

In the courtroom, the voice calls out: “All rise!” What do you know? The judge is about to take his place. It’s time to stop whatever else you’re doing. It’s time to pay attention and give the judge his due. It’s time to show respect, or else be judged - contempt of court.

John the Baptist is the voice. He doesn’t just call out: “all rise.” He isn’t calling out for some black-robed judge. No, John the Baptist calls out: “**Prepare the way for the Lord.**” “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.**” John is calling out for the Judge, and the Judge is the Lord, Jesus Christ, God himself. Christ is coming to establish his kingdom; the Judge is coming to sort out those who will be gathered for God in heaven and those who will be burned as chaff in hell. In Christ’s courtroom, contempt of court won’t just be a fine or a night in jail; contempt of Christ’s court, contempt for the Judge means hell.

Contempt of court, contempt for the Judge comes in different flavors, doesn’t it? There’s the in-your-face contempt - fighting, arguing, attacking, rejecting the Judge and the Judge’s authority - “This is a sham; I shouldn’t have to put up with this; I don’t have to listen to you.” But there’s another kind of contempt, isn’t there? There’s the passive contempt - not paying attention, ignoring the Judge, doing my own thing without any respect for what the Judge is saying or doing because the Judge and what the Judge is saying and doing just doesn’t matter. Why? Because I’m too busy saying and doing my own thing. Both the “in-your-face” contempt and the “too-busy-to-be-bothered” contempt are contempt of court, and in God’s courtroom, both are punishable as contempt of the Judge, punishable as contempt and rejection of the Lord, punishable in the fires of hell.

What kind of contempt, contempt for the Lord, do we see more in the world - the in-your-face contempt for the Lord or the I’m-too-busy-to-be-bothered contempt for the Lord? Here’s the tougher question - what kind of contempt do you see more in your own heart - in-your-face contempt for the Lord or I’m-too-busy-to-be-bothered contempt for the Lord? Too busy for the Lord - we’d rather not think of that as contempt for the Lord. Doing my own thing instead of what God has given me to do - we’d rather not think of that as contempt for the Lord. Busy living the life of the world - we’d rather not think of that as contempt of the Lord. But no matter how much we might like our excuses, no matter how much we might believe our denials - our Judge isn’t taken in by our lying and denying, blaming and excusing. Whether in-your-face contempt or too-busy-to-be-bothered contempt, contempt is contempt for the Lord.

What kind of contempt for the Lord do we see in our lesson? We might not see it so clearly; we see crowds of people, crowds including Pharisees and Sadducees, heading out into the wilderness to see and hear John the Baptist. Sounds good, looks good to us.

But John saw something in the Pharisees and Sadducees that we might not see. **“You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”** John saw contempt for the Lord that needed to be called out. The Pharisees liked to think of themselves and show themselves off as good and godly without actually being good and godly in their hearts. The Sadducees liked to think that there is no afterlife, no heaven or hell, no facing of the Judge - this life is the only life that matters. “This life is the only life that matters. I’m fine just the way I am.” You hear the contempt for the Lord in that thinking? John did. And he called it out - **“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”**

Did any of those Pharisees or Sadducees take John’s warning to heart? We don’t know. But we do know there is a more important question - “Do we take John’s warning to heart?”

In our lesson we see crowds of people who were taking John’s warning to heart. They came to John confessing their sin. They wanted a new start, a new life, with God. And God, through John, gave them that new life, a new start with God. He baptized them - a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. That is, in baptism God washed their sins away and gave them a new start, a new life of repentance.

Repentance is an interesting word, a packed word. It can be a hard word. Our old sinful nature hears: “Repent” and our old sinful nature fights back: “I don’t want to repent; I don’t want to change; who are you to tell me to repent; it’s too hard; it won’t do any good; I don’t want to repent.” You recognize that kind of talk as contempt for the Lord, right? And the Judge is holding his ax, ready to chop and burn. But there’s more to repentance than the command and warning: “Repent or else.”

Repent comes with a promise. And the promise isn’t: “If you repent, I will forgive you; if you repent, I will bless you.” No, the promise in repentance is this - that God is at work in repentance to give you a new start; God is at work to give you a new life.

When we repent, instead of living in contempt of God and his Word, we have God at work in Word and Sacrament to work in us a living appreciation for God and his Word.

