



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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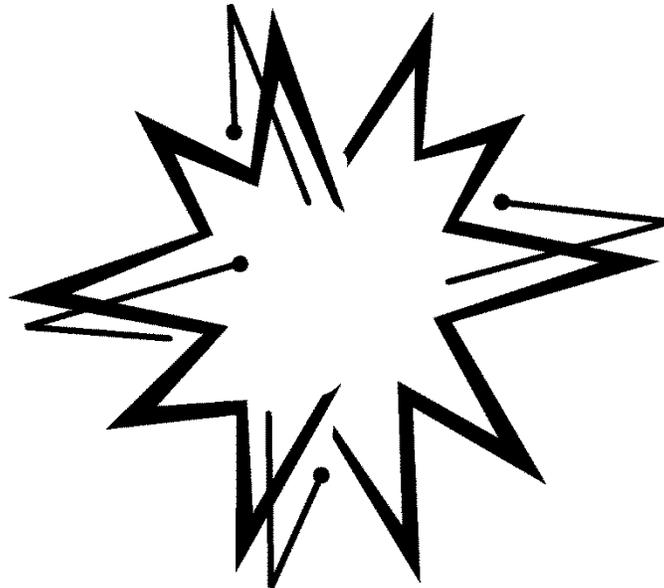
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Second Sunday of Christmas

January 3, 2021

Tree of Life

The feast of Epiphany (“manifestation”) concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God’s glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God’s calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God’s mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

In this New Year and at the brink of a new church season, let us give thanks to God for being with us, for loving us, and for showing us welcome and inclusion through the tangible waters of baptism. For as often as we see water, its clarity, purity and fluidity; as often as we hear it, splashing, crashing, and calming; as often as we touch it, its refreshing and satisfying coolness wrapping around our skin; we can be reminded of God's presence in and around us.

So we give thanks for this gift. We give thanks for God's providence. We give thanks for God manifested in this world through the life and ministry of Jesus and the ever-present Holy Spirit that resides in us all. And so those of you who have water in front of you, look at it, listen to it, and touch it and see, hear, and feel God there with you, embracing you, welcoming you in, and loving you with a grace that surpasses all understanding. And when you are ready, use the water to mark your forehead or the foreheads of those in your space with the sign of the cross as we are together enveloped by God's love, grace, and mercy, through Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: What Child Is This (ELW 296) verses 1&3

GREETING

The saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the epiphanic love of God,
and the live-giving fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (TOL p. 4)

HYMN OF PRAISE (TOL p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you make known to the nations the shining light of your love and salvation, manifested in the life of Jesus Christ the Emmanuel. May we see and recognize the light shining in our midst, that we may offer our worship and serve you with sincerity of heart, strengthened by this very light of Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we pray. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 60:1-6

A reading from Isaiah.

Jerusalem is assured that nations will make a pilgrimage to her because the light of God's presence is in her midst. The bountiful food of the sea and the profits of international trade will come streaming to Jerusalem and thereby declare God's praise.

¹Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

²For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;

but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

¹Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the king's son;

²**that he may rule your people righteously
and the poor with justice;**

³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.

⁴**Let him defend the needy among the people,
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.**

⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.

⁶**Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,
like showers that water the earth.**

⁷In his time may the righteous flourish;
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

¹⁰**May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute,
and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.**

¹¹May all kings bow down before him,
and all the nations do him service.

¹²**For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress,
the oppressed, and those who have no helper.**

¹³He has compassion on the lowly and poor,
and preserves the lives of the needy.

¹⁴**From oppression and violence he redeems their lives,
and precious is their blood in his sight.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 3:1-12

A reading from Ephesians.

What had been hidden from previous generations is now made known through the gospel ministry of Paul and others. In Christ both Jews and Gentiles participate in the richness of God's promised salvation.

¹This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (TOL p. 10)

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:1-12

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

God's promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king. Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus ¹was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they

saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God of new beginnings, the nations come to your light and rulers to the brightness of your dawn. By the compelling radiance of your Spirit, draw us near, reveal your truth, and teach us faithful obedience to your holy Word become flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Well, we made it. We endured. We survived not just 2020, but the most unusual Christmas season that most of us probably had ever experienced. Whatever your tradition is for Christmas, whether it be a big giant party with family and friends, or a quiet evening at home, or even leading a multitude of worship services in a very short period of time, I'm sure that this time around for many of us was just... different.

And we survived it. It wasn't the disaster that we might have thought it would be because of the pandemic, at least not from my standpoint. People got creative in their celebrations, found different kinds of traditions, and were still able to experience the joy of Christmas, birth of Christ, the light entering into our world. So this kind of proves my point from Christmas Eve when we talked about this light and how it cannot be overcome by any kind of darkness, any kind of pandemic, or any kind of change thrown at it.

But, in spite of those profound words of profundity, I know that perhaps there were still some that weren't able to celebrate. They weren't able to feel that joy. They weren't able to see the light as though the darkness had overcome it. And I get it, it was a different kind of Christmas, and perhaps it was too much change for some to handle. I've heard that some of my colleagues took some heat for making the decision not to have in person services over the Christmas season, and how that decision effectively ruined Christmas for those who were complaining. And again, I get it, it is different. It isn't what we're used to. It isn't what we wanted. But ruin Christmas? C'mon now.

I'm not trying to belittle the feelings of those who have been hurt. But at the same time I'm not going to totally validate them either. I'm not saying that people are wrong in feeling that their Christmas was ruined, but I am saying that it isn't right to blame your pastor for doing what they feel is best for the health and safety of the community as a whole as well as for themselves. And this isn't even to say that this past Christmas wasn't different and difficult, because it totally was. But it is to say that if you felt like it was ruined, perhaps your focus was on the wrong thing and that you were distracted from truly seeing that light.

And I don't blame you for that either, truth be told, in my planning and preparing, I too was a bit worried that this Christmas would be ruined because of this pandemic. It's hard for us to not be distracted by the wrong things. We tend to look for things in the wrong places. It isn't unusual for us to feel like we know how things are supposed to or should happen, so when they don't, we might feel like we've been slighted or even wronged in some way. So maybe we lash

out. Blame others and point fingers. Think that this is somehow personal and that we've been targeted to face this hardship alone.

While today is technically the Second Sunday of Christmas, we are using the Epiphany texts which include the story of the Magi visiting the young Jesus. We're doing this for a couple reasons. The first is because the actual texts for the Second Sunday of Christmas is the same passage about the Word being with God and was God from John that we got in Advent, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day if we had a Christmas Day service, and I don't know if we need to focus on that same text again. And the second reason is specifically because the story of the Magi is one that we also get every year for Epiphany, and it's a staple for our Christmas narrative and it might just be weird if we don't get it sometime during this season.

And normally we focus on the journey that the Magi took to find the Messiah, the star that led their way, and gifts that they gave, today I wanted to focus on a different part of the story. With a story as familiar as this, that isn't an easy task. But today, I want to focus on Herod, this Roman-appointed King of the Jews, this ruler that is usually painted as a tyrant in our bibles, this guy who just wanted to protect this throne from this new king that he was tipped off to by this so-called wise Magi.

I mean, wouldn't you want to protect what you worked so hard to get and held onto for so many years? Would you actually just give up the fight for your rights just because some kid was born somewhere that was supposed to be this new king? Wouldn't you do whatever you can to not let this unwanted change to your life take place? I mean, poor Herod probably already had to defend his Jewishness in the past to his Roman counterparts. He had already defended his kingship several times throughout his career. He worked hard in doing what was best for his constituents in protecting their religious freedoms and even rebuilding and remodelling their temple that meant so much to them. And now these strange Magi come and tell him that they want to worship some new king? Forget that noise.

So maybe now we understand what was going through Herod's head here. Maybe it even sounds a bit familiar. Maybe we can even draw parallels between his attitude and the attitudes of those who felt like Christmas was ruined because we weren't able to meet together in a church building, we weren't able to feast with our friends and family, and we weren't able to exchange gifts in the traditional way because we weren't allowed in anyone's houses.

Sure, the threat of losing your throne is really different from the threat of a pandemic Christmas, but I think the root of the problem is the same. And that is the focus is on the wrong thing. Just as how Herod's focus on keeping his throne prevented him from seeing how this child was to change the world, so was our focus on this ruined Christmas preventing us from seeing Christ in the season, and maybe even throughout the whole past year.

See, this whole thing of distraction and being focussed on the wrong thing preventing you from seeing Jesus isn't exclusive to just Christmas and/or losing your throne. But it reaches all areas of life and was really prevalent this past year, as we all had to face one thing that was largely distracting and consuming (I'm talking about the pandemic, by the way). In fact, this pandemic was so distracting and consuming that I'm willing to bet that at least 50-60% of my sermons in the past 9 and a half months mentioned it at least once. But the reason I kept bringing it up wasn't just because we were in the thick of it the whole time (which we were), or because it was really on my mind (which it was), or because all the news sources pretty much only talked

about it (which they did). But I kept bringing it up because I don't want us, any of us, to lose sight of God in Jesus through the Spirit present with us throughout it all. I kept talking about it because we need to be reminded that through all of this change and hardship and stress, we aren't alone but surrounded by our community and all the saints. I kept referencing the pandemic in my sermons because even though it is largely distracting and commanding our focus, we need that nudge to keep our focus on God's love, our gaze on God's grace, and our minds on God's blessing for us all that envelops us throughout the year but we're reminded how it enters our lives in the Christmas season.

