

What's your favorite Christmas wrap? Some gifts come in a stocking. Some come in a bag. Some in a box. Some come wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper, perfectly folded, perfectly creased. Some come in a cookie tin. Some in a card, perhaps with a card. Some come in a text or an email. Some come with just a bow.

When God wrapped his Christmas gift for us, he didn't wrap his gift in any of those things; he wrapped his gift in flesh. Not in a hunk of meat, but in living flesh - he wrapped his gift in a baby. Why?

Well, why do we wrap gifts? To hide them - to keep what's inside a secret, a mystery. And when we get a wrapped gift, what do we do? We shake it and tap it, and maybe even try to peek inside. But we don't wrap our gifts just to hide what's inside, we also wrap them to show off what's inside, to show off what's inside as special, a gift - we're not just replacing old socks; we're giving a gift of new socks. Here's another reason we wrap gifts. To hold them together, to contain them. We don't want everyone's socks and underwear and cookies and toys all jumbled together, so we wrap them up. Then when the time is right we can show and share them as special, as gifts. That's the heart reason we wrap gifts - to show them and share them as special; the head reason might simply be this - to hide them and hold them together.

Why did God wrap our Christmas gift the way he did? Why did God wrap his Son in flesh? To hide him. God wrapped his Son in the flesh of a baby to hide him from those who set their hearts against him, to hide him from those who don't want God's gifts given God's way. The same Isaiah who promised God's Christmas gift - "**For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given!**" - that same Isaiah announced God's judgment that God would hide and hold back his blessing and gift from those who hardened their hearts against him. In our lesson, John tells us about that judgment - "**[even though] He [Jesus] was in the world, ... the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**" So why did God wrap his Son in flesh? One reason - judgment - to hide him from those who harden their hearts against him. "Thank you, Lord," for letting us see Jesus!

And "thank you, Lord," for hiding your Son in Jesus. That's sounds strange, doesn't it? "Thank you, Lord, for hiding your Son in Jesus." Why? At the same time that God hiding his Son in human flesh is judgment on some, God hiding his Son in flesh is grace for us. How so? Do you remember what God told Moses? "**No one can see God and live.**" If God were to show off his Son in all his holy

glory, as sinners we couldn't take it. But God hid his Son in the flesh of a baby to spare us, to save us from seeing his all holy glory, so we can see him in his saving glory.

But first, a little more about God wrapping and hiding his Son in flesh. I said we wrap gifts to hide them and to hold them, to contain them. When God wrapped his Son in flesh, he didn't wrap Jesus in flesh to hold him together, to contain him from getting loose. No, as the Son of God, Jesus isn't held together by his flesh. As the Son of God he holds everything - he holds the whole universe together - in fact, as the Son of God, he holds our flesh together. So as the Son of God, Jesus isn't contained or limited by his flesh. In whatever ways Jesus was limited, he wasn't limited by his flesh; he was limited because he limited himself to do what his Father gave him to do. So we wouldn't say God wrapped his Son in flesh to contain or limit him, but we could say God wrapped his Son in flesh to contain him in this way - God wrapped his Son in flesh so he can show him and share him with us. And God wrapped his Son in flesh so he can show and share himself with us.

Think about it. How do you show and share an invisible, intangible, untouchable spirit? How do you show and share an invisible, intangible, untouchable thought? How do you show and share invisible, intangible, untouchable grace and truth? You make it visible, tangible, and touchable! That's what God did. He wrapped up his invisible, intangible, untouchable Son; his invisible, intangible, untouchable thinking; his invisible, intangible, untouchable grace and truth - he wrapped them up in the flesh of a little baby.

John put it this way - **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. [and then ...] 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.”** Here John calls the Son of God the Word, the Logos. In the Greek-thinking world, Word or Logos could mean a spoken word, or a word not yet spoken, the word, the thinking, the reasoning inside us. At the same time, in the Greek-thinking world, Word or Logos could also mean that power that holds our world together. In the Jewish world, Word or Logos was a way to refer to God. So what is John telling us? In the Word become flesh, we have the power that holds the world together, we have the thinking, the reasoning of God. In Jesus, we have what makes God tick; in Jesus, we have God himself - wrapped in flesh.

