

Christmas Eve Service

December 24, 2020 – 5 p.m.

Preservice Music

“Lo, How a Rose Is Growing” -set. Willem Vogel

“Angels from the Realms of Glory” -set. John A. Behnke

Welcome

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

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Christ is coming! Alleluia!

People: Christ is coming indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer

Pastor: O heavenly Father, you have caused this holy night to shine with the illumination of the true Light of the World, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hear our prayer, that as we have known the mystery of Christ's light upon earth, so may we be called to live with Him in eternal glory in Heaven, where with You and the Holy Spirit, He lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

People: Amen.

People: Christ is coming. Alleluia!

Reading

Lector: Isaiah 7:10-14 (*ESV*)

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Hymn 379 (LSB) “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful” (*sung by Paul and Betsy Hanson*)

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!

2. Highest, most holy,

Light of Light eternal,

Born of a virgin, a mortal He comes;

Son of the Father Now in flesh appearing! *Refrain*

Reading

Lector: Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7 (*ESV*)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for

his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Hymn 367 (LSB) “Angels, from the Realms of Glory” (*sung by Eleda DeRocker*)

3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations,
Ye have seen His natal star.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn king.

Reading

Lector: Luke 1:26-35 (*ESV*)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Hymn 367 (LSB) “Angels, from the Realms of Glory” (*sung by Eleda DeRocker*)

4. Saints before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear.
Come and worship, come and worship;
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Reading (*music during reading: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”*)

Lector: Luke 2:1-7 (*King James Version*)

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into

Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Hymn 364 (LSB) “Away in a Manger” (*sung by Eleda DeRocker*)

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

3. Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care
And take us to heaven to live with Thee there.

Reading (*music during reading: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”*)

Lector: Luke 2:8-14 (*King James Version*)

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Hymn 380 (LSB) “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” (*sung by Marie Galligan*)

Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

Reading (*music during reading: “Angels We Have Heard on High”*)

Lector: Luke 2:15-20 (*King James Version*)

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another,
Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which
was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Hymn 368 (LSB) “Angels We Have Heard on High” (*sung by Jo Nachtigall*)

1. Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply,
Echoing their joyous strains.
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.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Reading (*music during reading: “Joy to the World” played by Martin Miller*)

Pastor: John 1:1-2, 14-18 (ESV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

The Meditation “Son of Mary”

Charles Dickens’s novel *A Christmas Carol* is about Ebenezer Scrooge and how his heart was changed one Christmas. It’s a story that makes us feel good because “they all lived happily ever-after.” Tiny Tim gets some toys. Bob Cratchit gets a lovely meal, presents for the family, and a well-needed raise. Scrooge is no longer a heartless miser but wonderful embodiment of the Christmas spirit. It is a story we all love.

But the lines from another of Dickens novels more accurately describes the way Christmas feels for most of us. He begins *A Tale of Two Cities* with these famous words: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness. It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. We had everything before us, we had nothing before us.”

Christmas is also a time of contrasts. It is a time of prosperity and a time of poverty. It is a season of good will and a season of ugly greed. Christmas is a time of family togetherness and it is a time of excruciating loneliness. It is a season of light and it is a season of darkness. Christmas is the spring of hope and Christmas is the winter of acute despair.

Don’t get me wrong. We all want Christmas to be the best of times. That’s why we decorate and donate and shop until we drop. We put up Christmas trees, hang tinsel, turn-on Christmas lights, cook turkeys, and put together all kinds of toys. I did that last week after my Grandparents visited. We want a holly, jolly Christmas, but let’s be honest. As much as we want Christmas to be the best of times, sometimes it is the worst of times.

Some of us have spent too much money, again, and we are worried sick about our financial future. Others are struggling with their health, or the health of a loved one—wondering if this might be their last Christmas on earth. Some are wrestling with old hurts that won’t heal and new wounds that won’t go away. Still others are missing loved ones this Christmas—either because of distance, precautions, or of loss.

That’s why our focus from 1 Thessalonians seems so strange, so out of place, so artificial. **“Rejoice evermore.”** Really? Paul, just what is there to rejoice about? Finally, isn’t Christmas just a fantasy season in a season of fantasies? Isn’t Christmas about as real as sugar plum fairies, old St. Nick, and Jack Frost knocking at your door?

And even if Christmas joy is real, it’s real for other people. We might not think it is real for us. Maybe we have problems that no one else can relate with. Perhaps people we know and love have had a lot of hang

ups and have passed all of them on to us. And our families? Maybe you don't get along that well, especially at this time of the year. Maybe your job is a hassle, or your marriage is on the rocks. Perhaps you might feel that it is too late to do anything about this mess I call my life.

Paul's message of rejoicing can seem hard, tough, and out of place. How dare Paul say, "Rejoice evermore"? How could he suggest such a syrupy sentiment? I'll tell you why. Paul knew about the angelic announcement, "**I bring you good news of great joy,**" Luke 2:10. It is not for some of the people. It is not for the good people. It is not for the religious people. No. This is "**good news of great joy for all the people.**" Joy is the gift Christ gives to everyone. And he gives it especially to you.

Please hear what I'm about to say. It is very important. There is a huge difference between happiness and joy. They are not synonymous terms. External gifts like health and wealth and family are awesome blessings from God. They can make us happy. But—and this is a big but—they are not essential for joy. Why is that? Happiness is determined by what is going on around me. I can't control that. You can't control that. This last year has demonstrated that well! Joy is determined by what is going on inside of me. And God has taken control of that.

He sent Jesus, and Jesus didn't have a lot of reasons for earthly happiness. He didn't become an emperor, a statesman, a general or an investment banker. He was born in an animal feeding trough to a blue collar father and a teenage mother. As an adult, Jesus had no home. Jesus once said, "**Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.**" (Matthew 8:20) Jesus was as an itinerant preacher and washed feet. That's never been the key to making it big.

