



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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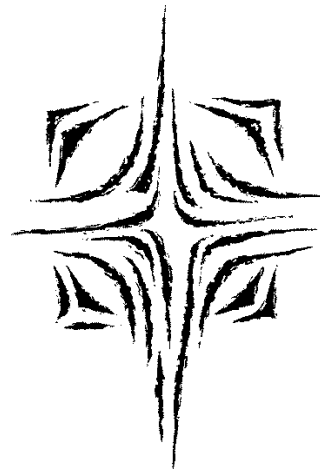
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**Christmas Day
December 25, 2023
Tree of Life**

As on the first day of creation, on this Christmas Day the Word illumines the world, shining forth to bring all things into being. Today we celebrate the incarnate Word, God becoming flesh to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ then and now. Emboldened by the good news of Christ's birth, along with the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and all witnesses to the light of Christ, we declare to the world that we have indeed seen and been transformed by the arrival of "the salvation of our God." O come, let us adore!

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and 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.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

DIALOGUE

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

**The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness,
on them light has shined.

**We have beheld Christ's glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father.**

To us a child is born, to us a Son is given.

**In the Word was life,
and the life was the light of all people.**

GATHERING SONG: It Came upon the Midnight Clear (#282)

GREETING

The grace that comes with the Christ child that was born to us, the love shown in the eternal presence of God, and the communion that draws us near through the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

HYMN OF PRAISE: (p.6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Wondrous God, we praise you and give you thanks for the gift of your Son Jesus, begotten for us this day as the true light who enlightens us all. May all who celebrate this day be blessed and born anew as beloved children of your redeeming purpose, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 62:6-12

A reading from Isaiah.

The prophet invites the people to give God no rest until God reestablishes Jerusalem. In turn, they will receive names full of promise: The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD, A City Not Forsaken.

⁶Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have posted sentinels;
all day and all night
they shall never be silent.

You who remind the LORD,
take no rest,

⁷and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it renowned throughout the earth.

⁸The LORD has sworn by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:

I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored;
⁹but those who garner it shall eat it
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it shall drink it
in my holy courts.
¹⁰Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.
¹¹The LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,
“See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”
¹²They shall be called, “The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD“;
and you shall be called, “Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 97

¹The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice;
let the multitude of the isles be glad.
²**Clouds and darkness surround the LORD,
righteousness and justice are the foundations of God’s throne.**
³Fire goes before the LORD,
burning up enemies on every side.
⁴**Lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.**
⁵The mountains melt like wax
before the Lord of all the earth.
⁶**The heavens declare your righteousness, O LORD,
and all the peoples see your glory.**
⁷Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight in false gods!
Bow down before the LORD, all you gods.
⁸**Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O LORD.**
⁹For you are the LORD, most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
¹⁰**You who love the LORD, hate evil!
God guards the lives of the saints and rescues them from the hand of the wicked.**

¹¹Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the honest of heart.

¹²**Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous,
and give thanks to God's holy name.**

SECOND READING: Titus 3:4-7

A reading from Titus.

God saves us not because of what we do. Rather, God is a God of mercy and salvation who graciously cleanses us in baptism and renews our lives through the Holy Spirit.

⁴When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Luke 2:8-20

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The world's deep night is shattered by the light of God's new day. The glory of God is revealed to poor shepherds, who share the good news with others.

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!"

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The 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

Loving God, your love has created all things and your grace has welcomed us to be a part of it. Open our eyes to see the hope, peace, joy, and love that you bring to us this day and always, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

Ever hear the term, “no rest for the wicked”? I remember the first time I heard it, back when I was working in retail and our manager said that just as he was piling more on our task lists. I later found out that it was actually a term that has biblical roots, as some of the prophets would talk about how the wicked will receive theirs, like unrest, while the righteous can have hope that they will find peace.

But these days it just means life is busy and it’s all about work, work, work.

I bring this up because this past week for me has really been all about work, work, work. I tried really hard to stay on top of things, but as many of you know, the more you work, the more tired you get. And the more tired you get, the less efficient you are. And the less efficient you are, the longer you have to work. It was this vicious cycle that I tried to battle by taking as many breaks as I could to do some online shopping, read about comic books, and of course play games on my phone. But still for some strange reason, it still took me forever to get my stuff done. No rest for the wicked I guess.