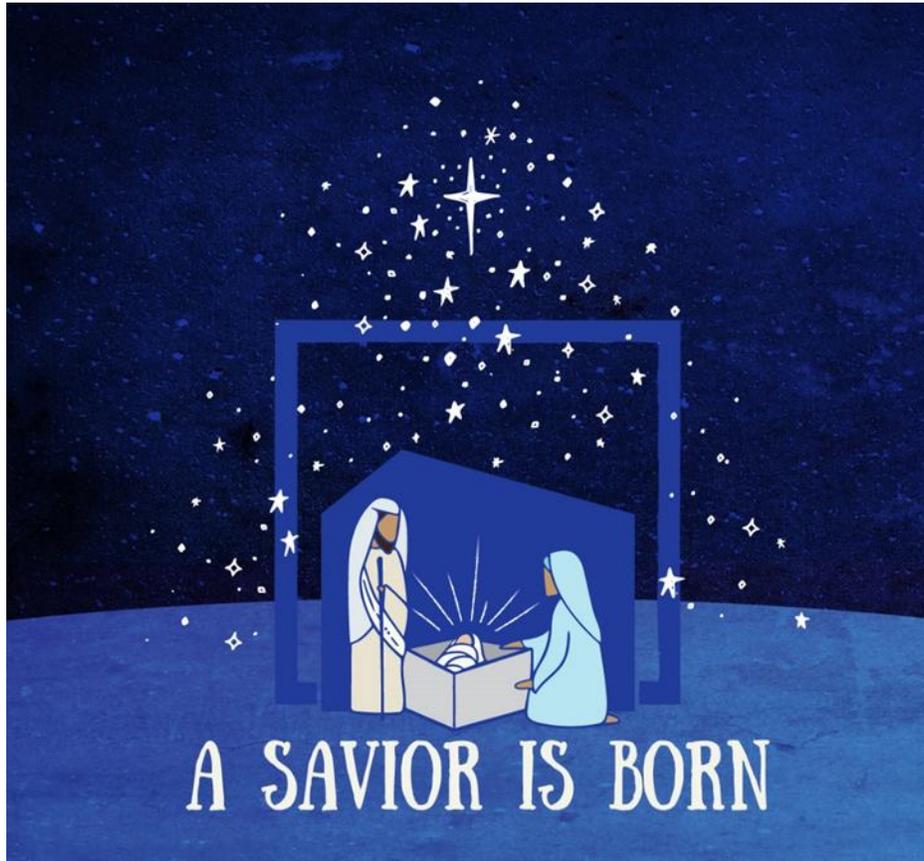
Why? To show us the invisible, intangible, untouchable God in a visible, tangible, touchable way. And especially this - to show us the invisible, intangible, untouchable grace and truth of God in a visible, tangible, touchable way.

How? In the flesh of a baby - smiling, cooing, reaching out - we see the Son of God as approachable, adorable, loveable. In the flesh of Jesus working miracles, we see the Son of God - and God himself - as caring, loving, powerful - meeting the needs of his needing people, making life right for his hurting people. In the flesh of Jesus walking and talking with people like us; sitting and eating, not only with his disciples, but with sinners; reaching out and blessing children; reaching out and touching outcasts - we see the Son of God - and God himself - as a God of grace and mercy - sharing visible, tangible, touchable grace and mercy with people who desperately need grace and mercy. That's why - another reason why - God wrapped his Son in flesh. So in Jesus, we can see what God is like!

But there's more to it. In John's history of Jesus, we turn the page and we go from Christmas to Jesus as a 30 year old and we hear John the Baptist point to Jesus: "**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**" We turn a few more pages and we hear Jesus: "**I am the Good Shepherd .... I lay down my life for the sheep.**" What's that about? In his letter, John explains: "**He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**" God didn't wrap his Son in flesh just to show us his grace and mercy. God wrapped his Son in flesh to work his grace and mercy. God wrapped his Son in flesh to take our place, to take our sin as his own, and then to lay down his life and take the punishment we had coming. God didn't wrap his Son in flesh just to be a cute baby, just to be his Public Relations face, just to do good and say nice things. No, God wrapped his Son in the flesh to be our Savior. In the flesh, the Son of God lived for us. In the flesh, the Son of God died for us. In the flesh, the Son of God saved us and set us right with God - "It is finished."