And then this. "**Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!**" (Philippians 2:8) Death on the cross was reserved for slaves, thieves and murders; the lowest of the low. They ripped his skin, burst his arteries and severed his nerves. It brought unimaginable pain. In spite of it all, though, Jesus exuded joy.

Poverty couldn't take it away. Disappointments and rejection couldn't take it away. Even death on a cross couldn't take away his joy. Hebrews 12:2 says as much, "**. . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.**" What does it all mean?

No matter what your life may be like right now, this one great truth makes everything worthwhile: Jesus Christ, son of Mary, was born to live and die for you. From his cross he freely gives joy; unlimited, undeniable and unending joy. And it is for you. How can I be so sure? "**I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who Is Christ the Lord.**"

Jesus once said, "**No one will take your joy from you**" (John 16:22). Why is that? Remember? Happiness is determined by what is going on around me. I can't control that. Joy is determined by what is going on inside of me. And God has taken control of that by sending Jesus who is the doorway to deliverance, the pathway to peace, and the gateway to glory. His mercy is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His love never changes. His grace is sufficient. His word is enough. And his reign is righteous forevermore! And no one will take this joy from you!

Joy stems the tide of gloom and despair. It brings confidence in the midst of confusion. Hope in the midst of uncertainty. And calm in the midst of life's chaotic storms. But please, don't confuse happiness and joy. They are not the same thing. There are happy Christmases and there are sad Christmases. It all depends on what is happening around us.

Joy, on the other hand, is dependent upon what is happening in us. And the birth of Jesus is God's commitment to send the Holy Spirit who comes inside to heal our hurts, forgive our filth and redeem our wretchedness. Whether tonight is for you the best of times or the worst of times, the birth of Jesus—announced by the angels, witnessed by the shepherds and marveled at by the magi—leaves us finally with only one response. And what would that be? Paul wrote it. 1 Thessalonians 5:16. "Rejoice evermore!" Amen.

Prayer

Pastor: Merciful God, who sent thy messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

Confession and Absolution

Pastor: Dear friends in Christ, here in the presence of Almighty God, let us kneel in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, so that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy. Almighty and most merciful Father:

People: We have strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have sinned against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done. We have done those things which we ought not to have done. Have mercy on us, Lord. Restore us with Your Word, and forgive us for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, whom You sent to us on that first Christmas Eve so long ago. Amen.

Pastor: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was sent to this world to die for you, and for His sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, he gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Reading

Pastor: Hebrews 1:1-4 (*ESV*)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

People: Christ is born in Bethlehem! Alleluia!

Prayers of the Church

For Peace

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your Church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For Understanding among Peoples

O God, you created all people in your image. We thank you for the astonishing variety of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For Peace among Nations

Almighty God, heavenly Father, guide the nations of the world into ways of justice and truth, and establish among them that peace which is the fruit of righteousness, that they may become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For Our Enemies

O God, the Lord of all, your Son commanded us to love our enemies and to pray for them. Lead us from prejudice to truth; deliver us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and enable us to stand before you, reconciled through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the Oppressed

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the abundance of the land, through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the Poor and Neglected

Almighty and most merciful God, we call to mind before you all those whom it would be easy to forget – the homeless, the destitute, the sick, the aged, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Help us to remember that it is not they but You, Lord, who stands and knocks at the door, asking for help. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son who for our sake became poor and friendless.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the Grace to Receive the Word

Blessed God, you speak to us through the Holy Scriptures. Grant that we may hear, read, respect, learn, and make them our own in such a way that the enduring benefit and comfort of the Word will help us grasp and hold the blessed hope of everlasting life given us through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For Our Children

Heavenly Father, you sent your own Son into this world as the child of Mary and Joseph. We thank you for the lives of our children, entrusted to our care. As we bring them up, give us calm strength and patient wisdom, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and good following the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who was also blessed to grow up in a loving human family. Help us to remember that we are all your children, and so to love and nurture

each other as members of the family of God, so that we may all attain full stature in your eternal kingdom, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the Remembrance of the Departed

With reverence and affection we remember before you, O everlasting God, all our departed friends and relatives. Tonight, we rejoice in the celebration of your promises fulfilled, the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ. Tonight, we can take comfort in knowing that our departed are with you, just as Simeon said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen salvation.” Lord, we have seen your salvation, and we look forward to the day when we may look upon your face in glory everlasting.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer

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.

The Blessing

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

People: Amen.

People: Christ is born in Bethlehem! Alleluia!

Lighting of the Candles (*“Silent Night, Holy Night” -set. Paul Bouman*)

The pastor will take the light from the Christ Candle and pass it to the ushers at the chancel. Please tip only the unlit candle to be lit. Do not tip the lighted candles. Note: Parents, please assist your children to prevent accidents.

The ushers will begin at the front of the church and light the candle of the worshipper closest to the center aisle. From the center to the aisles, the flame will be passed from one worshipper to the next, saying: “CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

Hymn 363 (LSB) “Silent 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 Thy holy face,

With the dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,

Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Extinguish Candles

Please extinguish your candle now, using caution regarding the flame and hot wax!

Postlude “Joy to the World” -set. James Marriott

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SANCTUARY CHRISTMAS DECORATION donation slips are available in the narthex. Please indicate your willingness to help defray decoration costs by using the donation slip. Place it in the offering plate or hand it to an usher. Donation slips will be available through December 25.

EMMAUS LUTHERAN CHURCH

1074 Idaho Avenue West, St. Paul, MN 55117

651-489-9426 emmaus@q.com

www.emmaus-lutheran-church.org