

Sermon followed by Service

December 19, 2021

Luke 1:45-55

This week we sing some of our favorite Christmas songs. I know we don't all have the same favorites. That's OK. Different congregations, families, ages all have different favorites. Today we look at a favorite from across the ages and across the church; today we look at one of Jesus' favorite Christmas songs.

This song isn't a favorite for everyone. People who think they're fine just the way they are ... people who think they can make it without Jesus ... for them this song won't mean much. This is a Christmas song for people who see their lives and their world twisted out of whack - things aren't the way they're supposed to be. It's a Christmas song for people with hurting hearts, guilty hearts.

This song comes from a teen-age girl, growing up in a small town up north, a part of the world where good people got stepped on and bullies ruled. A time and place where church and priesthood were bought and sold, where law-enforcement made their living in extortion enforcement, shaking people down. Our song comes from a time of corruption that squeezed most every heart and home.

Our song comes from a young girl who just found out she was pregnant, and her fiancée wasn't the father. She didn't know what he would do - keep her or kick her loose; she didn't know what her family would do - hug her or dis-own her. Our song comes from a young teenager whose life in most every way was out of her control ... whose hard life was about to get a whole lot tougher.

Does any of that life sound familiar in your life? Ever feel taken advantage of ... bullied ... that life just isn't fair ... and it's spinning out of control?

So, what kind of song would we expect to hear? If it were on country radio, old-fashioned country radio - we'd hear a "tear in my beer" kind of song. If it were a rap station ... or I know some of you were into Blink 182 ... between the two we'd hear "kill the bleep" with a whole lot more bleep. Or how about Cheap Trick - do you remember them out of Rockford? Cheap Trick had another answer: "Gonna raise hell" ... because that's the best this world has to offer.

But what kind of song do we hear? This girl isn't about "tears in the beer"; she doesn't sing a bitter ballade thirsty for blood; raising Cain isn't her answer.

This girl knows her Bible; she knows her God; and she knows Christmas is coming. And with Christmas coming she's just got to sing how great God is!

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.”

The hurt, the anger at living in a world so wrong; the guilt for being part of the world gone so wrong; the questions: “What am I supposed to do with this baby? Will my fiancée divorce me? Will my parents disown me? How will this all work out?” - the hurt, the anger, the guilt, and worries didn't matter. She had God looking out for her! It didn't matter how small she was, how little she mattered; her God was looking out for her! In a world where most everything worked dreadfully wrong - she knew her God was right and holy! She could count on him to be right, and to do right by her! In her world so full of hurt, she remembered her God's mercy. Back in the family tree, when Jacob's life was out of control, God stepped in. Back in the family tree, when her family was being crushed by the Egyptians, and then the Philistines, and then the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians, and then and then and then ... God stepped in and set his people free. Back in the family tree for generation after generation in her family - no matter how hopeless things looked, no matter how insignificant her family looked - God took care of them.

And now this God was coming to be her Savior! Life was about to change! The bullies wouldn't matter! The evil all around wouldn't matter! God would make life right for her ... forever! How? When my life is screwed up and my world is a mess I sometimes like to think that God will step in and snap his fingers and fix my life the way I want things fixed. (Do you know what I mean?) Well, this girl didn't just see God as a fixer, but as her Savior - the Savior she needed.

She knew her great-great-great-great grandfather's confession: **“I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. I have sinned against you God ... Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** She knew his prayer: **“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love ... wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ... Create in me a clean heart, o God ... Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior!”** And she knew his confidence: **“Cleansed me and I will be clean! ...**

**Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him!”**

She knew what that word “Savior” meant. God wasn’t just coming to fix her life; he was coming to save her life. As the Lamb of God, he would take her sin. As the Son of God he would give her his right life to be her right life. As the Prince of Peace he would make life right for her with God forever. So she just had to let it out: **“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

God was coming to make things right. She knew it just as if God had already done it! **“He has shown the strength of his arm; he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy!”**

What does that get to mean for us? When we feel small and pushed around ... when we feel cheated and taken advantage of ... when we feel the world isn’t treating us right and, to make it worse, we can’t get things right either ... when the world has us ready to sing “tears in the beer” ... or to blast out anger and hurt ... then we get to remember: “Christmas is coming and our God has come to make life right!” **“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

I said this is one of Jesus’ favorite Christmas songs. Do you know why? This song is his mom’s song, the Song of Mary. And it’s our song too. Amen.

