels. Glory to you, O God:

C **Glory in the highest!**

*On the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and gave thanks,
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

P Send your Spirit on us and on this meal of wonder. In this bread, give us the body of Christ. With this cup, reveal the grace of your risen Son. Make known to the whole earth your steadfast love. Glory to you, O God:

C **Glory in the highest!**

P In these dark days, bring the dawn of your righteousness to birth. Hold the living and the dead in your hands. In your good time, awaken the sleeping animals, and revive the dormant plants with your life-giving Spirit. Glory to you, O God:

C **Glory in the highest!**

P With trumpets and horns and harps, with the faithful on earth and the hosts of heaven, we sing to your splendor, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God Most High, Light of the earth, and Judge of the world, today and forever.

C **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

P Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

C **Our Father, who art in heaven,**

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence



1 Let all mor - tal flesh keep si - lence, and with fear and trem - bling stand;
 2 King of kings, yet born of Mar - y, as of old on earth he stood,
 3 Rank on rank the host of heav - en spreads its van-guard on the way;
 4 At his feet the six - winged ser - aph, cher - u - bim with sleep - less eye,



pon - der noth - ing earth - ly - mind - ed, for with bless - ing in his hand
 Lord of lords in hu - man ves - ture, in the bod - y and the blood,
 as the Light of light, de - scend - ing from the realms of end - less day,
 veil their fac - es to the pres - ence, as with cease - less voice they cry:



Christ our God to earth de - scend - ing comes full hom - age to de - mand.
 he will give to all the faith - ful his own self for heav'n - ly food.
 comes, the pow'rs of hell to van - quish, as the dark - ness clears a - way.
 "Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia, Lord Most High!"

Text: Liturgy of St. James; tr. Gerard Moultrie, 1829–1885, alt.
 Music: PICARDY, French folk tune, 17th cent.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P A Child has been born for us, a Son given to us. Come, receive the gift of Jesus.

C Amen.

P For those communing at home: take, eat, drink: the Body and Blood of Christ for you.

The congregation is seated.

This is Christ's Table and Christ himself is present whenever we feast together.

All Christians are welcome to the Lord's Supper!

We believe that this is the Body and Blood of Christ for you.

Please come forward from both sides by the center aisle.

Take a small empty cup from the trays at the head of the center aisle.

Wine is offered in the silver chalices. White grape juice is offered in the earthenware chalices.

Gluten-free wafers are available for those who need them; please let the pastor know.

Receive the bread in your open palm, then hold your cup steady for and assisting minister to fill.

As you return by the side aisles, please place your empty cup in the silver bowl.

*All are invited to the meal. If you would like to participate but not to receive the bread and wine,
 please cross your arms in front of you for a blessing from the pastor.*

*If you are unable to come forward, please alert your neighbor or an usher
 so that they can let the pastor know and the Sacrament will be brought to you.*

THE COMMUNION

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

1 Lo, how a rose e'er bloom - ing from ten - der stem hath
 2 I - sai - ah had fore - told it, the rose I have in
 3 This flow'r, whose fra - grance ten - der with sweet-ness fills the
 4 O Sav - ior, child of Mar - y, who felt our hu - man

sprung! Of Jes - se's lin - eage com - ing as
 mind; with Mar - y we be - hold it, the
 air, dis - pels with glo - rious splen - dor the
 woe; O Sav - ior, king of glo - ry, who

seers of old have sung, it came, a flow'r so bright, a -
 vir - gin moth - er kind. To show God's love a - right, she
 dark-ness ev - 'ry - where. True man, yet ver - y God, from
 dost our weak - ness know: bring us at length, we pray, to

mid the cold of win - ter, when half - spent was the night.
 bore to us a Sav - ior, when half - spent was the night.
 sin and death he saves us and light-ens ev - 'ry load.
 the bright courts of heav - en and in - to end - less day.

