

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

A Family Connecting in Christ

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A Festival Celebrating The Birth of Christ!

December 27, 2020

OPENING HYMN

"Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful"

Hymn 55

(Stand for v. 4)

Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant,
Oh, come ye, oh, come, ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, Born the King of angels.
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

God from true God, and Light from Light eternal,
Born of a virgin, to earth he comes,
Only Begotten Son of God the Father.
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation;
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above.
Glory to God, all Glory in the highest.
Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n,
Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing.
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

INVOCATION

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

C: **And also with you.**

CHRISTMAS LITANY

- M: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. *Psalm 95:1*
- C: O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.** *Psalm 8:1*
- M: Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
to him who alone does great wonders,
who by his understanding made the heavens,
who spread out the earth upon the waters,
who made the great lights –
the sun to govern the day, the moon and stars to govern the night. *Psalm 136*
- C: Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit.** *Psalm 147:5*
- M: But our iniquities have separated us from our God;
our sins have hidden his face from us, so that he will not hear.
We look for light, but all is darkness;
for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.
We look for deliverance, but it is far away. *Isaiah 59:2, 9*
- C: For our offenses are many in his sight, and our sins testify against us.
Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities.** *Isaiah 59:12*
- M: The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities. *Psalm 103:8-10*
- C: From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.** *Psalm 113:3*
- M: “The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord our Righteousness.” *Jeremiah 23:5, 6*
- C: Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.** *Matthew 3:3*

M: Do not be afraid.

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10,11

**C: Let the name of the Lord be praised,
both now and forevermore. Alleluia!**

Psalm 113:2

PRAYER OF THE DAY

M: Almighty God,
grant that the birth of your only Son in the flesh
may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin.
Pour out your Holy Spirit into the world,
so that the message of the babe born in Bethlehem
might change the lives and destinies of many more people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

FIRST LESSON

Hebrews 1:1-9

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,
"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father"?

Psalm 2:7

Or again,
"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"?

2 Samuel 7:14

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,
"Let all God's angels worship him."

Deuteronomy 32:43

In speaking of the angels he says,
"He makes his angels winds,
his servants flames of fire."

Psalm 104:4

But about the Son he says,
"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,
and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy."

Psalm 45:6-7

HYMN

"Of the Father's Love Begotten"
Hymn 35

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.

Oh, that birth forever blessed
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore.

This is he whom heav'n-taught singers
Sang of old with one accord;
Whom the Scriptures of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word.
Now he shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

See *Christian Worship*, pp. 132-133, for the complete Athanasian Creed.

P: It is necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh.

C: **Now this is the true Christian faith.**

We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.

P: He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of the Father, and he is man, born in time from the nature of his mother,

C: **fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh,**

P: equal to the Father as to his deity, less than the Father as to his humanity; and though he is both God and man,

C: **Christ is not two persons, but one,**

P: one, not by changing the deity into flesh, but by taking the humanity into God; one, indeed, not by mixture of the natures, but by unity in one person; for just as the rational soul and flesh are one human being,

C: **so God and man are one Christ.**

C: **He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there will come to judge the living and the dead.**

This is the true Christian faith.

The Athanasian Creed

Next to the mystery of the holy Trinity, the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth is the personal union, that God and man are a single person in our Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of the New Testament church, reason, logic, and paganism have fought to cloud the identity of God as Triune and Jesus Christ as both true God and true man. To clear the confusion and safeguard the Truth, the Athanasian Creed was written as the Church's confession of the identity of our God and Savior. In seeking to clear confusion and safeguard Truth, some might say, the Athanasian Creed brings its own confusion - is it necessary for salvation to know the Athanasian Creed and to understand all it declares? We rest on the promise of Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his One and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." At the same time, we sound the warning of the Creed - those who reject what this creed teaches are rejecting the true identity of their God and Savior. Thank you, Lord, for teaching us who you are!



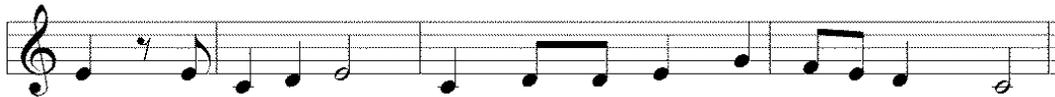
1 Peace came to earth at last that cho - sen night
 2 And who could be the same for hav - ing held
 3 You show the Fa - ther none has ev - er seen,
 4 How else could I have known you, O my God!