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
A Family Connecting in Christ



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C O M E S N E A R

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December 18 & 19, 2021

SERIES THEME

WHEN THE LORD COMES NEAR

“Advent” comes from a Latin word that means “coming.” The season of Advent is the four week period before Christmas that the Church uses to connect the two “comings” of Christ. The first time the Lord came into our world it was as a tiny, helpless baby, born in a manger in Bethlehem. However, when Jesus comes again, it will be in all his power and glory with his angelic army behind him. He will be coming as judge at the end of time. Let us use these four weeks to see how the events of Jesus’ first coming remove all our fears about his second coming. We can hold our heads high when the Lord comes near.

THEME OF THE DAY

WHEN THE LORD COMES NEAR, HE LIFTS UP THE HUMBLED

By this time of the holiday season, people are often weighed down. They feel guilty about presents that are not perfect, or parties that did not go as planned, or year-end projects that did not get completed. To top it all off, now is when it dawns on people how little attention they have given to the spiritual preparation Advent invites. If that is how we feel, perhaps the frenzy of December has actually done us a favor. We have been stretched to our limits. We have been made aware of our shortcomings. We have been humbled. Perfect! For being made aware of our weaknesses does not disqualify us from God’s care. It does the opposite. It is what prepares us for the work he does best. He is a God who lifts up the humbled.

The Service

OPENING HYMN

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Hymn 327

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free Your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Key of David, come, And open wide our heav'nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

CONFESSION

If we claim to be without sin,
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

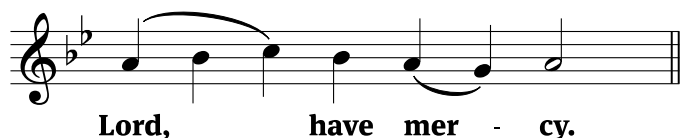
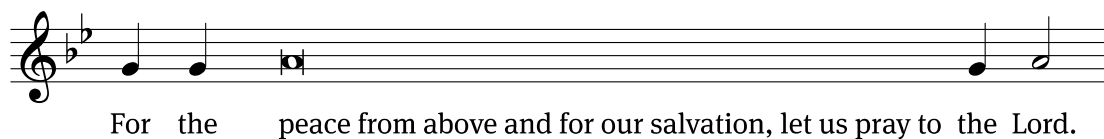
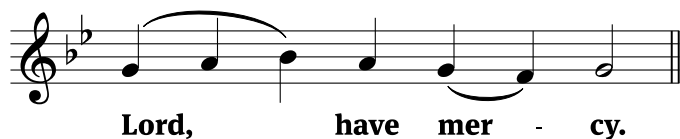
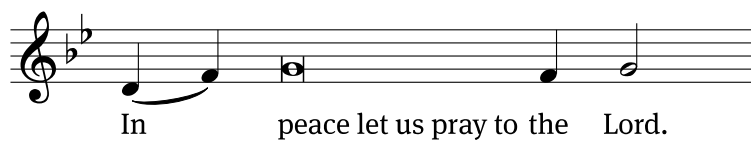
Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