Text: German carol, 15th cent.; tr. Theodore Baker, 1851–1934, sts. 1–2; Harriet R. Krauth,
 1845–1925, st. 3; John C. Mattes, 1876–1948, st. 4

Music: ES IST EIN ROS, *Alte catholische geistliche Kirchengesänge*, Köln, 1599; arr. Michael Praetorius, 1571–1621

O Little Town of Bethlehem

1 O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee lie!
 2 For Christ is born of Mar - y, and, gath - ered all a - bove
 3 How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is giv'n!
 4 O ho - ly child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we pray;

A - bove thy deep and dream-less sleep the si - lent stars go by;
 while mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep their watch of won - d'ring love.
 So God im - parts to hu - man hearts the bless - ings of his heav'n.
 cast out our sin, and en - ter in, be born in us to - day.

yet in thy dark streets shin - eth the ev - er - last - ing light.
 O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth,
 No ear may hear his com - ing; but, in this world of sin,
 We hear the Christ - mas an - gels the great glad tid - ings tell;

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to - night.
 and prais - es sing to God the king, and peace to all the earth!
 where meek souls will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.
 oh, come to us, a - bide with us, our Lord Im - man - u - el!

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893

Music: ST. LOUIS, Lewis H. Redner, 1831-1908

What Child Is This

1 What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mar-y's lap is sleep-ing?
 2 Why lies he in such mean es - tate where ox and ass are feed - ing?
 3 So bring him in - cense, gold, and myrrh; come, peas-ant, king, to own him.

Whom an - gels greet with an-thems sweet while shep-herds watch are keep - ing?
 Good Chris-tian, fear; for sin-ners here the si - lent Word is plead - ing.
 The King of kings sal - va - tion brings; let lov - ing hearts en-throne him.

This, this is Christ the king, whom shep-herds guard and an - gels sing;
 Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;
 Raise, raise the song on high, the vir - gin sings her lul - la - by;

haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mar - y!
 hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mar - y!
 joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mar - y!

Text: William C. Dix, 1837–1898
 Music: GREENSLEEVES, English ballad, 16th cent.

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

1 It came up - on the mid - night clear, that glo - rious song of old,
 2 Still through the clo - ven skies they come with peace - ful wings un - furled,
 3 And you, be - neath life's crush - ing load, whose forms are bend - ing low,
 4 For lo! The days are has - t'ning on, by proph - ets seen of old,

from an - gels bend - ing near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
 and still their heav'n - ly mu - sic floats o'er all the wea - ry world.
 who toil a - long the climb - ing way with pain - ful steps and slow:
 when with the ev - er - cir - cling years shall come the time fore - told,

"Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heav'n's all - gra - cious king."
 A - bove its sad and low - ly plains they bend on hov - 'ring wing,
 look now, for glad and gold - en hours come swift - ly on the wing;
 when peace shall o - ver all the earth its an - cient splen - dors fling,

The world in sol - emn still - ness lay to hear the an - gels sing.
 and ev - er o'er its ba - bel sounds the bless - ed an - gels sing.
 oh, rest be - side the wea - ry road and hear the an - gels sing!
 and all the world give back the song which now the an - gels sing.

Text: Edmund H. Sears, 1810–1876
 Music: CAROL, Richard S. Willis, 1819–1900

Please stand as you are able.

TABLE BLESSING

☐ And now, may the body and blood of Christ, the Savior held in Mary's arms and which you have received in your hands, bless you, keep you in all goodness and health, and bring you to everlasting life.

☑ Amen.