When we repent, instead of having to live driven, chasing the life of the world - “I need to have what they have; I need to do what they do,” when we repent, we have God at work in Word and Sacrament so we can live free and content, knowing we are blessed today and we have a better life coming.

When we repent, instead of living driven - “I need to be better; I need to do better” - and when we aren’t better, either kicking ourselves and beating ourselves up, or taking it out on the people around us - lying, denying, blaming and excusing, angry and bitter - when

we repent, we have God at work in Word and Sacrament so we can live a new life of peace - forgiven by God, cared for, safe and secure in God's care, living the life God has for us, a life of being both blessed and a blessing.

Repent isn't just a warning command; repent is God-powered invitation to a new start, a new life, a truly good and godly life blessed to be a blessing.

That's the life God was offering in John's baptism. That's the life God offers in baptism today. A life where Jesus and his Spirit work together so you can know - no matter what you have in your past, no matter what you might struggle with today - in baptism, you have Jesus, his life and his death, his cross and his Easter; your sins are paid for; your guilt is gone; you are washed and forgiven for life with God.

In baptism, you have a life where you have Jesus and his Spirit working together so you can have the life and the love of God at work in you, powering you to live a new life godly and good.

In baptism, you have a life where Jesus and his Spirit are working together to give you peace and this hope - Jesus is coming to take you to be with him in heaven.

That's why when the voice says: "All rise," ... when we hear the voice of John the Baptist - "**Prepare the way for the Lord ... Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**" - we don't show contempt for God by putting him off, ignoring him, arguing with him, doing our own thing. No, when we hear the voice of John the Baptist - "**Prepare the way for the Lord**" we pull ourselves together and answer "Yes, Lord," knowing he has a better life for us. Amen.

SERVICE SETTING 2

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are a people far more willing to judge than be judged.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we are encouraged to prepare for the Imminent Arrival of our Judge. That means we (not just they) had better be ready. And, thankfully, our Judge has a different way to judge!

"COMFORT, COMFORT, ALL MY PEOPLE"

A Gathering Rite

P In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

♪ **John the Baptist's voice is crying in the desert far and near,
Calling people to repentance for the kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet him and the hills bow down to greet him.**

P During the season of Advent, we hear John the Baptist call us to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. We approach our God with humble and penitent hearts. We are weak and easily drawn to sin by our own flesh, the Devil, and the World around us.

C **"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass." (Isaiah 40: 6b, 7)**

P We have sinned against you in our thoughts, words and actions. For our many sins and our lack of love toward You and our neighbors, we deserve punishment both now and forever.

C **But Jesus, my Savior, has paid for my sins with His innocent suffering and death. Trusting in Him, I pray: God have mercy on me, a sinner.**

♪ **"Comfort, comfort all my people; speak of peace," so says our God.
"Comfort those who sit in darkness, groaning from their sorrows' load.
Speak to all Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, that their warfare now is over."**

P Our gracious Father in Heaven has been merciful to us. Promising comfort and peace, 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. Though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow!

C “Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40: 1-2)

P “And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.”

C “For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40: 5)

♪ All our sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserved his anger he no more will see or heed.
We have suffered many a day; now our griefs have passed away.
God will change our aching sadness into ever springing gladness.

P Today we light two candles ... (usher lights candles) ... as we humbly prepare for the Imminent Arrival of the Judge.

C We follow Isaiah’s and John’s call to repent, trusting our Judge to forgive, to save, and to show his glory in us!

P “Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:4-5)

C “Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

♪ Now make straight the crooked highway; make the rougher places plain.
Let our hearts be true and humble, ready for his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord now o’er earth is spread abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token that his word is never broken.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming, give us strength in our conflicts, and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 11:1–10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,

the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

CHOIR

"Faith of Our Fathers"

1. Faith of our fathers! living still In spite of dungeon, fire and sword: O how our hearts beat high with joy Whene'er we hear that glorious word!

Refrain: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee 'til death!

2. Our fathers, chained in prisons dark, Were still in heart and conscience free: How sweet would be their children's fate, If they like them could die for thee!

Repeat refrain. Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee 'til death!

3. Faith of our fathers! we will strive To win all nations unto thee, And thro' the truth that comes from God, Mankind shall then be truly free.

Repeat refrain. Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee 'til death!