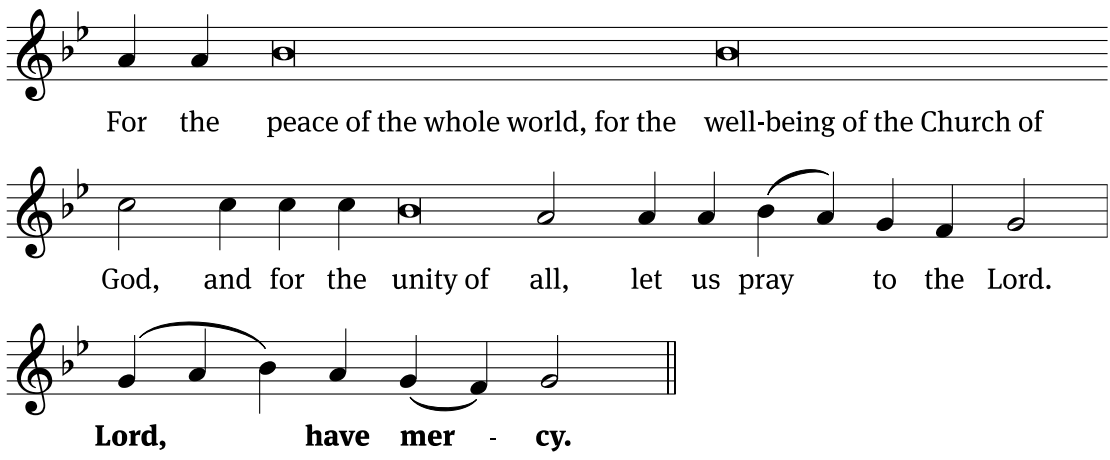
Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

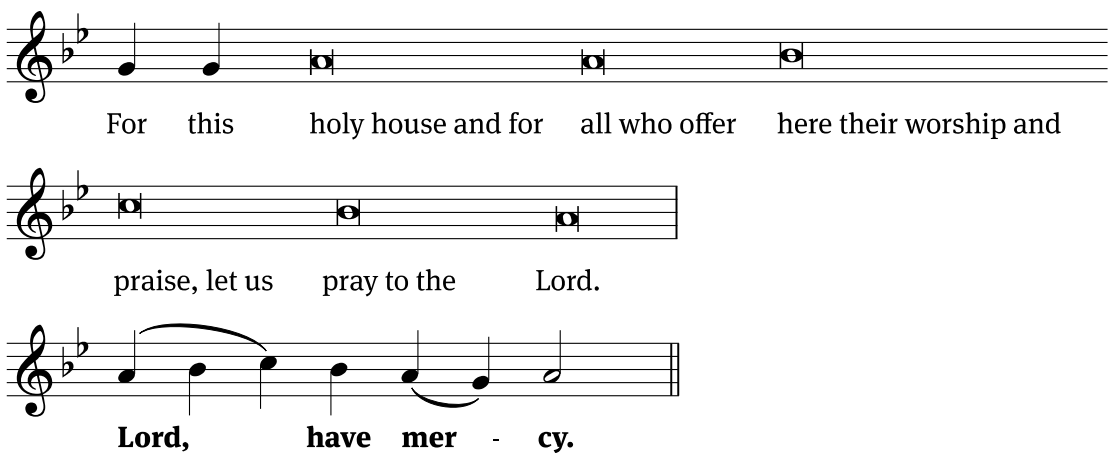
Amen.

LORD, HAVE MERCY (KYRIE)

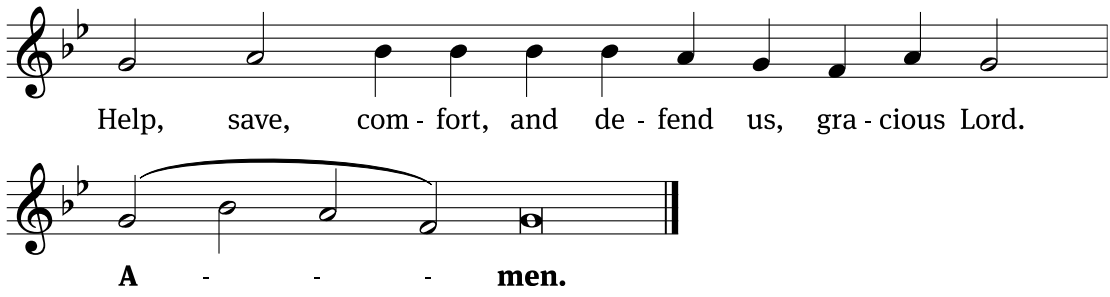




For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of
 God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mer - cy.



