



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Christmas Day December 25, 2024 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!

We at Grace Lutheran Church strive to reflect and proclaim the love of God shown to us by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by providing an inclusive and supportive environment through loving care and community service.

A warm welcome to all who are worshipping with us in person or online! We appreciate your contribution to the community today: with your voice, your presence, and just the blessing that you are. May you be nurtured by God's Word, empowered by the love of Christ, and stirred by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in this service this day, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran Church worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmi̓ñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking 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.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

My friends, today we are gathered around the arrival of the promised one, the Word become flesh, God with us, Jesus Christ, to sing a new song to our Lord who has done marvelous things and shows us steadfast love and faithfulness. In our worship, we shout for joy, we rejoice, and we sing with all of creation as all voices ring out to our God, who is full of righteousness and who rules with equity and love, now and always. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: The First Noel (#300)

GREETING

The grace of Jesus our Lord that shines upon us, the love of God that breaks through the darkness, and the fellowship of the Spirit that reminds us of God with us be with you all.
And also with you.

HYMN OF PRAISE: (p.6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, your everlasting Word has become flesh and dwelt among us as the person of your Son Jesus. May we receive him and his truth into our lives, that we might always see how you have welcomed us as your beloved children to live in the light that you bestow upon the world through a baby born to us, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 52:7-10

A reading from Isaiah.

Isaiah proclaims news of great joy: "Your God reigns!" Just as God saved the people from oppression in Egypt, God delivers Israel from exile. All the earth will witness the saving acts of God.

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy,

for in plain sight they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.
⁹ Break forth; shout together for joy,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 98

¹ Sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous things,
whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.
² **O LORD, you have made known your victory,
you have revealed your righteousness in the sight of the nations.**
³ You remember your steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
⁴ **Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.**
⁵ Sing to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the voice of song.
⁶ **With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the king, the LORD.**
⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who dwell therein.
⁸ **Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD, who comes to judge the earth.**
⁹ The LORD will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 1:1-4

A reading from Hebrews.

This letter opens with a lofty declaration of Jesus' preeminent status as the Son through whom God created the world and through whom our sins are cleansed. God speaks to us now through the Son, who is exalted even above the angels.

¹ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: John 1:1-14

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The prologue to the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, the one who reveals God to be "full of grace and truth."

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

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

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

¹⁴ 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, through the power of your Spirit may our eyes and ears be opened and our hearts illumined that we might see and hear Christ your living Word and accept his presence with us as one of us, in your name. **Amen.**

Here we are again, Christmas...

I'm just kidding. I mean, it is Christmas and we certainly are here, but if you were at our Christmas Eve service last night, you would have heard me poking fun at how often I actually open our Christmas sermons with that exact phrase. I'm not going to reuse last night's sermon, as tempting as that might be, seeing as how we're gathered here this morning for basically for the same exact reason.

The same reason, yes, but different texts. The same event is highlighted, but we are told about it through different stories. It's pretty much the same message, but we get very different words from last night and this morning, and they almost seem to be saying very different things.

Yesterday we had shepherds and angels and a baby and all that typical Christmas stuff that you'd expect. And today... not so much. Today we don't get any of that feel good stuff. We just get this somewhat nonsensical and almost contradictory philosophical language that perhaps confuses more than it comforts.

Seriously, the Word was there in the beginning and the Word was with God and the Word was God? And then the light and darkness and this and that? Not exactly the Christmas story we're used to. Not exactly the story and characters that we could easily sing or make and display a diorama about. Not exactly the familiar and warm and comfortable story of a pregnant underaged and unwed woman not given a choice but to give birth in a barn while surrounded by farm animals. Instead, we might struggle with relating to this text. We might find it somewhat more of a head scratcher compared to very understandable immaculate conception and virgin birth. We might not really get the festive feelings, the holiday happiness, and the Christmas cheer from this one, because it just seems so *out there*.

It's just a bit too philosophical. A bit too different from what we expect for a Christmas text. A bit too detached from our normal speech that it just doesn't seem relatable to us.

Well, maybe in Western culture and thought at least. Let's not forget that this was written at a very different time about 2000 years ago to a very different people. Or *peoples*, as we'll talk about in a moment. See, in the original Greek language that this text was written in, the word used for "word" is the Greek "logos," which of course literally means "word" but it's the nuances the word in this context carries that changes things up a bit. Don't forget that the ancient Greeks were big on that philosophy, and so logos is much more than the spoken or written word, but it encapsulates the intention behind the word, the reasoning that the word has, the logic that it brings forth.

So in the beginning was God's intention for the world, God's specific and divine reasons for a creation, God's logic in putting things where they go and how they can interact with each other. This would have been very understandable to the people that spoke the original language and lived in that original cultural backdrop, and it would have had a lot of meaning. Because being told this, learning this, believing this would give us purpose. It tells us that creation wasn't just a random smattering of atoms and molecules and stuff that joined together in just right order and time to create life, but rather it was on purpose, it was intentionally to fulfill an idea and plan, there is logic behind all of this, what we might perceive as chaos. And to an intellectual or philosopher, there is comfort in that. It tells us that we aren't meaningless and arbitrary beings, but we have value and worth. It means that things actually do mean something, our actions actually do make a difference, that we actually do matter. That is for the Greeks of the time.