4. Faith of our fathers! we will love Both friend and foe in all our strife: And preach thee too as love knows how, By kindly words and virtuous life:

Repeat refrain. Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee 'til death!

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 130A

Refrain

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD,
Lord, hear my voice.

Tone

Out / of the depths
I / cry to you, O LORD;
Lord, / hear my voice.

Listen closely as I / call on you for help.
LORD, if you kept / track of sins,
O / Lord, then who could stand?
But with you there is for- / giveness,
in order / that you may be feared. *Refrain*
I wait for the LORD, my / soul waits,
and in his / word I put my hope.
More than watchers wait for / morning
my / soul waits for the Lord.
Israel, put your hope / in the LORD,
for with the / LORD is faithful love;
with him is complete re- / demption.
He will redeem Israel from the / guilt of all their sins.
**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 for- / ever. Amen. *Refrain***

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 3:4,6

Alleluia!
Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

And all people will see God's salvation.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.' "

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

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

HOLY BAPTISM

Christian Worship, page 261

Baptism of Reece, son of Tim and Brett Benz

HYMN OF THE DAY

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

Hymn 316



1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry an - nounc - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin and fur - nished
3 We hail you as our Sav - ior, Lord, our ref - uge
4 Stretch forth your hand, our health re - store, and lift us
5 All praise to you, e - ter - nal Son, whose ad - vent



that the Lord is nigh; come, then, and lis - ten,
for a Guest with - in, and let us all our
and our great re - ward; with - out your grace we
up to fall no more; O make your face on
has our free - dom won, whom with the Fa - ther



for he brings good news a - bout the King of kings.
hearts pre - pare for Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way like flow'rs that with - er and de - cay.
us to shine, and fill the world with love di - vine.
we a - dore and Ho - ly Spir - it ev - er - more.

SERMON

Matthew 3:1-12

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 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 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 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.**

OFFERING PRAYER

As we offer our gifts to you, we are reminded of your call to step out into the world and let the world know you are coming. Give us courage and wisdom as we engage with the world around us, sharing your love and truth with others. **Amen.**

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

- M** Eternal Father, throughout the centuries you repeated and affirmed your promise to send the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head. Through your prophets of old, you continually directed the eyes of your people to the advent of their Savior.
- C** **We praise you, O Lord, for keeping your promise and sending your Son to destroy the works of the devil.**
- M** As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, use your mighty Word to shatter our pride and to rouse us from spiritual slumber and apathy.
- C** **Move us to take to heart the words of John: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."**
- M** You sent your Son to redeem us from sin. Let this good news be our joy and strength. Use it to cheer the lonely, encourage the fearful, and give hope to the despairing. In these days before Christmas, spare us from the stress of deadlines and the frenzy of commercialism.
- C** **Fill our lives with the message of your peace and the music of your grace.**
- M** Direct our eyes not only to the manger but also to the skies, where we will see your Son coming again, not as a lowly child but as the Lord of lords.
- C** **Lift up our hearts in joyful anticipation of that day.**
- M** Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

M Come quickly, Lord Jesus, in your grace, in your power, and in your glory.

C Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

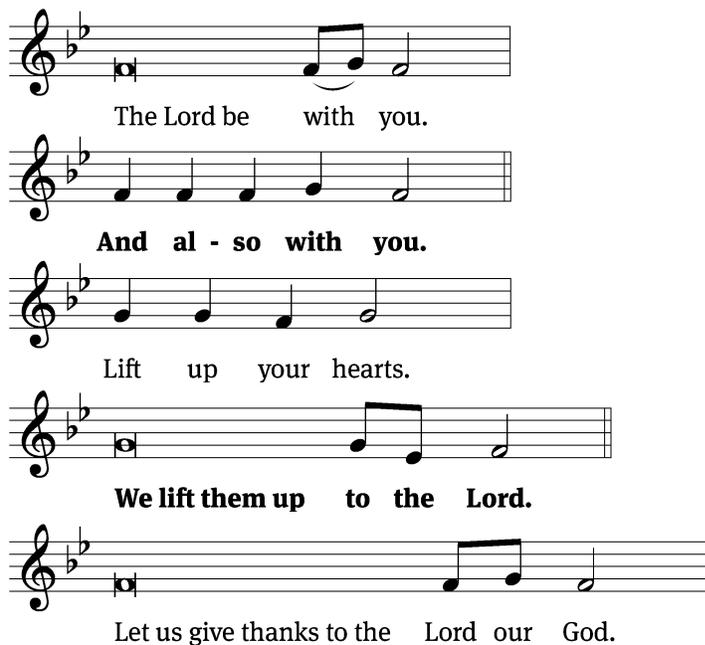
LORD'S PRAYER

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.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



The Lord be with you.