Don’t get me wrong though, I’m not complaining or anything. I mean, it’s Christmas, after all. Of course it’s going to be busy. Of course I’m going to feel a bit more overworked and unrested. Of course I’m going to go to bed super late and still wake up super early. Wait, maybe I am complaining just a bit.

But then I wonder how Mary felt when she was going through what she went through. I mean, I look at her life, the pressure she must have gone through, what it must have been like to raise the Messiah, and I think to myself, “go ahead, complain more about how difficult *your* life is.” If I thought I had it bad... oh no, *she* had it bad.

Not only was she super young, like 12 or 13, not only was she likely from a very humble upbringing, not only was she found to be with child outside of wedlock, but she had to give birth for the first time with a barn as her maternity ward, a pile of hay as her bed, and a clueless carpenter as her midwife. She was days away from home. She had to rely on this man that she barely knew for support. She rocked her baby to sleep with the sounds of farm animals grazing and gnawing and hee-haw’ing as her lullaby. Of course she must have felt stressed, isolated, and very overwhelmed. There’s no rest for the wicked.

I don’t mean to call Mary, the mother of our Lord, wicked. No way I’d ever. But at times like this, of great overwhelming stress and loneliness, don’t our minds sometimes turn to maybe possibly perhaps that we might be wicked? Or insufficient? Or maybe even... unloved?

I mean, why else would we be feeling the way we feel? Why else are we going through what we go through? Why else does it seem like we face these hardships either completely alone or whoever is along side us doesn’t really understand or empathize or care? The truth is, it isn’t hard to have these thoughts when we’re in this kind of a position. So when we hear “there’s no rest for the wicked,” it really hits as we can totally relate. We might feel that about ourselves. We might feel like of course we would. We might feel like we deserve it.

So maybe that is what was going through Mary's head. Sure, she was pretty joyful waaaay back on the 4th Sunday of Advent that happened like yesterday. She was singing about the good news that she had and how her cousin was going through the same thing as her.

But where was her cousin now? Where is the joy? Where can God be seen in all the work, all the busyness of life, all the unrest? Although just a day passed for us in the story, but for Mary it was 9 months. That's 9 months of thinking, worrying, and wondering why her. That's 9 months of planning and preparing only for it to go up in smoke once they got notice of the census, when they heard there was no room in the inn, when they first took a whiff of the smells her child was to be born in. That's 9 months of being reminded of just how not in control Mary is.

And to top it all off, these shepherds show up and just let themselves in. I guess they're outdoorsy animal types so they didn't mind those smells. But the text tells us that the shepherds shared with Mary and Joseph everything that happened to them with the angels and the message they gave, and Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

What was there to ponder?

I mean it was pretty straight forward, yeah? Those angels told the shepherds pretty much what Gabriel told Mary, no? Both stories lined up pretty good so it should be an open and shut case, shouldn't it?

There was the "don't be afraid bit", the ancestor of King David thing, and the whole baby will save the world news. Sure, the angels didn't tell the shepherds the whole conceived out of wedlock situation, but I guess that was just information that they didn't need to know. So what did Mary need to ponder that she didn't already ponder over the last 9 months of her pregnancy?

Well, one thing that the angels did for the shepherds that the angel Gabriel didn't for Mary, was that song that they broke out into just as they were leaving. Do you remember it? The lyrics they sang were, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth *peace* among those whom God favours."

Peace? No, not really. Not around the childbirth, not in the running to Egypt for their lives shortly after, not for any of us who don't get any rest. No, we don't really get peace, and so through simple logic we can conclude that we're not among those whom God favours... Maybe that is what Mary was pondering.

Maybe Mary was pondering the whirlwind of life she had endured over the past 9 months and probably beyond. Maybe Mary was wondering how much more difficulties she'd be able to endure before completely losing it. Maybe Mary was remembering the words that our angel Gabriel said to her when he first appeared: "Greetings, *favoured one*, the Lord is with you," and "don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found *favour* with God."

So... Mary *is* favoured, Mary *should* have peace, Mary is actually loved. In spite of the hardships she faces in the recent past, in spite of the rough life that she's led, in spite of anything that could happen to her and her newborn son, Mary has favour in God's eyes.