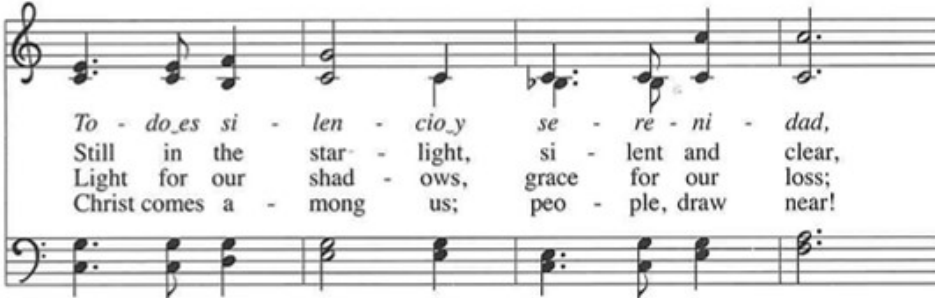
Night Long-Awaited / Noche Anunciada



1 No - che_a-nun - cia - da, no - che de_a - mor,
 1 Night long - a - wait - ed, God comes to earth;
 2 Sleep in a man - ger, safe and a - dored.
 3 Now is God's prom - ise born in the night;



Dios ha na - ci - do, pé - ta - lo_y flor.
 bloom - ing like ros - es, love giv - en birth.
 All that is bro - ken shall be re - stored.
 wake to its full - ness; live in its light.



To - do_es si - len - cio_y se - re - ni - dad,
 Still in the star - light, si - lent and clear,
 Light for our shad - ows, grace for our loss;
 Christ comes a - mong us; peo - ple, draw near!



paz en la tie - rra, es Na - vi - dad.
 peace comes a - mong us; Christ - mas is here.
 born for our dy - ing; bear - ing our cross.
 Come to the man - ger; Christ - mas is here.

Text: Félix Luna, 1925–2009; tr. Adam M. L. Tice, b. 1979
 Music: Ariel Ramírez, 1921–2010; arr. Carlos Colón, b. 1966
 Text © 1965 Lawson-Gould, admin. Alfred Music
 Music © 1965, 2019 Lawson-Gould, admin. Alfred Music

NOCHE ANUNCIADA
 5 4 5 4 D

SENDING OF COMMUNION *(if needed)*

- P** O God, whose grace and truth are revealed in the Word-made-flesh, bless those who go forth to share your word and sacrament with those who are unable to be here. Nourish and strengthen those who receive this holy communion, that through the body and blood of your Son all may rejoice at his birth and in his presence among us now and forever.
- P** We send you forth bearing these holy gifts that the Meal we have shared here may be extended for our siblings who are not here.
- C** We who are many are one body in Christ, sharing one bread, one cup.

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

- A** Let us pray. Merciful God, we thank you for Jesus, who is our heavenly food. Strengthened by this goodness, send us forth to announce your peace, comfort the afflicted, and share the good news of great joy.
- C** Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING and ADORATION AT THE CRÈCHE

*The ushers will light the candle of the first person on each aisle in each pew.
If you are using a flamed candle, each person, in turn, will pass the Light to their neighbor.*

Never tip a lighted candle!

*If you are using a flameless candle, simply turn the base of the candle.
When all the candles are lighted, we will join in the singing of "Silent Night."*

CAROL

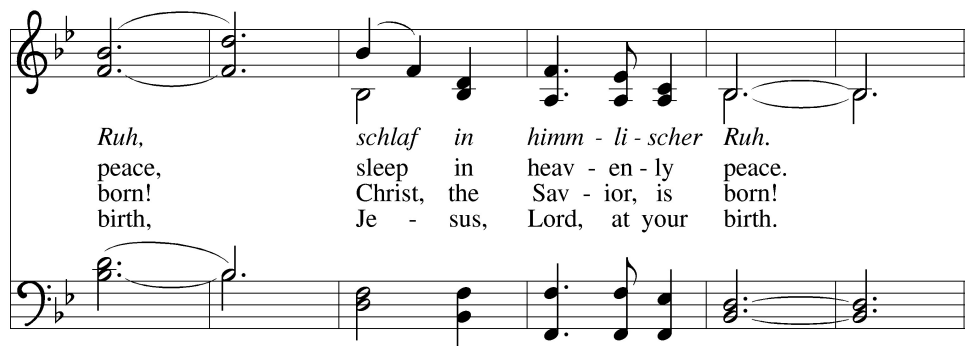
Silent Night, Holy Night! *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!*

