



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Christmas Eve Candlelight Service December 24, 2023

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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

ENTRANCE HYMN: Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful (#283) vs 1-3

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.

HYMN: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (#270) vs 1 & 3

GREETING

May the grace that came to us in the form of a baby, the love of a God with us, and the fellowship to which we are invited and welcomed by the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Glorious God, through the proclamation of the angels, the witness of the shepherds, and the experience of a young woman named Mary, we gather in worship of child borne to us. May our eyes be opened to see your light, our hearts opened to feel your love, and our hands open to receive your gift: the life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord, our Saviour, our God with us. Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 9:2-7

A reading from Isaiah.

This poem promises deliverance from Assyrian oppression, a hope based on the birth of a royal child with a name full of promise. While Judah's king will practice justice and righteousness, the real basis for faith lies in God's passion for the people: The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

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, 2, & 4

SECOND READING: Titus 2:11-14

A reading from Titus.

The appearance of God's grace in Jesus Christ brings salvation for all humanity. Consequently, in the present we live wisely and justly while also anticipating the hope of our Savior's final appearance.

¹¹The 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: What Child Is This (#296) vs 1 & 3

GOSPEL READING: Luke 2:1–14

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

God's greatest gift comes as a baby in a manger. Angels announce the "good news of great joy" and proclaim God's blessing of peace

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

HYMN: Angels We Have Heard on High (#289)

SERMON

O Lord, may you, on this holiest of nights, fill our hearts and minds with your truth, your love, and your Spirit, that we be born anew to reflect your light in and around us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Here we are, Christmas Eve. Everyone's favourite service of the year. I know this is everyone's favourite, because what other time of year do we actually see so many of you here in this space at the same time? This isn't a guilt trip or anything, but you know we have services like every Sunday, right? Well, except for next Sunday, and those other Sundays that I'm away or sick, but pretty much every other Sunday there will be a service. And you're welcome to come to all of them, not just the Christmas ones.

So it's clear that Christmas is a favourite for many of us. It's a time of the year we look forward to, think about in anticipation and preparation, and perhaps even participate in things we don't normally participate in. Of course it is, I mean what's not to love about Christmas? There are the pretty lights, the ornate decorations, and the feel-good music. There is the visiting, the community, the cheerful gatherings. There are the events, those hallmark movies streaming everywhere, and all the wonderful wonderfulness that makes this season so jolly, so merry, so grand, so... perfect.

At least, we try to make it perfect, don't we? Why not, if there's any time of year to make perfect, it should be this time, right? If there's any season to go all out, it should be this one. If there's any reason to go bigger than big, it'll be Christmas.

Or we try, at least.

So we spend more time fighting for parking at the mall so we can check off all those wish lists. We take more time cleaning, rearranging, and prettying up the house and learning how to make new dishes or perfecting old ones. We use up more time thinking of ways to ensure that we don't make it on Santa's naughty list so we won't end up with coal in our stockings. That's just how it is. In order to make Christmas, Christmas, we have to spend more, take more, and use up more in order to make everything absolutely perfect. Because in a lot of our eyes, if it isn't perfect, it isn't Christmas. If it isn't big and grand, it doesn't feel like Christmas. If it doesn't take up all our time and energy then it just doesn't look like Christmas.

And there's nothing wrong with this, don't get me wrong. Because Christmas is a big one for so many of us it is natural for us to go all out. But Christmas sure demands a lot from us, doesn't it. But we happily give it for the sake of others and their joy, hoping that we won't bah humbug the season away, or end up hating Christmas like the Grinch did before his heart grew like 3 sizes.

I mean, heck, I rewrote this sermon like 6 times, and still all we got was this. So I'm not free from this mentality either. I get caught up in the planning and preparing. I find myself busier and busier this time of year. I try to make this season, this night in particular, absolutely perfect.

I think if we don't or if it isn't, we're afraid that we'll ruin it for others and for ourselves. If we don't do all we can, decorate all we can, be jolly as much as we can, then we just aren't doing it right. If we don't do all the Christmas things or totally get in that Christmas spirit, then maybe it just isn't Christmas.

Well, the thing is, Christmas will still be Christmas whether we feel like it is or not. God is with us whether we're in church tonight, tomorrow morning, the rest of the year, or not. The Christ child is born unto us when things are perfect sure, but also definitely when they're not.