Now what? We might think that with his death and resurrection Jesus unwrapped himself and shed his skin - so to speak. But he didn't. Instead, the Son of God raised his flesh back to life. Why? To be visible, tangible, and touchable. Wrapped in flesh, the Son of God showed himself to his disciples. Wrapped in flesh, the Son of God smiled God's smile - "**Peace be with you.**" And wrapped in flesh, you will get to see the Son of God, Jesus, God's Christmas gift to you ... you will get to see him share God's Christmas smile with you. Glory to God in the highest! Amen.

# *“A Savior is Born”*



## **St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church**

*A Family Connecting in Christ*

Pastor Kevin Raddatz  
Principal David Retzlaff  
501 West Park Avenue  
Libertyville, IL 60048  
847-362-4424

## Christmas Day

December 25, 2025

### MERRY CHRISTMAS

#### WELCOME VISITORS!

We hope you feel at home with us.

We hope you enjoy worshiping with us today. But more importantly, we pray that you hear the wonderful Gospel message that Jesus came down to Earth to live and die for our sins, and rose again from the dead so that each of us may have life with God in Jesus.

#### We Care about Your Children

- We love to have children with us in worship. Children's "church bags" (with paper, colors, and Bible story books) are available in the Narthex Gathering Area.
- If your children are crying loudly, our nursery, Gathering Area (back of church), and downstairs Fellowship Hall are audio-equipped for you and your young children. When your children are ready, come back so we can worship together.

#### We Care about Your Special Needs

- **Hearing Assistance** for those with hearing aids is provided through our Hearing Loop or personal hearing devices available at the "sound table."
- A **wheelchair lift** is available for your assistance; please ask an usher.



#### Our Facilities

Restrooms are in our Fellowship Hall, downstairs and to the right of the kitchen.

#### Our Ministry

St. John offers an excellent preschool-8th grade school program. We are members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) - [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).

# The Festival of the Nativity

## Wrapped Presents

This Advent, we prepared for our Christmas celebration by considering various ways our seasonal decorations amplify the real meaning of Christmas. Though many of the reasons behind holiday decorations go unappreciated and even unnoticed, they still point us to Christ. Some of the decorations do this in a more obvious way. Even the most secular of souls sees baby Jesus in the crèche. But even seemingly nonreligious signs of the season like evergreens and lights originated in Christendom. Now, as we have come to the Twelve Days of Christmas, we consider another Christian tradition: the exchange of Christmas presents. The giving of gifts, beautifully wrapped, reflects the gracious love of our heavenly Father, the “Father of lights,” from whom “every good gift and every perfect gift” comes (James 1:17). Certainly, the greatest gift of all is none other than what we have come to celebrate: God’s self-offering to us through His Son for the forgiveness of our sin. It is a gift that produces abundant blessings for us and in us. These blessings know no end. They regenerate and renew us as we walk into the bright eternity God has in store for us. The gift is all wrapped up in the babe, who lies in a manger. Come, let us adore Him!

### PRELUDE

**Piano:** *Christmas Hymn Medley - arranged by Valerie A. Floeter*

**Organ:** *Of the Father's Love Begotten - James Southbridge*

*Oh, Come All Ye Faithful - arranged by Kenneth T. Kosche*

*Variations on Puer Nobis - arranged by Austin C Lovelace*

### OPENING HYMN

*“Come, All Ye Faithful”*

Hymn 354 (v. 1, 2, 4)

(Stand for v. 4)

### INVOCATION

P 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**

P 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*

P 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*

P 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*

P 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*

P “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*

- P 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*

HYMN

*“To Shepherds as They Watched by Night”*  
Hymn 335 (v. 2-6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

- P Everlasting Father, You brought us peace even as we rebelled against You. Thank You for being faithful to Your promise to give us a Messiah to save us from our sins and give us an eternal inheritance of reconciliation with You. Grant that, as Your children, we may hold fast to Your merciful love, that we may cling to our inheritance, and enjoy the blessings of life in Your holy family; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord and Brother, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C **Amen.**

FIRST LESSON

*Luke 2:1-14*

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The Word of the Lord.

**“Glory to God in the highest!”**

HYMN

*“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”*  
Hymn 350

EPISTLE 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*

The Word of the Lord.

**"Glory to God in the highest!"**

HYMN

*"Of the Father's Love Begotten"*

Hymn 358

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

*John 1:14*

Alleluia. 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. Alleluia.