ELW 281

Stil - le Nacht, hei - li - ge Nacht! Al - les schläft,
1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! All is calm,
2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Shep - herds quake
3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Son of God,

ein - sam wacht nur das trau - te, hoch - hei - li - ge Paar.
all is bright round yon vir - gin moth - er and child.
at the sight; glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
love's pure light ra - diant beams from your ho - ly face,

Hol - der Kna - be im lok - ki - gen Haar, schlaf in himm - li - scher
Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild, sleep in heav - en - ly
heav'n - ly hosts . . . sing, al - le - lu - ia! Christ, the Sav - ior, is
with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at your



Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792–1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820–1885
Music: STILLE NACHT, Franz Gruber, 1787–1863

THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN

- P** In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
The Word was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through the Word,
and without the Word not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in the Word was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the bleakness,
and the bleakness did not overtake it.

- C** **The Word has become flesh and lives among us.**
We have seen his glory:
the glory as of a parent's only child,
full of grace and truth!

BLESSING OF THE CRÈCHE

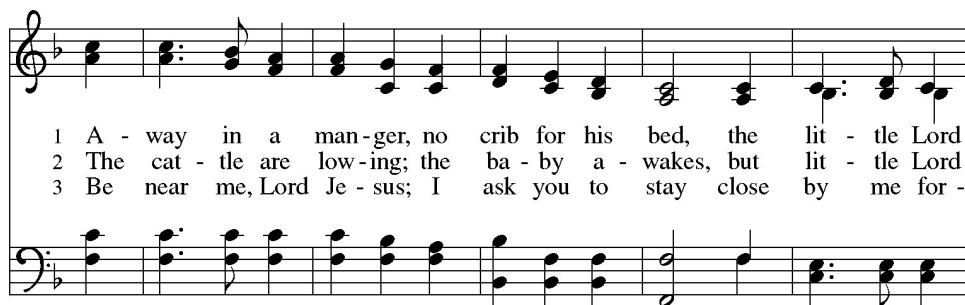
- P** Let us pray.
God of Mary and Joseph, of shepherds and animals, bless us whenever we gaze on this manger scene.
Through all the days of Christmas may these figures tell the story of how humans, angels, and animals
found the Christ in this poor place. Fill our hearts and homes with hospitality, joy, gentleness, and
thanksgiving and guide our steps in the way of peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord.
- C** **Amen.**

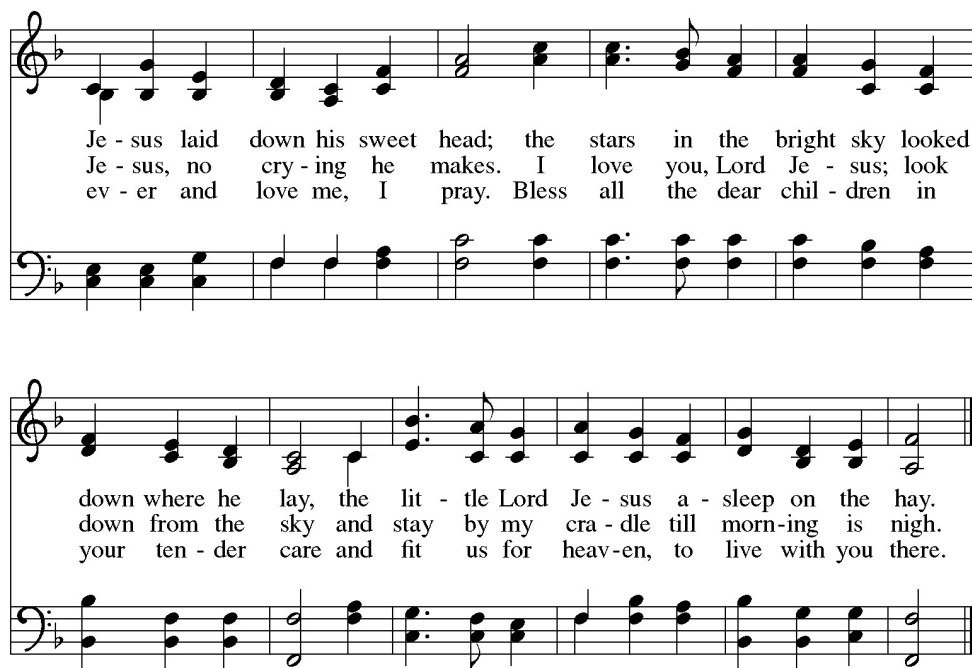
*You may extinguish your candle as the lights rise or you may choose to keep you candle lighted as you carry the
Light of the Christ Child into your heart and home. The candle itself is yours to keep.*

