

Service of Holy Communion

December 24, 2020 Christmas Eve

WELCOME

PRELUDE

"The Rocking Carol"

SKLC Hand Bells

"Light of the World" Lauren Daigle, Paul Duncan & Paul Mabury One Voice

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

As the candles are lighted, this prayer is said.

We praise you, O God, for this ring of light that has marked our days of preparation for Christ's advent. Tonight we light the candles on this wreath in joyous recognition that Emmanuel is come, God with us. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may rejoice and spread the good news of Jesus' birth. We praise you for Christ's coming; may his presence among us transform the world.

Amen.

GATHERING SONG #283 O Come, All Ye Faithful, vses 1 and 4
Pastor Kris Franke Hill, Trumpet

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him,
born the king of angels:

Refrain

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n!
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing: *Refrain*

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

HYMN OF PRAISE #289 Angels We Have Heard on High, vses 1 and 3

1 Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain

Gloria in excelsis Deo;
gloria in excelsis Deo.

3 Come to Bethlehem and see
him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn king. *Refrain*

Text: French carol; tr. H. F. Hemy, *The Crown of Jesus Music*, 1864

PRAYER OF THE DAY

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. Amen.**

THE WORD**FIRST READING: Isaiah 9:2-7**

This poem promises deliverance from Assyrian oppression, a hope based on the birth of a royal child with a name full of promise. While Judah's king will practice justice and righteousness, the real basis for faith lies in God's passion for the people: The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

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 the nation, 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.

⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

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.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 96:1-4, 7-13

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

²**Sing 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.

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

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

⁸**Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.**

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

¹⁰**Tell 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.

¹²**Then 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.

CAROL #300 The First Noel verse 1

1 The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he 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. ¹⁹But 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, as it had been told them.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

It has finally arrived – Christmas Eve. We’ve been waiting, hoping this day would come with encouragement and renewal in these waning days of 2020. Now it is here – the tree is decorated and lighted, the whole Advent wreath is lit, the crèche is out with the baby in the manger, and we’re singing well-loved carols. As in every year of our lives, Christmas has come. Maybe we should bask in the holiness of this night for a moment.

Like other years, Christmas is here...yet this is unlike any other Christmas we’ve experienced. This year’s celebration is strange – all of us gathered over computers or iPads or smart phones, or simply reading the service to ourselves. The building looks lovely, as it does every year. The decorations seem to be inviting friends and strangers alike to ‘come in! come in!’ It looks like Christmas here, except for what’s missing – our being with each other in person. Tonight we come together virtually and in spirit.

For years my family gathered at the house on Avenue D in Austin, my parent’s former home, for supper and games and gift exchange. There were around 30 of us, from great-grandparents down to the great-grandchildren: all the food, the laughter, the familiarity of our own traditions, the quietness of peace and goodwill this night can bring. But this year, Christmas is strange in our homes, too. No big family get-togethers, no talk and story-telling around a table full of food, no Christmas caroling to our shut-in members. For some, this Christmas is especially strange – and painful – the first since a beloved family member has died. How odd to be celebrating the birth of Jesus without them.

This whole year has been strange. We last worshiped in person on March 15. At the time, I thought the staying home and social distancing might last a few months. It’s been 9 months, and counting. At the beginning of 2020, I saw pictures of people in China wearing facemasks in stores and thought, ‘that’s weird.’ What was weird is now normal. Vacations have been canceled, church and school have been via the internet, everyone who can works from home. People have lost jobs; some have been evicted from their homes. In the midst of the upheaval and pain, this congregation and many

others are trying to figure out what it means to be “church” in these days, how we can be Christ to our neighbors in need.

Mary and Joseph had already had an unusual engagement, what with the surprise of her pregnancy by the Holy Spirit. I’m not sure anything could top that for strangeness. But then, in Mary’s ninth month, she and Joseph had to travel 90 miles – most likely on foot – from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the national census. It’s no wonder she gave birth as soon as she got there, after all that exertion and stress.