Well, that's a funny way of showing it, she might be thinking. But then she might be realising just how true those words are. Sure, life isn't easy, she had some tough breaks, she is still trying to get the animal smells from out of her clothes and hair, but she is at peace.

Peace in knowing that God loves her. Peace in feeling God's hand at work in her life and the life of her family. Peace in looking into the eyes of God with her and all of us, cooing up at her with an innocence that redeems us all.

So you see, the promise of Christmas is not just peace on earth and goodwill to all, but it is that God is with us through the conflict and hardships. The message of Christmas isn't just that we shouldn't worry but just be happy, but it is that we are redeemed and saved by the grace of God. The whole point of Christmas isn't to give us a quick fix of joy so we can continue living life for another year until the next Christmas rolls around, but it is to remind us, each and every one of us, that we are, always have been, and always will be highly favoured and loved by our God and we will be given rest.

We might not see it right away, but there is comfort in knowing that we are not alone. There is joy in seeing that we belong in community and family. There is peace in feeling God's love wrapped around us and constantly revealing to us that God is most definitely with us, now and always.

So as we head out to whatever festivities or events or gatherings we have, may we always be on the lookout for God in our midst, showing us love, and giving us peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (#288)

APOSTLES' CREED (p.12)

Together with all in awe of a God with us, 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

Called into the wonder and majesty of God with us, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “God, in your mercy incarnate,” and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God, in your mercy incarnate, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you reign throughout all the earth and we rejoice and are glad for your righteousness and justice. Continue leading us through this world, that our work and ministry be reflective of your love and grace. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; those who use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and all our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. God, in your mercy incarnate, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, fire and lightning light up the world but they do not compare to your power and might shown in your creation. May we all grow in our respect for all that you have made, that our stewardship of what you’ve entrusted to us be pleasing to you. We pray for those living in areas of harsh weather and natural disasters, that we all might find safety and peace in our changing climate. By your incarnate mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the heavens declare your righteousness and glory, and we rejoice in your justice. Teach all world leaders, politicians, and people of influence the ways of your love and grace, that we might be able to work together toward peace in spite of difference. We pray for all areas of the world that face wars and violence, and we especially pray for the continued support of those that we’ve sponsored to come to our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; and for those that have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. God, in your mercy incarnate, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are the most high above the earth, and you guard us and rescue us in our times of need. Be with all who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and bring us all the hope and joy of your peace in the world. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Beulah; Sukhwant; Cari; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; Allan; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

By your incarnate mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your light dawns joy in our hearts, and we rejoice in your holy name as you welcome us into your kingdom to live with you and all the saints. May all the lives of faith from the past continue to inspire us as we move into the future, that we all be testament to your gracious promises and redemption. By your incarnate mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the hope of your Son Jesus, borne to us today. **Amen**.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE (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, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who came to us as one of us to show us the ways of your everlasting life, that we might join with all the angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, the whole host of heaven and the church on earth, in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Blessed are you, O Holy God, the beginning and the end, the giver of life, the creator and healer of us all. Through your wisdom came forth all of creation out of nothingness. Through your righteousness came light out of darkness. Through your love came a promise of salvation out of despair. And so you send to us your Son Jesus, born to us this day, as a reflection of all that you are and all that you call us to be as your beloved people in the world.

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

And then after they ate, he took the common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from 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's in this bread and cup that we see Christ in our midst, with us, one of us, joining us together, even as we declare the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Remind us always, O God, of your Word dwelling among us. Reveal to us always, O Lord, of your unending grace and love. Restore in us always, O Redeemer of the world, the joy and hope that you bring through this meal, through this community, and through your Son sent down to us full of truth and life, as he continues to live and reign with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Gathered into wonder and awe at the sight of God with us, 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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Take and eat, know that God is with us.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)
What Feast of Love (#487)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We give you thanks, O God, for again feeding and nourishing us with your truth and blessing, and for revealing to us your everlasting presence among us through the Christ child. Empower us with your love and shine your light through us that the world be illumined with your glorious salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God who creates bless you and keep you,
the God who redeems shine on you and be gracious onto you,
the God who is with us always, look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: The First Noel (#300) vs 1, 2, & 4

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, announce the good news of Jesus Christ.
Thanks be to God.

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