CAROL

ELW 277

Away in a Manger





Je - sus laid down his sweet head; the stars in the bright sky looked
 Je - sus, no cry - ing he makes. I love you, Lord Je - sus; look
 ev - er and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear chil - dren in
 down where he lay, the lit - tle Lord Je - sus a - sleep on the hay.
 down from the sky and stay by my cra - dle till morn - ing is nigh.
 your ten - der care and fit us for heav - en, to live with you there.

Text: North American, 19th cent.
 Music: AWAY IN A MANGER, James R. Murray, 1841–1905

SENDING – “God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.”

BLESSING

- ☐ May you hear the song of the angels,
 have the curiosity of the shepherds,
 the faith of Joseph,
 the wonder of Mary,
 the peace of the Christ Child;
 and the blessing of God Almighty,
 Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit
 be yours this Christmas and always.

☑ **Amen.**

The assembly faces the cross as it passes in procession and we are led into ministry in the world.

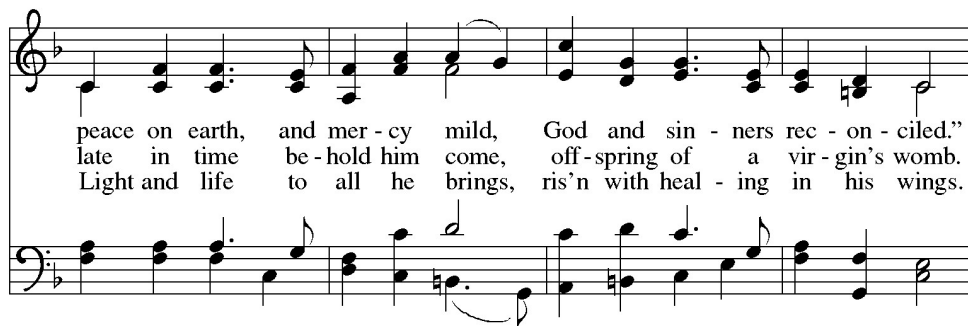
SENDING CAROL

ELW 270

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing



1 Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, “Glo - ry to the new - born king;
 2 Christ, by high - est heav’n a - dored, Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord,
 3 Hail the heav’n - born Prince of peace! Hail the Sun of righ - teous - ness!



peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled."
late in time be - hold him come, off - spring of a vir - gin's womb.
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with heal - ing in his wings.



Joy - ful, all you na - tions, rise; join the tri - umph of the skies;
Veiled in flesh the God - head see! Hail, in - car - nate de - i - ty!
Mild he lays his glo - ry by, born that we no more may die,



with an - gel - ic hosts pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
Pleased as man with us to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el!
born to raise each child of earth, born to give us sec - ond birth.



Refrain
Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new-born king!"

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788, alt.
Music: MENDELSSOHN, Felix Mendelssohn, 1809-1847; arr. William H. Cummings, 1831-1915

DISMISSAL

- ☐ Glory to God in the highest!
- ☒ And peace to God's people on earth!
- ☐ Go in peace. Tell the Good News!
- ☒ Thanks be to God!