See, Christmas was never meant to be perfect. Not by what we would consider perfect, at least.

I mean just think about how it all started. Talk about botched plans and imperfect nights. Mary and Joseph had to travel miles away from home, their hotel reservations fell through, and they had to spend the night in a cold barn surrounded by some donkeys and other non-housebroken animals. They were doing what they could to make things work, sure, but I'll be darned if all of this wasn't disappointing. In spite of all their best efforts, it was like they kept hitting one roadblock after another, making life frustrating, exasperating, and just mind-numbingly difficult.

Not really perfect by any means. In fact, I would say that it was downright awful.

And it was in this type of backdrop in which Jesus was born. It was in this kind of climate that God chose to be revealed. It was in this messy and chaotic imperfection that we can see most clearly and tangibly God present with us, among us, and in our midst.

God with us in the brokenness. God with us in the sadness and fear. God with us in all the imperfect moments of our lives reminding us that we are not alone.

This isn't to say that our Christmases can't be grand, or well executed, or even perfect. I'm just saying that it's ok when it isn't all that. It's ok when Christmases fall apart. It's ok when things don't go our way, don't go as planned, and the 6th edition of your sermon still doesn't seem to be landing right. I mean, I've had my fair share of bad Christmases, not just in the sermon-writing department. Even if it isn't difficulties around sermon-writing, or worship planning, or having 3 services in the span of 25 hours, there always seemed to be something else, almost waiting to ruin Christmas for me. Like this one Christmas when my dad was sick and fell at my aunt's house and hit his head, so I spent the rest of the night in the hospital with him. Or this other one when I didn't have much money and I couldn't afford to get anyone anything so I stayed up all night writing a bunch of meaningful cards only to have slept in like crazy so I didn't actually get the chance to hand them out. I think I still have them in a drawer somewhere actually. Or there was this other Christmas that I did have a better paying job but it meant that I had to work like non-stop right until Christmas afternoon so I was so tired that I didn't even feel like seeing anyone or do anything. Maybe you've had similar Christmases in the past. Maybe this Christmas is like that now. Or, if you haven't already, I'm sure you'll have similar Christmases in the future. Things happen. Plans don't always pan out. In spite of our best intentions, our Christmas might not be exactly perfect. And that's ok.

Because again, Christmas wasn't meant to be perfect. But it was meant to show how God's perfection of holiness and righteousness, could be present even in the midst of all the imperfection. It was meant to remind us how love can be found even in the messiness and hectic throws of life. It was meant to reveal to us all how God is with us, here, now, and even when we completely forget to look. That is Christmas.

It is Christmas even when underprivileged and under-aged Mary had her firstborn son, this illegitimate child in very unsightly and unsanitary conditions. It is still Christmas even though Joseph went through disappointment after disappointment, and all this trouble to go to his hometown only to have no where to stay. It is always Christmas because Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of us all, enters our world in the middle of the stress and unrest, in the trouble and turmoil, in the unplanned imperfection among the smelly smells and unruly sounds of life. This is Christmas.

So it's in contrast to the imperfection that Jesus came in that we see the perfection he brings, not because everything will go as planned but because his love and grace are pure and point us to God's salvation. It's in the brokenness and pain in the world that we see him coming with healing and peace and redemption. It's in the hardships and hurts that we are reminded that we are not alone, but surrounded by a host of saints, a community that cares, a God that became a tiny human baby just to be with us.

God with us. *That* is the point. That is what Christmas is. That is why we are here.

Thanks be to God. And Merry Christmas, everyone. Amen.

HYMN: Go, Tell It on the Mountain (#290)

CREED (p. 105)

**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.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Holy God, as the candle light increases through this place of worship, so your love increases throughout the world, giving it light and joy, and teaching us how to love. May our connection to you and each other be strengthened and may your light and love continue to guide us toward the peace in accepting your presence among us as one of us, in the life and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. **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. 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)

LORD'S PRAYER

Still gathered in the light and love of Christ, let us 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.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of light grant you the joy of the angels,
The God of life give you the eagerness of the shepherds,
and the God of love lead you into the peace of the Christ Child, now and forever.

Amen.

The candles are extinguished.

DEPARTURE HYMN: Joy to the World (#267)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, walk in the light of Christ that the darkness cannot overcome.

Thanks be to God.