The story we tell every year at Christmas is peculiar. It is so familiar to us, we might miss its strangeness. In Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph can’t find anywhere to stay, so they end up in a stable with the oxen and the chickens. When their baby is born, they have nowhere to lay him but in the animal’s food trough, and nothing to clothe-him-with but strips of cloth from their own garments. That much of the story isn’t all that unusual. In every age, poor people have traveled hard roads at inopportune times, slept wherever they found shelter, and made do with the few resources they had on hand. It still happens today – at our borders and elsewhere.

But this child was special. This isn’t just any baby born in a barn in Bethlehem, it is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. God couldn’t arrange better accommodations for his son’s birth than this? Where is the welcoming party for Mary, Joseph, and little Jesus? Where are the midwives and relatives to help and encourage her? The stable itself is quiet and dark, the only sounds: munching of hay, clucking of birds, and tired boards sighing in the wind.

What about the rest of Bethlehem that night? Did anyone know what was happening, or were most people in bed, sleeping right through the arrival of God in human flesh? Did they wake the next morning, throw on a robe, pour a cup of coffee and open the newspaper as though it was just another day? Surely they would have felt something different, sensed newness and great possibility in the air. If the residents of Bethlehem did not know something monumental had occurred in their town, then we wouldn’t know, either, when God comes to us in human flesh. It could be a while before we realize the whole world has been made new.

Mary, Joseph, and the baby did get some visitors. Shepherds came in the wee hours of the morning. Shepherds – not dignitaries from the city of Bethlehem, not the governor of Judea, not the local bishop. Just tired, smelly shepherds. They’d been sitting by a fire while their sheep slept, when suddenly the night sky was aglow with radiance, an otherworldly messenger appeared with astonishing news, and angelic choirs sang praise to God on high. The poor shepherds must have been terrified. Yet they also listened and rejoiced, and praised God from their hearts, because God was turning the world upside down.

In our ordinary lives, in the weirdness of this past year, it is hard to imagine God being born to some anonymous family in San Antonio. It seems silly to think God would rouse shepherds or janitors to go stand as witnesses, or choose that young couple down the street in those sketchy apartments (who aren’t even married) to be mother and father to the Savior. We love the Christmas story, know it nearly by heart, but

really – how odd that God sent a baby rather than a Warrior or a Statesperson or a Diplomat to reshape and re-energize the world. How strange that our hopes, our very lives and their destiny, lie in a manger with Mary’s newborn.

It’s been a weird year, 2020. Maybe this is the perfect odd occurrence to cap off such a peculiar year. We’re all wearing our masks and washing our hands and staying six feet apart and not gathering in indoor spaces... and now, with full hearts, we’re welcoming a squalling, squirming, red-faced baby – only hours old – as Emmanuel, God with us in the flesh. What could be stranger than that? What could be more disarming, more irresistible, more clearly a sign of hope for us all?

Down in a stable in Bethlehem, unnoticed by everyone but a few shepherds, Jesus is born. The rest of his story – challenging, wonderful, and heart-breaking – will follow. But tonight... tonight there is only this – a little baby in his mother’s arms, his adoring father nearby, the oxen lowing, the hens scratching, the stars shining, the world asleep, and God, come to save.

HYMN OF THE DAY #296 What Child is This

- 1 What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary!
- 2 Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you;
hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary!
- 3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
the virgin sings her lullaby;
joy, joy, for Christ is born,
the babe, the son of Mary!

THE NICENE CREED

With the whole Church let us confess our faith.

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 and the Son,
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.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

The shepherds sing, "Jesus Christ is born!" Let your church throughout the world proclaim this good news, over the hills and everywhere. Unite the voices of all your faithful people in songs of praise and rejoicing. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Heaven and nature sing, "Joy to the world!" Give respite to flocks, fields, and those who tend them. Come near to us in the beauty of nighttime, the shining of the stars, and the hush of a world at rest. May our wonder at your creation rouse our care for all the earth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

The angels sing, "Peace on earth!" Come quickly to still the strife of this world. Hush the noise of war and violence in places of unrest. Inspire leaders of nations to seek lasting peace and sustainable provision for all in their care. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Mary sings melodies of comfort to her newborn child. Bring rest and reassurance to those facing struggles this night. Shelter travelers and those without homes. Console those who lie awake due to pain or anxiety. Heal those who are sick or hurting. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Love sings through the sound of a new baby's cry. Bless new parents and expectant parents. Comfort those who long for children, especially those running out of hope or options. Surround families of every shape and size with your love and care. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive the prayers of this gathered people...