POSTLUDE – "Voluntary"

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— **SERVING THIS EVENING** —

GREETER – Les Fobes (6:00pm)
ACOLYTES – Cecilia & Noah Montroy (6:00pm)
Gabe Stroup (10:30pm)
CRUCIFER – Jack Bartlett (6:00pm)
BOOKBEARER – Tessa Bartlett (6:00pm)
BANNER BEARER – Lincoln McCall (6:00pm)
Madeleine Wertz (10:30pm)
CHRIST BEARER – George Hedlund (6:00pm)
August Wertz (10:30pm)
ASSISTING MINISTER – Cathie Dugan (6:00pm)
Liz Stroup (10:30pm)
COMMUNION ASSISTANT – Tom Klomp (6:00pm)
Linda Graffius (10:30pm)
LECTOR – Pat Bellingham (6:00pm)
Bill Lasher (10:30pm)
ALTAR GUILD – Cathie Dugan (6:00pm)
Sharon Burke (10:30pm)
USHERS – Jane & Dave Kinzig, Carl Moore, Marilyn Rositer (6:00pm)
Diana Alvaro, Sharon Burke, Bill Lasher (10:30pm)
LUTHER MEMORIAL CHOIR & HANDBELL CHOIR



Altar flowers are given to the Glory of God and in memory of loved ones by Carol Schaal.

Front altar flowers are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of our fathers, The Rev. Roy P. Washill (beloved Boopa) and Denny Martin; and our uncle, Donald A. Mitchell, by Kate & Dennis Martin and Jeffrey Logan.

Columbarium flowers are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of my husband, Bill, by Carol Schaal.

Bulletins are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of C. Richard and Dorothy Overberg by their family.

The Nativity Star is given to the Glory of God and in thankfulness for all friends and family by the McAfee family.

The Lord is with us at all times; in our joys and our sadness we turn to Him for strength and comfort. As you look upon the star shining in our church tonight know that He is always with you. We thank our Luther Memorial family for their gift of this star for Christmas Eve.

Thank You to our adult choir, handbell choir, and instrumentalists who have assisted in our worship services throughout the past year:

Christy Adams
Bob Banks
Pat Bellingham
Patricia Boyd
Emma Chaffee
Mary Daniels
Barb Dennison
Lena Donnelly
Cathie Dugan

Les Fobes
Susan Forsythe
Jeanne Gaber
Jonathan Gaber
Molly Gaber
Lynnette Gustafson
Ken Kraut
Linda Melaragno
Skip Meyn

Barb Moore
Kara Partusch
Rose-Marie Rose
Kathy Sahlmann
Tessa Wolf
Penelope Wolf
Veronica Wolf
Pat Young

The Church Office will be on limited hours this week as our staff celebrates with their families. Please be patient with all correspondence and we will get back to you as soon as we can. The office is open on Thursday, January 2 with normal hours.

Luther Memorial Academy students and staff return to school on Monday, January 6, 2025.

Members who have donated poinsettias may take their flowers following the 10:30pm service this evening.

Volunteers to assist with delivery of poinsettias to our homebound are appreciated.

WORSHIP MATTERS!

Where's the Advent Wreath? The keeping of time during the Advent season by lighting candles was an old tradition. Originally using wagon wheels or any other instruments of labor that were not used during the winter season, there was one candle for each day of Advent (24-28 depending on the year). Red candles for each weekday and white candles for each Sunday. Over time, there were myriad iterations of these calendars to count down (or up!) to Christ's birth. The idea is as the days grow shorter and the nights deeper and longer, we light candles in anticipation of the birth of the Light of the World. Once we enter into the Christmas season—as we do tonight—and celebrate the birth of the Light among us, we no longer keep track of time in the same way, we are too busy celebrating with all of the creation the light come into the world! We light all the candles around us, we carry candles against the dark, cold night, we shine lights in the trees themselves as the entire earth is alight with the glow from the manger bed. As such, we no longer have need to count the days and so the Advent wreath is put aside until our next season of expectation and longing.