When an - gels clove the sky with song and light And
 The in - fant in their arms and lat - er felt The
 In flesh and blood you bore our griefs and pain, In
 How else could I have loved you, O my God! How



God em - bod - ied love and sheathed his might— Who could but
 wound-ed hands and side, all doubts dis - pelled— Who could but
 bread and wine you vis - it us a - gain— Who could but
 else could I em - brace you, O my God! Who could but



gasp: Im - man - u - el! Who could but sing: Im - man - u - el!
 sigh: Im - man - u - el! Who could but shout: Im - man - u - el!
 see: Im - man - u - el! Who could but thrill: Im - man - u - el!
 pray: Im - man - u - el! Who could but praise: Im - man - u - el!

SERMON

Romans 8:32

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

It wasn't what we were hoping for, was it? We were hoping for something more, weren't we? And I don't mean more gifts. I mean more family, more freedom, more fun, more special. It wasn't everything we were hoping for, was it?

Do you think Mary and Joseph said the same thing - "It wasn't everything we were hoping for"? Or before-hand, can you imagine Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem talking about the big day - "Oh, I hope the baby is born in a stable. Wouldn't it be great to have cows and sheep and goats and maybe a camel right there when you're giving birth? And we could use their manger, their feeding trough, for a crib. Wouldn't that be great?!"

And what about the shepherds or the angels? Can you imagine the angels, after they sing: **“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests,”** can you imagine them disappearing into the heavens: “It wasn’t everything we were hoping for, was it?” Can you imagine the shepherds, after they spread the word about what the angels said and what they saw, can you imagine the shepherds around their campfire: “It wasn’t everything we were hoping for, was it?”

No! When the angels saw their Lord and King, the Son of God himself born as a baby in Bethlehem, they just had to shout it out: **“Glory to God in the highest!”** When the shepherds saw their Savior as a baby lying in a manger, they didn’t slump their way back to their sheep; they had to tell anybody and everybody: **“the angel said: ‘I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior is born; he is Christ the Lord!’”** And as they headed back to their fields and flocks, they just had to glorify and praise God - **“it was just as the angel said!”** And Mary? She treasured it all, rolling it over and over in her heart and mind.

Why weren’t they more bummed that Jesus’ big day, Jesus’ big welcome into the world, was scented with barnyard?

Why? I imagine that Mary and Joseph and the shepherds had seen enough of the dark side of this world to know that wrapping paper doesn’t make the gift, that comfort and convenience don’t make the world go ‘round, and that a baby with promise, oh, even more so, this baby with God’s promise has what it takes to fill the dark of any day with hope and joy. And the angels, I imagine they had seen enough of the Father, and his love in action, to know not to be disappointed by anything he might give or do. Even if they didn’t know all of what the Father and his Son Jesus would do, they knew something good and right was in the works.

We know that same thing, don’t we? We know that God has something more in the works for us - something more than just nice wrapping paper on an empty box; something more for us than just a comfortable, convenient casket; something more for us than just the past. Paul tells us about that something more; he tells us about God’s Christmas gift: **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”**

Who here likes Christmas gifts? I think we all do, don’t we? And Christmas gifts that last more than a day, Christmas gifts that keep on working, Christmas gifts that somehow multiply - we especially like those gifts, don’t we? As Paul tells us about God’s Christmas gifts, God’s multiplying Christmas gifts, he uses two different words, two very different words for “give.”

First, Paul says: **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all”** We do not want to be given like that. That “given” means be to “given over, handed over.” In Jesus’ case, given over, handed over to Satan for battle to see who would crush whom. Given over, handed over to be arrested, to be judged. Given over, handed over to be crucified. Given over, handed over to be sacrificed. Given over, handed over God did not spare his own Son, but gave him over for us all, in place of us all.

Why? So that God wouldn't have to give or hand us over to Satan. So he wouldn't have to give or hand us over to judgment. Jesus was given over, handed over to Satan to make up for, to undo the ways we have given ourselves over to do the work of Satan. Jesus was given over, handed over to judgment to pay for the ways that we have handed ourselves over to join in the sin of the world. Jesus was given over, handed over to take our place, so we wouldn't have to be given over, handed over to hell.