For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and
 praise, let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mer - cy.



Help, save, com - fort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.
A - - - men.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Micah 5:2-5a

The humble, tiny town of Bethlehem would be exalted. For there a special son would be born who would bring spiritual peace to the ends of the earth.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

And he will be their peace.

P: The Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 85

Refrain

I will hear what the Lord pro-claims: peace to his peo - ple.

Psalm tone

You showed favor to your `land, O LORD;*
you restored the fortunes of `Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of your `people*
and covered `all their sins.

Show us your unfailing `love, O LORD,*
and grant us your sal`vation.

Refrain

I will listen to what God the `LORD will say;*
he promises peace to his people, `his saints.

Surely his salvation is near those who `fear him,*
that his glory may dwell `in our land.

Love and faithfulness meet to `gether;*
righteousness and peace kiss each `other.

**Glory be to the Father and `to the Son*
and to the Holy `Spirit,
as it was in the be`ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. `Amen.**

Refrain

SECOND READING

Hebrews 10:5-10

We cannot do enough good works or offer enough sacrifices to raise ourselves up to God. So the Son of God obeyed the law for us and by his sacrifice has made us holy.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

Then I said, ‘Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll -
I have come to do your will, O God.’”

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

P: The Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The cantor/choir sings the refrain and verse.

The congregation joins to sing the final refrain

Refrain



Come to us, Emmanuel;
come and set your people free.

Refrain

GOSPEL

Luke 1:39-55

In Spirit wrought humility, Mary knew she needed a Savior. God lifts her up, making her the mother of that Savior.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me -
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers.”

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came”

Hymn 328

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
“All hail,” said he to meek and lowly Mary,
“Most highly favored maiden.” Gloria!

“I come from heav’n to tell the Lord’s decree:
A blessed virgin mother you shall be.
Your Son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold,
“Most highly favored maiden.” Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleases God," she said.
"My soul shall praise and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!

Of her Immanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
"Most highly favored maiden." Gloria!

SERMON

CONFESSION OF FAITH

NICENE CREED

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 fully 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 in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

- P: Eternal Lord, give us peace as we ponder the good news that you forgive our sins in Christ. Lead us to see clearly the path you have laid out for us.
- C: Work in us so that we believe and live the Word we have heard today.**
- P: Provide courage and compassion to all who preach and teach your Word. Fill them with a love like yours as they proclaim your grace to us and all people.
- C: Move us to love all ministers of the Word wherever they serve.**
- P: Guard and guide the families of our congregation. Lead husbands and wives to love each other with commitment, respect, and patience. Help parents to grasp the eternal value of keeping their children close to Jesus all their lives. Grant joy to those who are single, and make them a blessing to others.
- C: Protect us from the temptations that surround us; give us pure hearts and minds.**
- P: Provide wisdom and insight to those who make laws and set policies. Give us respect for those who protect us from crime. Lead us to value the rights of our fellow citizens and to defend those who cannot defend themselves.
- C: Bless our land with peace and prosperity so that the gospel may be proclaimed to all.**
- P: Give us passion to share the story of your love with our family and friends. Overcome unbelief, and open the hearts of people everywhere to believe the good news that Jesus has forgiven their sins and opened the gates of heaven.
- C: Fill us with joy over every sinner who repents and comes to trust in you.**
- P: Extend your healing power to those who are sick and suffering in body or mind. *Pour out your special blessing on . . . (here name the person and the cause of the petition).* Give patience and compassion to all who care for the sick and dying.
- C: Lift the eyes of the distressed to your love in Christ.**

P: Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

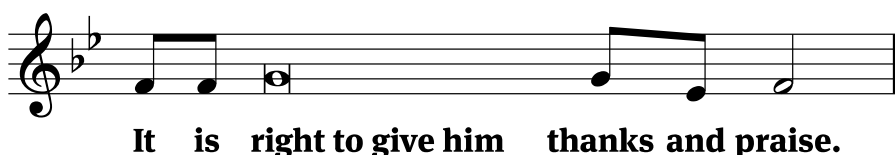
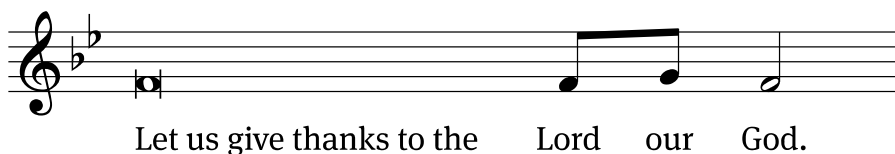
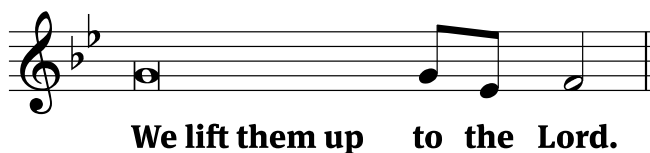
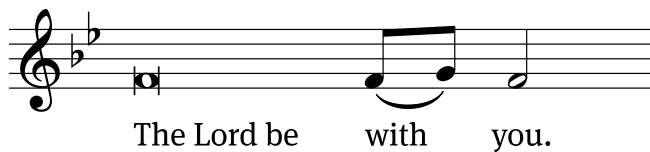
P: Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people.
Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and grace.

C: **In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)
(Individually packaged wafers are gluten-free.)

The following responses may be spoken or sung.



It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory.

Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Sanctus

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

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Lord God, you are worthy to receive thanks and praise from all people. You created the world and all who live in it, and in your mercy you saved us. We give thanks to you for the grace of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Though in very nature God, he took the nature of a servant and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. He offered himself as a sacrifice for sin and redeemed us from its curse and penalty. He rescued us from the terrors of death and restored eternal life with you. He conquered our enemies and gained for us the kingdom of grace and glory.

Bless us as we receive your Son's body and blood, and lead us to remember his suffering, death, and resurrection. Forgive our sins and fill us with the hope of new life in heaven. Hear our praise and receive our thanks as we worship you— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my + body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my + blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD

Agnus Dei

The cantor/choir sings the first phrase.

Je - sus, Lamb of God; you take a - way the
sin of the world, have mer - cy on us.

Je - sus, Lamb of God; you take a - way the
sin of the world, have mer - cy on us.

Je - sus, Lamb of God; you take a - way the
sin of the world: grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION - Choir

“Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing”

Hymn 827

PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and + give you peace.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“Holy Is Your Name”

Hymn 956

My soul is filled with joy as I Sing to God, my Savior.

You have looked upon your Servant, you have visited your people.

Refrain

And holy is your name through all generations!

Everlasting is your mercy to the

People you have chosen, and holy is your name!

I am lowly as a child, but I know from this day forward

That my name will be remembered, and the world will call me blessed.

Refrain

I proclaim your pow’r, O God! You work wonders for your servants;

You have scattered the proud - hearted, you have lifted up the lowly.

Refrain

To the hungry you give food, send the rich away with nothing.

In your mercy you are mindful of the people you have chosen.

Refrain

In your love you now fulfill all you promised to your people.
I will praise you, God, my Savior, everlasting is your mercy.
Refrain

OFFERING

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