READINGS AND COMMEMORATIONS FOR THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

December 25 – The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day – Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14 – *As on the first day of creation, on this Christmas Day the Word illumines the world, shining forth to bring all things into being. Today we celebrate the incarnate Word, God becoming flesh to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ then and now. Emboldened by the good news of Christ's birth, along with the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and all witnesses to the light of Christ, we declare to the world that we have indeed seen and been transformed by the arrival of "the salvation of our God." O come, let us adore!*

A Note from Pastor Jay: The three days that follow our celebrations of Jesus' birth are the feasts of the three "**Christmas martyrs.**" As we celebrate Jesus present on earth and what it means to be called to be disciples and witnesses (in Greek) of what he means in our lives, we contemplate the three kinds of martyrdom:

Stephen was a martyr of will and deed: He witnessed to Jesus and knew it could get him killed. He witnessed anyway. And he was killed for his witness.

John the Divine was a martyr of will but not of deed: He is believed to be the only one of the original 12 disciples to die of natural causes (though there are stories of his being spared of martyrdom on several occasions). This fulfills the Gospel of John when Jesus says, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" He witnessed to Jesus knowing he could be killed. He witnessed anyway. He died of natural causes, though by tradition in exile on the isle of Patmos.

The Holy Innocents were martyrs of deed but not of will: Killed by order of King Herod who feared the birth of the "King of the Judeans" in Bethlehem, they did not witness to Jesus but were killed for his sake nevertheless.

December 26 – The Second Day of Christmas -- Stephen, Deacon and Protomartyr – II Chronicles 24:17-22; Psalm 17:1-9, 15; Acts 6:8-7:2a, 51-60; Matthew 23:34-39 – *Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr (protomartyr) of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning.*

December 27 – The Third Day of Christmas -- John the Divine, Evangelist – Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31; Psalm 116:12-19; I John 1:1-2:2; John 21:20-25 – *The son of Zebedee and brother of James, John was one of the twelve disciples and witness to the transfiguration. Tradition has named him also the writer of the Gospel of John, the three New Testament letters bearing his name, as well as Revelation.*

December 28 – The Fourth Day of Christmas -- The Holy Innocents of Bethlehem, martyrs – Jeremiah 31:15-17; Psalm 124; I Peter 4:12-19; Matthew 2:13-18 – *This day commemorates the young children killed by Herod in Bethlehem in his jealous attempt to murder the baby Jesus, a sobering reminder of the evil that led Christ to be born for our salvation.*

December 29 – The Fifth Day of Christmas -- The First Sunday of Christmas – I Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

December 30 – The Sixth Day of Christmas Psalm 147:12-20; II Chronicles 1:7-13; Mark 13:32-37

December 31 – The Seventh Day of Christmas Psalm 147:12-20; I Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19

January 1 – The Eighth Day of Christmas -- The Holy Name of Jesus – Number 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 2:15-21 – *By Jewish law, every baby boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day of life, so on the eighth day of Christmas the church celebrates this event in Jesus' life. The keeping of the covenant, as well as Jesus' name, are signs of God's salvation given to us through him.*

January 2 – The Ninth Day of Christmas Psalm 147:12-20; Proverbs 1:1-7; James 3:13-18

January 3 – The Tenth Day of Christmas Psalm 72; Job 42:10-17; Luke 8:16-21

January 4 – The Eleventh Day of Christmas Psalm 72; Isaiah 6:1-5; Acts 7:44-53

January 5 – The Twelfth Day of Christmas -- The Second Sunday of Christmas – Sirach 24:1-12; Wisdom 10:15-21; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:10-18

January 6 – The Epiphany of Jesus – Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12 – *The feast of Epiphany (“manifestation”) concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God’s glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.*

**MY COMMITMENT TO GOD THROUGH THE MINISTRY
OF LUTHER MEMORIAL CHURCH - YEAR 2025**

I/we commit my/our entire life in service to Jesus Christ, and therefore will offer a portion my/our annual income. I promise, with God helping me, to give to Luther Memorial’s ministry during the coming year, as follows:

\$ _____ () Weekly () Monthly

Name _____

Address _____

(Please detach from bulletin and add to offering plate)

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2024
CHRISTMAS DAY**

Pajama worship will be held at 10:30am. Wear your comfiest and most festive jammies.