But this text also speaks to the Israelites of the time as well, but in a different but no less meaningful way. See, the language this passage starts with, "in the beginning," to anyone who has read the Genesis accounts, must evoke images of creation, the separation of the light and the darkness, the birth of all things, living or otherwise. This text is saying to the ancient Jews that at creative power that spoke the cosmos into existence, that willed together a world full of wonder, that breathed life into all living beings, was with God since the beginning and was God in every way possible. Because it was by speaking that God created. It was by God's voice that all things came into being. It was God's very Word that brought everything that ever was, is, and will be into existence. This will remind the Israelites what a force to be reckoned with God is. And how they need to respect and honour this power. And above all, how much this power is on their side, with them, rooting for them, and setting them apart to receive gracious blessing and mercy.

So while to the Greeks this Word speaks to the *why* things are the way they are, because they were created with logic, to the Israelites this Word reveals the *how* things are the way they are, which is through the sheer and utter power of God.

Both of these understandings give us divine meaning and purpose. Both are inspiring, uplifting, and empowering in reminding us of who we are, why we are, and how we are. But that isn't the most shocking part of this peculiar Christmas story that we get out of John. I mean, sure, God is logic and power, and was that since the beginning when God created everything and continues to be that throughout all of time which fills us with hope and joy, but the most surprising part about this all powerful and all logical Word is that... it became flesh.

Human flesh. Starting out in the form of a baby like all other human flesh did.

A baby. A squishy, squirmy, squeeze baby. The absolute power of the universe, in diapers. The ultimate logic of all time, dependant on a young girl who as of yet has no fixed address. The will, the wisdom, the Word of God, encapsulated in a human body. This is an astonishing truth. It is an astounding promise. It is an astronomical reality that all that God is, everywhere that God is, and everything that God has done can be fit into a tiny infant.

See while the Word tells the Greeks why and the Word tells the Israelites how, the Word tells all people, *what*. In that, through what did this logic come to us, by what did this power enter our lives, and for what did this Word become flesh? John's Christmas story tells us that the what, is *love*.

It is by God's love that God created all things. It is through God's love that God reaches out to have a relationship with us. It is because of God's love that God graciously saves us through the life and actions of Jesus Christ, born unto us this day.

My friends, this passage out of John might not be what we expect for Christmas, although we get it every Christmas at least once. This philosophical text that we get today probably won't fill us with feel-good feelings like the nativity story, which we might prefer. This truth about who Jesus is in the great and grand scheme of things really isn't the usual Christmas message. But this is the story that we need, this is the promise that fills us with hope and peace, this is the message of Christmas, that reminds us of God's will for us as God's people, God's power in lifting us up and healing us from our hurts and pains and broken relationships, and God's love for each and every one of us, graciously redeeming us and saving us, this day and always.

No, this isn't the Christmas story that we're used to, but it is very much Christmas. In that God's Word becoming flesh and bringing light into the world is what draws us to this day, brings us to worship, and beckons us to live with each other in community and love.

So in this Christmas season, may we always be reminded of who we are and whose we are as God's people, dearly beloved enough for God to be one of us just to be with us, revealing to us all hope, peace, joy, and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: In the Bleak Midwinter (#294)

APOSTLES' CREED (p.12)

With all those basking in the light shining throughout the world, 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 into the joy of celebrating the Christ child born unto us, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "Lord, in your ever-present mercy," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Holy God, you call us forth to be your servants and act as your hands and feet in the world. As we gather at the manger, help us see your face in all people as well as in ourselves as we serve, minister, and be guided by our faith. We lift in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use this building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Creator God, the rocks and streams proclaim your praise. Attune us to the joyful sounds and groaning of your creation. Stir us to tend the earth wisely, that the whole earth may dwell in abundance and peace. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Righteous God, your messengers declare your joy to the world. Embolden leaders and nations to make your justice and peace known throughout the earth. Uphold justice advocates and social service providers who risk their safety to help others. And we pray especially for the continued support for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; and Filimon Abraha; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Healing God, you choose those regarded as lowly to tell the good news of your love. Pour out your mercy and care on all who are sick, grieving, struggling, and lonely. Especially we pray for

Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Debbie; Beulah; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Bishop Kathy; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; Georgina; Teddy and family; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, your grace and mercy extend to all. Give comfort to those who mourn, and assure them of the peace you have granted those who have gone before us. May your light always shine in the darkness and let not the darkness overcome it. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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 was with you since the beginning, watching over and caring for us and strengthening us to be joined with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth to praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy and wondrous God, long ago you spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways. And in these last days you have spoken to us in your Word made flesh, Jesus, who proclaimed your dream of peace. He gave himself for our weary world, accepting death so that we might live, and held our darkness deep within until through cross and grave and empty tomb he set us free for love.

For on the night that he was betrayed, the Incarnate Word Jesus Christ sat with his friends for a meals, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it with them saying, "Take and eat. This is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and passed it around the table for 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 is this heavenly food that helps us to recall his death and resurrection, that reminds us of your love shining into our lives, even as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts. Pour out your Spirit upon us. Pour your Spirit upon the world, that all might know your very real presence with us, among us, and as one of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Gathered together in the light of God's word made flesh, 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

Taste and see God present with us.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

That Boy-Child of Mary (#293)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for all that you have done throughout history, for all that you do for us in the present day, and all that you will do in the generations to come. May we always feel the strength in your love that shines light into the darkness and gives us hope and joy, through the grace of Jesus Christ, our Saviour born to us today. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the song of the angels that praises the God who saves us,
the joy of the shepherds who we amazed by the love given to us,
and the peace of the Christ child born as one of us,
bless you, keep you, and shine on you, this day and always.

Amen.

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

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, love and serve God through Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

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