GOSPEL LESSON

*John 1:1-18*

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.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**"Glory to God in the highest!"**

CONFESSION OF FAITH

Excerpts from the Athanasian Creed

See *Christian Worship*, pp. 284-285, 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!*

**HYMN**

*“All My Heart Again Rejoices”*

**Hymn 329**

**SERMON**

*“Wrapped Presents”*

**HYMN**

*“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”*

**Hymn 331 (vs. 7-9, 13-15)**

**OFFERING – A Gift for Our Savior**

*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**

**P** Let us pray to God our Father through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**P** Heavenly Father, in Your kindness and love, You sent Your Son into the world to be our Savior. Be with those You sent today to bring Jesus to us. Bless the pastors, teachers, missionaries, and musicians of Your church, and strengthen the witness of all the congregations of our Synod, that more people may know Your loving kindness each and every day. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Heavenly Father, as the angel testified to the shepherds that the gift of Jesus was given for them and for all, so may each of us tell others about how the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths is for them as well, that, by Your Spirit’s power, our neighbors and coworkers and all whom we love may unwrap the greatest gift of all this Christmas. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Heavenly Father, under Your watchful care, You preserve and sustain life. We give You thanks for those who keep watch over us: firefighters, police officers, doctors, nurses, and all who are entrusted with public work. Bless their work, and guide those who govern in our land. We ask Your protective and sustaining care for those who serve our country, particularly those who serve in our military. Grant that they may share the good tidings of comfort and joy even in days of separation

from their families. Watch over all who place themselves in harm's way on our behalf. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

**P** Heavenly Father, You once sent Your angels to announce good news to lonely and lowly shepherds. Send us and others with the same good news of the Savior, who has come for the lowliest among us, including the lonely and destitute, those who are homebound, those who live in nursing homes and care facilities, those who spend their days in institutions and prisons, and those who live on the streets of our towns and cities. Help us love others as You have loved us, and so provide for our neighbors in need. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

**P** Heavenly Father, sustain all those from this congregation who are sick and infirm, [*especially . . .*]. Grant them healing of body, peace of mind, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Comfort them and their families with the certainty that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the nations who gives us the sure hope of eternal life. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

**P** Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

**C Amen.**

**P** Let us pray.

O God, the earthy gifts we give and receive each Christmas pale in comparison to the abundant and everlasting gifts You have given us through Your Son. Yet they are reflections of Your light. Help us appreciate them and be thankful for the love our friends and family show to us and we to them as we exchange presents, knowing that ultimately every good gift comes from You. Grant that the gifts we unwrap this Christmastide may indeed keep us mindful of the light they reflect: the light of Your love that has shown into our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C 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.

**BLESSING**

**P** 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.

**C** Amen!

**HYMN**

*“Joy to the World”*

Hymn 353

**POSTLUDE**

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* - setting by Jacob B Weber

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* – setting by Carl F Schalk

*Joy to the World* - Michael Burkhardt

*Oh, Come All Ye Faithful* - Hilton Kean Jones

*In the Peace and Joy of the Christ-child,  
Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year*

**Acknowledgments**

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# Join Us in Worship This Christmas Season!

New Year's Eve Service – 5 p.m.  
Followed by Game Night! – 6 p.m.

*Be part of our annual New Year's Eve tradition!  
Bring along a favorite game and  
a snack to share and  
we will have a great time together!*

## WORSHIP NOTES

### THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

You are probably familiar with the carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. While that carol isn't religious, its title does capture the fact that on Christmas Day the Christian Church begins a twelve day celebration.

Historically, the celebration of Christmas didn't begin until Christmas Eve. That was the night homes were decorated with trees and tinsel. (It is the secularization of Christmas and the desire to have a longer shopping season that has pushed the "beginning" of Christmas back into October.) Christmas Eve often consisted of a vigil, either at church or in the home, that was quiet and muted. Then, come Christmas Day, all Christians would gather in church as a joyous celebration began. Families would continue to worship (and, yes, give gifts) for twelve straight days. The celebration of Christmas would end with the Festival of the Epiphany, marking the appearance of the Wise Men celebrating that Christ is King for all peoples.

### THE FESTIVAL OF THE NATIVITY

*Nativus* is Latin for "birth." By the fourth century, the early Christian Church had set December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ. Along with Easter, it quickly became one of the major celebrations in the Church Year. It always included

celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is seen in the word *Christmas*, which is simply short for "Christ's Mass."