See, no matter what we are going through, know that God is with us. No matter what is thrown in our way and blocks our paths in the past year of 2020 and this current new year of 2021, know that God holds us and continues to lead us in truth and righteousness. No matter what might distract us and take our focus, know that God has entered our lives, brightened the darkness with the light, and filled the world with redeeming love.

So as we enter this brand new year and this season after the Epiphany, may we continually look for and see and recognise God in Christ through the Spirit in our world, that we might draw strength through God's presence, grace, and love even as we continue through this pandemic. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (ELW 270) verses 1&3

APOSTLES' CREED (TOL p. 11)

With all worshipping and giving thanks for the light of Christ, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Led by the love of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "let your light shine, O Lord," and you're all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your justice and righteousness are made known to us through the life and light of Christ, given to us by your grace. May we always see and feel this light in our lives and communities, that we be constantly reminded of your presence with us. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you treat us righteously and justly, as we continue to serve you by proclaiming your good news to the world. Strengthen our ministries even as we continue through this pandemic, that we can still act with faith and love. We pray especially for our faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Benediction Lutheran Church in Delta and their pastor Thomas Keeley; and for King of Life Lutheran Church in Coquitlam and their interim pastor Dorothy Chu. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, the mountains and hills, the sun and moon, the rain and showers that water the earth that you have created are testament of the prosperity that you generously and graciously give. May our appreciation for this gift be shown through our stewardship of it, that this planet might continue to flourish and house human life for the generations to come. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, we pray for the needy and poor among our cities and countries that they be rescued from all that oppress. Be with world leaders and politicians and give them the wisdom and strength to work toward true and abundant peace. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that her travels to our country might come soon even in the midst of this pandemic. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you have compassion for us and you preserve our lives in your love. We pray for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who are lonely, that we all might lean on your strength, healing, and peace. Especially we pray for Paula; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you redeem our lives and remind us that we are precious in your sight. You join us with you and all the saints as the body of Christ, and you show us eternal welcome into your kingdom. May we be reminded daily of your love, that we be empowered to live and act as your hands and feet in the world. Let your light shine, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your eternal presence in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: Come, Let Us Bring (TOL p. 13)

OFFERING PRAYER

O God, as the magi gave gifts to your Son Jesus and offered their lives in worship and praise and adoration for all that you have done, so do we honour you and give you thanks for the food you give us this day. May it be a reminder for us of you being with us always in our midst through Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel and our Saviour. **Amen.**

DIALOGUE (TOL p. 14)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ, who is the manifestation of your love and presence in the world, joining us together with all the choirs of angels, the church on earth, and the hosts of heaven in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (TOL p. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O God, you have showed us your justice and righteousness through your Son Jesus, who defends us, rescues us, and lifts us out of oppression. His truth and love live as long as the sun and moon and endures through the generations, raining into our hearts and showering onto our lives. And so to him we bow down and serve, for he delivers us and helps us, has compassion on us and preserves us, and above all, through him we are all forgiven and welcomed into your kingdom.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, took some bread, and with a thankful heart he broke and shared it and said, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food before us that we see just how precious we are in God's love, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

For all honour and glory are yours, O God, for all that you have done, all that you do, and all that you will continue doing in and through our lives and communities alongside Jesus Christ our Lord, the light of the world, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (TOL p. 17)

Gathered into the light of Christ, let's pray as he taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see Christ present in our lives.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (TOL p. 17)

POST-COMMUNION HYMN: By Your Hand You Feed Your People (TOL p. 18)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Loving God, we give you thanks for the light of the world, Jesus Christ, through whom we know of your grace and mercy, and with whom we can be empowered and led into faith and service. May we journey into this New Year with hope as we are guided by your ever-present love, through Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel and our brother. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

Now may God our Sovereign bless you and keep you,
God our Saviour, the light of the world, uphold you in love,
and God the Spirit living in and among us all, lead you in all truth, grace, and peace,
now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN *Go Tell It on the Mountain* verses 1&3 (ELW 290)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, proclaim the light of the gospel.

Thanks be to God.

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