And al - so with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

The image shows six staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. Each staff contains a melody line with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: 'The Lord be with you.', 'And al - so with you.', 'Lift up your hearts.', 'We lift them up to the Lord.', and 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.'

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, whose way John the Baptist prepared when he called people to repentance and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

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

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

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!

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

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 HYMN

"When All the World Was Cursed"

Hymn 317



1 When all the world was cursed by Mo - ses' con - dem - na - tion,
2 Be - fore Saint John was born, he leaped in joy - ful meet - ing,
3 Be - hold the Lamb of God, who bears the world's trans - gres - sion,
4 O grant, dear Lord of love, that we re - ceive, re - joic - ing,
Saint John the Bap - tist came with words of con - so - la - tion.
con - fess - ing him as Lord whose moth - er he was greet - ing.
whose sac - ri - fice re - moves the dev - il's dread op - pres - sion.
the word pro - claimed by John, our true re - pent - ance voic - ing,
With true fore - run - ner's zeal the great - er one he named,
By Jor - dan's roll - ing stream, a new E - li - jah bold,
Be - hold the Lamb of God, who takes a - way our sin,
that glad - ly we may walk up - on our Sav - ior's way
and him, as yet un - known, as Sav - ior he pro - claimed.
he tes - ti - fied of him whom proph - ets had fore - told.
who for our peace and joy will full a - tone - ment win.
un - til we live with him in his e - ter - nal day.

CLOSING 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

"There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying"

Hymn 308



1 There's a voice in the wil - der - ness cry - ing, a
2 O — Chris - tians, you bring — good ti - dings; get
3 But the Word of our God is e - ter - nal; the



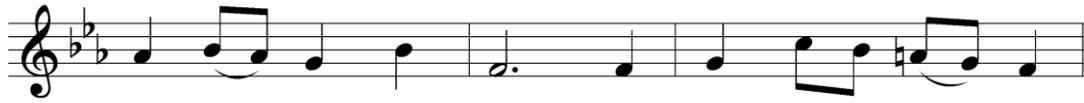
call from the ways un - trod: Pre - pare in the des - ert a
up to the heights and sing! Pro - claim to a des - o - late
arm of the Lord is strong. He stands in the midst of the



high - way, a high - way for our God!
peo - ple the com - ing of their King.
na - tions, and he shall right the wrong.



The — val - leys shall be ex - alt - ed, the
Like the flow'rs of the field they — per - ish; like
He shall feed his — flock like a shep - herd, the



loft - y hills brought low; make straight all the crook - ed
grass their works de - cay. The pow'r and_ pomp of
lambs shall gent - ly hold, to pas - tures of peace shall



plac - es where the Lord our_ God_ may go!
na - tions shall_ pass like a dream_ a - way.
lead them, and_ bring them_ safe to his fold.

Acknowledgments

Software distributed in partnership with Northwestern Publishing House. CCLI Copyright License 11194382, Size A and Streaming License CSPL059933, Size A. Setting Two from Christian Worship Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. Liturgical and musical settings of Scripture based on text from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. Created by Christian Worship: Service Builder © 2025 Concordia Publishing House. Tune: © 2010 Tim TenClay, admin. Faith Alive Christian Resources. Used by permission: OneLicense no. 712373 Advent Gathering Rite Based on Comfort, Comfort All My People CW Other words by Pastor Kevin Raddatz and Timothy Samelson. Faith of our Fathers Lyrics by Frederick W. Faber, (1814-1863) Music by Henry F. Hemy (1818-1888), arranged by James G. Walton (1821-1905). Public domain

Join Us In Worship This Holiday Season!

Advent Wednesdays
at 3:30 and 6:30 pm
Advent Dinners at 5 pm
December 10 – Lights
December 17- Nativity Scenes

Sunday, December 14 - Children's Christmas Service at 3:00 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 5 pm
Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am
New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm