



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Christmas Eve Candlelight Service December 24, 2022

In winter's deepest night, we welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. Paul reminds us that the grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including lowly shepherds. Filled with the light that shines in our lives, we go forth to share the light of Christ with the whole world.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and 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 Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CHRISTMAS DIALOGUE

Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh, is the Light of the world!

By day and night he shines for all to see.

He was born in the midst of injustice and poverty

that the world may see the justice and richness of God.

God so loved the world that God sent Jesus,

that all may not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus Christ, our Saviour, is the Light of our lives.

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

We sing to God a new song, for God is with us here and always!

A song of hope, joy, and peace around the world.

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!

The highest, most holy, light of light eternal,

Born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;

Son of the Father now in flesh appearing! *Refrain*

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 incarnate love of God's Word made flesh,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit who anointed a baby to be our Saviour be with you all

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious God of heaven and earth,

you have thrown a lifeline to us in our darkness—

a beam of light that shines through Jesus.

Though born in a humble manger, he is the firstborn of all creation.

Though crucified on a condemning cross, he is the Lord of life.

Fill our hearts with the wonder and joy of his presence in the world, through the power of your Spirit residing in all of us.

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

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
on them light has shined.

³You 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.

⁴For 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.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For 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.

⁷His 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: O Little Town of Bethlehem (#279) verses 1, 4

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He 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 READING: Luke 2:1-14

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. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph 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. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And 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.

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

in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

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

SERMON

Loving God, by the light of your Spirit shining in the darkness, open our hearts and minds to see and feel you present among us, with us, and for us, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Not that many years ago, we gathered together for a Christmas Eve service much like this one, and there was snow on the ground. I remember the sermon that I preached that day was about how much I hated the snow, how I hated the driving around on messy roads, and how I especially hated the shovelling. Oh, the shovelling. And now, here we are again, on another Christmas Eve with snow on the ground, and I am so tempted to just use that same sermon again. But I won't (not like anyone would notice or saying anything even if they did), because I'm not really the "reuse a Christmas Eve sermon" kind of guy. 24th Sunday after Pentecost sermon maybe, but not Christmas Eve.

But it's hard not to have all this snow on the ground on our minds, is it. I mean, the snow is pretty concerning, especially if you watched or heard the news at all in the past few days. They were making this weather event out to be like the worst the Lower Mainland has ever seen. Bridges were closed, people were told to avoid going out, and snow blowers were flying off the shelves even at full retail price. I remember going to sleep Thursday night sort of biting my nails because I wasn't sure what Friday morning would bring, and I was on snow clearing duty here at the church. And while we have a plethora of tools to make the job easier, it's still quite a job.

Now, I want to make it clear that this isn't the same sermon that I mentioned earlier, because in that one I was talking about how much I hated shovelling snow. But this year the shovelling wasn't so bad, as again we have the snowblower and stuff that actually makes it kind of fun. So don't think that I'm complaining about having to clear the snow whatsoever. I just bring it up because while I was shovelling away, I had a lot of time to think. Like a LOT of time, as I said, it's quite the job (still not complaining though).

Among all the things I was able to think about, I kept coming back to this sermon, and wondered what on earth could I say if I don't reuse that other sermon about the snow? But then I thought, isn't it weird how often we've been getting heavy snowfalls these past few years? Like, this is what, the third or fourth "white Christmas" in recent history? I know it's not super rare for us here in the Lower Mainland, but it also isn't really common, or at least it wasn't before. I remember laughing at a classmate in elementary school who said that it always snows on Christmas because at point in my life, I was in grade 4 or 5, I hadn't experienced a single snowy Christmas yet. Usually we don't see any snow until January or maybe even February, and even then it's usually a couple flurries and they're melted and gone by the next morning.

So to get all this snow in such a short period of time this year, I don't know, it was a bit concerning for me. Pair that with the heat waves we've been getting every year for the past few years as well? Looks like climate change to me.

Now, I'm not trying to make this a political thing or blame anyone or anything or any party for what is happening to this planet, I'm just saying that it's happening. It's undeniable, the world is changing. Weather has been getting more severe at least in this small part of the world that I've called home my whole life, and I actually pay attention to weather patterns and stuff because I find it really interesting ever since I was a kid, so trust me when I say that I can tell that things are different now.

So yeah, this worries me a little. I mean, my wife and I brought 3 human beings in the world, and what kind of world will they end up with after we're gone? How about their kids? Again, I'm not saying that this is change is our fault, but I wonder if we doing what we can to ensure that it actually isn't.

I know what you might be thinking, "I wish he just reused that sermon from a few years ago," because I'll admit, this is kind of depressing stuff. Not exactly your typical Christmas Eve sermon, that's for sure. Normally there is talk about peace and joy and glad tidings and all that kind of stuff, not doom and gloom and weeping and gnashing of teeth stuff.

But it seems like in our world today, this doom and gloom is unavoidable. Everywhere we turn it seems like there's a new protest, a new evil uncovered, a new thing to complain about and try to cancel. If it isn't climate change, it's the government. If it isn't the government, it's the celebrities. If it isn't the celebrities, it's the regular people. And so on and so forth. It is depressing.

At the same time, while our world now seems to be in shambles, hasn't it always been like this? I mean, we didn't start this fire, looking at human history it looks like it was always burning since the world was turning. Every generation in our recorded history has faced some kind of catastrophic events, each one seemingly worse than the last, and every one of them signaling the end of the world.

Sigh, now we're really in the doom and gloom. What does this have to do with Christmas?

Well, while we are facing this broken world, so did those of Jesus' time. While we might be thinking that the world is ending, such was the mentality of Mary and Joseph and their peers. While we might feel stuck in a world climate not of our doing, I'm pretty sure the shepherds watching their flock by night felt the same exact way.

And in that brokenness, in the doom and gloom, in that blame game, God showed up. God entered the world and into our lives. God appeared among us as a newborn baby and lit up the sky with angels, filled our lives with songs of praise and peace, and poured hope and love into our hearts and showed us all that even when the going gets tough and impossible, God hasn't, doesn't, and will never leave us but remains with us. With us in spirit, with us in community, with us through us.

I know, this doesn't necessarily take away all the troubles that we face, it doesn't fix our problems, it doesn't magically melt all the snow or revert the climate to what it once was. But

it does remind us that in our troubles and problems and various things out of our control, we are not alone but God is with us, strengthening us and leading us into peace, joy, and hope.

Still, it doesn't often seem like it. It might not have seemed like it for Mary and Joseph as they travelled from city to city, country to country, and giving birth in a barn. It probably didn't seem like that for the shepherds who went back to the fields and their regular jobs after this strange episode in their lives. So I think it's ok for us to sometimes gloss over it and forget.

But every now and then, we can be reminded of it. Maybe not by a bunch of angels shining with the glory of God or a newborn baby promised to be the Messiah, but maybe in a neighbour helping you shovel. Maybe in the joyous faces of children laughing and playing in the snow. Maybe in a community gathered together on a holy night to again see the face of God in each other and celebrate together the hope graciously given to us. However it happens, it might be surprising, it might be unexpected, it might be almost unnoticeable until maybe a couple weeks later, but it will be glorious.

My friends, we're here this night to remember the birth of our Lord. We anticipate the morning where we continue with our customs and traditions and different ways we might welcome God into our lives. We look ahead to this upcoming New Year and we have hope that while life can be truly difficult, we can be strengthened by God with us, in us, and through us, now and forever.

This is the promise of Christmas. This is the reason we celebrate. This is why we, as children of God, can be filled with the abundant love and grace that surpasses understanding, leaning on the everlasting arms that bring us into all hope, peace, and joy, this season and always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (#270)

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all you nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Refrain

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king!"

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see! Hail, incarnate deity!
Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth, born to give us second birth. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Holy God, as we light these candles here in this place and wherever we may be, may the light of your love increase through our community here and abroad, may our connection to you and each other be strengthened, and may you continue to guide and navigate us 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.

candles are lit

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

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

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

¹⁴And 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 be warmed by the light of God's love, 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 the Shepherd of all that is and was and is to come, be your light,
God the Saviour, the Word made flesh, be your love,
and God the Spirit that connects us all together as a community and body, be your life,
this night and always.

Amen.

The candles are extinguished.

SENDING HYMN: Joy to the World (#267)

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

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

No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

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

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be filled with the joy of God with us.

Thanks be to God.