Do you see how much your Father loves you? Giving Jesus over, handing Jesus over wasn't some painless transaction. Remember, the Father and his Son had been together as One forever. They worked together in creating this world. They celebrated together in seeing this world "very good." They hurt together when we turned away from them and against them. Their whole existence has been One, together. So giving Jesus over, handing Jesus over wasn't some painless transaction. When Jesus hurt, when Jesus shouted: "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" don't think that the Father didn't hurt. And yet, he loves you so much he handed over his Son, the Son who is made of the same stuff that he is, so that we can have life together with him.

But your Father's love, your Father's giving didn't stop there. Paul asks us - not for us to come up with an answer, but to get us thinking, really thinking: "**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him graciously give us all things?**" "**How will he not also along with Jesus graciously give us all things?**" This second word for give - "**graciously give**" - is so different from the first word. Instead of a tone of judgment, the flavor is all grace, generous grace. "How will he not generously grace us with all things?"

With all things, what comes to mind? Maybe you think of Jesus speaking of his Father, your Father: "Don't worry about food or clothes. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them." And then Jesus gives us this giving promise: "**Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you a well.**" Put that together with what Paul says and what do you get to know? If our Father in heaven was willing to give us Jesus, his own Son, he's not about to get cheap and stingy with the small things, is he? So, "Don't sweat the small stuff; your Father has you covered!"

I like that. But I like this too - in the verses right after our lesson, Paul isn't talking small stuff. He's talking big stuff. Big stuff we will all have to face. For example, Paul talks of facing God in his courtroom, with Satan accusing. Can you picture yourself there, in God's courtroom with Satan accusing you? It's not a picture we like to think about, is it? What do you get to know? God has given you Jesus, not just as the baby in Bethlehem to do his thing 2000 years ago. God has given you Jesus to be your defense attorney today in heaven. With Jesus, you get to know it doesn't matter what Satan the accuser says against you, Jesus is speaking up for you! And what's he saying? Listen to him read into the court record the new covenant that God gives you in Jesus: "**I will be their God and they will be my people. I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.**" God's gift of Jesus just gets better and better.

Think about it. With Jesus, God has you covered in all things - big and small, life and death, the powers of hell, the judgment of heaven. With Jesus, God has you covered with his life and his love forever. And that's why Christmas - even when it's less than what we hoped for - is really more than we could ever hope for. Amen.

To shepherds as they watched by night
Appeared a host of angels bright;
"Behold the tender babe," they said,
"In yonder lowly manger laid,

"At Bethlehem, in David's town,
As Micah did of old make known.
It is the Christ, your Lord and King,
Who will to all salvation bring."

Oh, then rejoice that through his Son
God is with sinners now at one;
Made like yourselves of flesh and blood,
Your brother is th' eternal God.

What harm can sin and death then do?
The true God now abides with you.
Let hell and Satan storm and rave,
Christ is your brother you are safe.

Not one he will or can forsake;
His cov'nant he will never break.
Let ev'ry scheme the tempter try,
You may his utmost pow'rs defy.

You shall and must at last prevail.
God's own you are; you cannot fail.
To God forever sing your praise
With joy and patience all your days.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: On this holy day, dear Father, we rejoice to hear the good news of great joy that a Savior has been born for us. For fulfilling your prophecies and in the fullness of time sending your Son to be our Savior, we give you our heartfelt thanks and praise.

C: **Unto us a child is born! Unto us a Son is given!**

M: What a great mystery of our faith this is: that God has become fully human for our salvation! Even though he is the all-powerful Lord of all, he is wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.

C: Help us always believe that this precious child was born as our substitute to take our place in life and in death and so to be our Savior.

M: In the midst of our joy, we grieve for the many people in our world who do not know that Jesus has come to bring them forgiveness and healing. As the shepherds spread abroad the good news of the birth of the Savior born for all the world, may we also make use of the unique opportunities this holiday presents to tell others of what we have seen and heard concerning the child.

C: Grant that the true peace between God and fallen mankind may comfort all people.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow

M: As the angels sang out their praise, move us also to sing out our praise to you, today and every day, as the joy of Christmas remains in our hearts.

C: Glory to God in the highest! Amen.

M: Father, we bring these prayers before you this Christmas season and always, confident that you will hear and answer them. For it was your only Son who taught us to pray:

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.

BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.

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.

HYMN

"Joy to the World"

Hymn 62

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

OFFERING

(Please fill out friendship pad on the pew)

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Acknowledgments

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