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

The heavenly chorus sings, "Glory to God in the highest!" We give you thanks for all the saints who have proclaimed your glory in word and deed. Let us join them this night in joyful praise around your eternal throne. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

THE DOXOLOGY to the tune of "*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*"

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel

OFFERING

Thank you for your continued offerings to Shepherd King. Your support not only keeps this congregation's ministry functioning, but also supports ministry in the larger Lutheran Church, like Lutheran Disaster Relief helping people around the world recover from natural disasters.

OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God, you came to us as one unknown, bringing joy and salvation to the earth. Nourish us at your banquet table, that with all who welcome your birth we may proclaim your peace, revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

(Please have the bread and wine/juice ready for Holy Communion)

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING (setting 1)

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 our thanks and praise.

PREFACE FOR CHRISTMAS

It is indeed right, our du - ty and our joy,
 that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you,
 al - mighty and merciful God, through our Sav - ior Je - sus Christ.
 You comforted your people with the promise of the Re - deem - er,
 through whom you will also make all things new
 in the day when he comes to judge the world in righ - teous-ness.
 And so, with all the choirs of an - gels,
 with the church on earth and the hosts of heav - en,
 we praise your name and join their un - end - ing hymn:

"Holy, Holy, Holy"

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of
 pow-er and might, heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -
 san - na in the high-est. Blessed is he who comes in the
 name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

God our creator, our redeemer, our comforter, we praise you for your infinite goodness: creating the universe, claiming Israel as your own, delivering your people from slavery, choosing Mary to be mother of your Son, sending John to prepare the way, leading Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, and on this night, bringing forth Jesus, the Savior of the World. We rejoice in your love, so great it cannot be measured. We gratefully receive this bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord, which forgives our sin and brings us abundant life.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord 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.

LORD'S PRAYER

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

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.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

The Word is revealed in a manger, in simple bread and wine. Come meet Christ in this meal.

Take the bread and eat, this is the body of Christ, given for you. *(please consume the bread)*

Take the cup and drink, this is the blood of Christ, shed for you. *(please drink from the cup)*

BLESSING AFTER COMMUNION

The body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have once again fed us from your very self with the body and blood of Christ. Through this mystery, send us forth to proclaim your promise to a world in need, through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING AND SILENT NIGHT

(You are invited to light candles in your home and dim the other lights as we sing Silent Night. Candles are lighted and lights dimmed at Shepherd King.)

CAROL #281 Silent Night, Holy Night!

1 Silent night, holy night!
 All is calm, all is bright
 round yon virgin mother and child.
 Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
 sleep in heavenly peace,
 sleep in heavenly peace.

- 2 Silent night, holy night!
 Shepherds quake at the sight;
 glories stream from heaven afar,
 heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
 Christ, the Savior, is born!
 Christ, the Savior, is born!
- 3 Silent night, holy night!
 Son of God, love's pure light
 radiant beams from your holy face,
 with the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
 Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

RESPONSE

The light of Christ shines in the darkness,
And the darkness does not overcome it.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Worship with Zion Lutheran on Sunday

<http://youtube.com/ZionSanAntonio>

<http://zionsa.org/>

BLESSING

Almighty God, who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary, proclaimed joy through the angels, sent the shepherds with good news, and led the magi by a star, bless you this day † through the Word made flesh. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN #290 Go Tell it on the Mountain

Refrain

Go tell it on the mountain,
 over the hills and ev'rywhere;
 go tell it on the mountain
 that Jesus Christ is born!

- 1 While shepherds kept their watching
 o'er silent flocks by night,
 behold, throughout the heavens
 there shone a holy light. *Refrain*

2 The shepherds feared and trembled
 when, lo, above the earth
 rang out the angel chorus
 that hailed our Savior's birth. *Refrain*

3 Down in a lonely manger
 the humble Christ was born;
 and God sent us salvation
 that blessed Christmas morn. *Refrain*

Text: African American spiritual, refrain; John W. Work Jr., 1872-1925, stanzas, alt.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus. **Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

POSTLUDE

"He Shall Reign Forevermore" Chris Tomlin & Matt Maher

One Voice

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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