



## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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### **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service December 24, 2021**

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us tonight! 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.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəm (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

## GATHERING

### CHRISTMAS DIALOG

Jesus Christ is the Light of the world!

**He is the Light no darkness can overcome.**

At darkest night we gather to celebrate the great light of our salvation.

**With all the angels and the whole church we sing glory to God.**

In Christ, God's Word is made flesh and lives among us.

**In him is life, and the life is the light of all people.**

**ENTRANCE HYMN:** Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful (#283) verses 1, 3

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:

*Refrain*

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 heaven above!

Glory to God in the highest: *Refrain*

### GREETING

May the grace revealed in the birth of the Christ child,

the love of God incarnate in the Word made flesh,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit who conceived a baby to be the Saviour of the world

be with you all

**And also with you.**

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, from the tabernacle of heaven to the poverty of a stable, your radiant light shines forth in a tiny baby wrapped in rags; and we are astounded to behold such love. In Jesus you have become one with us as one of us that we might be one with you and each other. Open our hearts to joyfully receive this love and grace that the Christ child might be born in us and in our hearts, this day and always.

Amen.

**HYMN:** Away in a Manger (#278) verses 1, 3

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,

The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;

The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,

The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay

Close by me forever and love me, I pray

Bless all the dear children in your tender care

And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 9:2-7

A reading from Isaiah.

- <sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —  
on them light has shined.
- <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.
- <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- <sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
- <sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- <sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### HYMN: What Child Is This (#296) verses 1, 3

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.  
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.  
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;  
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!

## **SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14**

A reading from Titus.

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, <sup>13</sup>while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup>He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN:** Angels We Have Heard on High (#289) verses 1, 3

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.

*Refrain*

Gloria in excelsis Deo; gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn king. *Refrain*

**GOSPEL: Luke 2:1–20**

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising

God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ**

### **SERMON**

Glorious God, in Jesus your grace appears, bringing salvation to us all. Help us to ponder your words and deeds of love by the light of your Spirit, that we be able to proclaim the glad tidings of peace and joy of you among us, with us, and as one of us, through the birth and life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Ugh. Can you believe that we're back to just online for our worship services? And the timing couldn't have been any worse. We were so close to celebrating Christmas together, we had all these plans in place, I even had half of my sermon written, and then boom. Our COVID numbers went up like crazy and it drove us back to meeting online. And I know, you might be thinking that it was my choice to have people in the space or not, as our health orders didn't really say that we couldn't meet in person, so I shouldn't really be complaining. But as our dear theologian and comedian Chris Rock once said, "just because we can, don't make it a good \*\*\*\*ing idea."

Because with the numbers going up the way they are, our province breaking our daily records like... daily now, and more and more of my friends and acquaintances reporting being exposed to the virus mainly through *children* has really put the fear in me and wanting to make sure that we here at the church aren't the cause of any outbreaks or infections. So while we technically *can* meet in person, I just don't think it's a good idea right now, especially since I do have young kids and also live with my somewhat elderly in-laws. Who knows what kind of germy germs we'd be spreading through our breath and whatnot.

Still, it's disappointing. Christmas Eve is our big service of the year, bigger than Easter for us, and now it's two years in a row that we can't celebrate it face to face. We were so close to be getting out of this pandemic and somehow we bounced right back into the thick of things. We were just getting the hang of the new way we do church around here with all the distancing, hand washing, and mask wearing and now we're back to just staying at home in our pyjamas. Wait, that one isn't so bad I guess.

But what is bad is the fact that we're still in pandemic and things are worse now than they ever have been after almost 2 years and a bunch of vaccines and safeguards put in place. What is bad is that our lives are still disrupted and we are getting more and more fed up with it all. What is bad is that we still think and expect that our lives should be *better* than this.

I mean, we should be allowed to go out with others and hug and embrace and eat together without worry. We should be able to go to the homes of our friends and family or they to ours if we want. We should be able to travel and go places that we have never gone before. But nooooo... instead we're stuck at home, stuck not in church, stuck in our respective provinces and country because this pandemic, this virus, this whole situation just doesn't care about our convenience. It doesn't care about our wants. It doesn't care about our leisure. And it certainly doesn't care about our religion.

So what can we do? We can complain, although I don't think the virus is listening. We can protest, but I still don't think it cares. We can even deny its existence but we risk putting others in danger if we're wrong. Or we can make the best of a grim situation and see the joy that could be lurking in the shadows.

Pfft. Joy? Who am I kidding?

But I'm actually serious. I'm not delusional, as much as it might seem like I am. I'm not trying to be offensive, as I know many people have been having a very difficult time with this. And above all, I'm not in any way saying that this pandemic had to happen or is supposed to happen to give us joy. All I am saying is that even when times are tough, even when we aren't getting what we want, even when our world seems like it's falling apart, it is possible that God continues to give us joy in spite of it all.

Now, I should say that I'm not just pulling this out of my you-know-what. There is precedence for this notion of joy, which leads me to believe that it remains available for us all. I mean, try being an under-aged, unwed girl who just found out that she was pregnant. Try being a blue collared worker looking forward to his nuptials but learns that his fiancée is "mysteriously" with child. Try being a relatively tired and over worked pastor and father who had to do a bunch of extra work during the kids' winter break to make sure that this online service could happen with very short notice.

See, we aren't the only ones in history who has had it bad. We aren't the only ones in this world who can't do what we want to do, for some that is a regular everyday thing even outside of pandemic. We aren't the only ones who have been inconvenienced. But just as Mary and Joseph and even I found joy in the Christ child, so can all of us.

In today's texts, the same ones we get every year, pandemic or not, we have of course the birth of Jesus as told by Luke, and the thing that caught me this time around was how surprised Mary seems when the shepherds just appear all excitedly. The text says that she is amazed with what they were telling her. She treasured what was said about her son. She pondered those words in her heart.

She pondered them. Meaning she perhaps didn't have any idea about the situation she found herself in. Sure, that Gabriel angel guy told her what the deal was going to be, but I imagine that would be a tough truth to take. Maybe she didn't believe the angel. Maybe she thought it was a dream. Maybe she thought if she would just ignore it all that it would go away. But it didn't. She had to face up to her fiancée. They had to travel some distance even though she was ready to pop. There wasn't a sanitary place to even rest when it came time for the baby to be born.

But in that smelly barn they ended up in, in that gross inconvenience, in that life changing, world shattering, mind blowingly awful situation, joy was found in a baby born.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours!

Remember, Mary was called the "favoured one" by that very same angel we were talking about. And so Mary ponders these words, she ponders how any of this could be, she ponders the joy that came down in the midst of messiness. She ponders the peace that is granted to her

by God in spite of the craziness of her current world. She ponders the love that God has for her, this child, and all those around that God would even be present there with them, in that dirty barn in the middle of the night, during a very busy and crowded census, surrounded by the greed and corruption and inconvenience of the world.

God brings us joy. God grants us peace. God sends down love even in the worst times of our lives, reminding us that even though we can't always get what we want, even though life isn't always a bed of roses, even though we are still in this darned pandemic, God is with us.

God is with us through these internet tubes that continue to connect us with each other while we're apart. God is with us through this season of hope when the world seems hopeless. God is with us through a baby born in the most humble of ways to the most humble of mothers. God is with us and brings us joy, peace, and love.

So yes, this pandemic is inconvenient. This pandemic has had its ups and downs and we are fed up with it. This pandemic just can't end soon enough and if it were up to us it really should have ended before it even started. But even in the midst of it all, let's not lose sight of our God who gives us joy. Let's not lose hope in the God who brings us peace. Let's not lose faith in the God who entered our world through the birth of Jesus, to walk among us and teach us God's ways of compassion, grace, and love.

In this Christmas season, may we continue to receive the joy of the Spirit in spite of pandemic as we are granted the peace of God in the inconvenient messiness, through the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, graciously given to us through the miracle of a baby born. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** Love Has Come (#292)

Love has come—a light in the darkness!  
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.  
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;  
Hear how their song of joy arises:  
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Saviour!  
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.

Love is born! Come, share in the wonder.  
Love is God now asleep in the hay.  
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;  
What is the name her heart is saying?  
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers;  
Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us!  
Love is life everlasting and free.  
Love is Jesus within and among us.  
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.  
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.  
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

## **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Holy God, as we light these candles in this space, in our homes, and beyond borders and area codes, may the light of your love increase through our community, in our connection to you and each other, and our continued navigation through this broken world. And as we bask in the warm glow of these candles, may we be reminded of your grace that no evil can overcome, anointing us as beacons of the hope we have in you and your unending and steadfast love, shining bright through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Emmanuel, God with us. **Amen.**

## **THE GOSPEL OF THE INCARNATION: John 1:1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## **HYMN OF LIGHT: Silent Night, Holy Night! (#281)**

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;  
Glories stream from heaven afar, heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia!  
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from your holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

As we continue to bask in the warm light of our candles, let us pray as Jesus 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.**

## **SENDING**

### **BLESSING**

May God our Shepherd be your light,  
God our Saviour be your love,  
and God the Spirit be your life,  
this night and always.

**Amen.**

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

#### *Refrain*

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and ev'rywhere;

Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,

Behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light. *Refrain*

Down in a lonely manger the humble Christ was born;

And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn. *Refrain*

### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, glorify and praise God for all that you've heard.

**Thanks be to God.**