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2024
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS**

Lessons and Carols will be held at 8:15am in Faith Chapel and 10:30am in the main church.

— PRAYER LIST —

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Our Members:

Abbie & Ben Dixon
Matt, Jessica Kinzig & family
Marilyn Bohn & family

Dave Parsh
Virginia Long
Rosanne Braine

Rose-Marie Rose
Pat Gilbert
Ed Hokaj

Ron King
Lois Fobes
Ann Flick

Friends and Family:

Cheryl Runstedler
Jessica Bulos Grubb
Leigh Ann Fassnacht
Branden Jones
Bernadette Mulder
Andy Zimmerman
Betsy & Rudy, Sydney Kohn
Grant, Alina, Charlie Jane McGrail
Mary & Urban LaRiccia
Cara & Bradley Kendra

Jenn
Phil F.
Janine Frank
Teddy & Rebecca
Kevin D.
Jim Roberts
Racheal Thompson
Phil
Carol Steffey

Norma Lynch
Karen
Casey Smith
Jean Coburn
Tom Kraut
Bev
Joey & family
Jane
Andrew Wachter

Jenn Eddy
Curtis Krick
Tom Dean
Cheryl Atkinson
Steve Sensor
Dale Dannhaus
Michele Seifert
Amy S.
Chris Beckman

Grief:

Tina Clark DiNicola family
Emma Houseman family

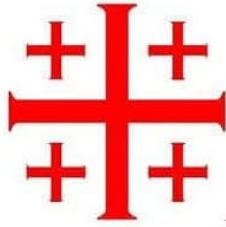
JoAnn Guilianelli family Fred Kern family

Our Military Service Men & Women:

Lt. Col. Matt Anderson
Ben Dixon

Michael Stickner
Lt. Col. Mark Collins

Andrew Watson Alli Brown
Christopher Rose



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE — 2024

*“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has
(Matthew 4:16, quoting Isaiah 9:2)*

In the midst of these dark days of continuing conflict and uncertainty in the Holy Land, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, remain steadfast in proclaiming to the congregations and the wider world the eternal Christmas message of the True Light: the birth of our Lord Jesus in Bethlehem (John 1:5).

For in Christ’s Nativity, the light of God’s salvation first came into the world, and we would receive Him, both then and now, and offering them “grace upon grace” against the forces of evil that ceaselessly conspire to bring about the destruction of God’s Kingdom.

John the Baptist later testified to the light as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, straighten the way of the Lord” (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:3). As the above passage reflects, the light first dawned upon our spiritual ancestors, who received the message of salvation from the “region and shadow of death” (Matthew 4:16). Enduring many hardships, they followed the Holy Light of Christ’s Resurrection, becoming His witnesses in the Holy Land, and to the ends of the earth.

This ancient path of redemption leads us full-circle to our time, when wars and suffering afflict millions in our region and around the globe continue to suffer grievously. Outwardly, circumstances have changed. Yet inwardly, our Lord Jesus Christ’s holy birth sparked a spiritual journey that continues to transform countless hearts and minds towards the ways of justice and peace (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 2:17).

For those families of the faithful who have remained in the Holy Land, as we have joined us, it is our privilege to continue to testify to the sacred light of Christ, who was born here, where He was born, ministered, and offered Himself on our behalf, rising from the dead to a new resurrected life. We do this by offering Him our worship and prayer; by welcoming pilgrims and visitors into our midst; by proclaiming His sacred Gospel; by continuing His ministries of teaching, healing, and loving-kindness; and by seeking “liberty for the captives, and release to the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18-19).

In this hopeful Christmas spirit, we give thanks to the Almighty for the recent cessation of the warring parties in our region, and we call for it to be expanded into all places, bringing an end to the wars that have plagued our part of the world. We pray for a lasting peace that will allow all people to live in harmony and joy.