



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

7283 Nelson Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5J 4C2

Phone: 604-433-1515

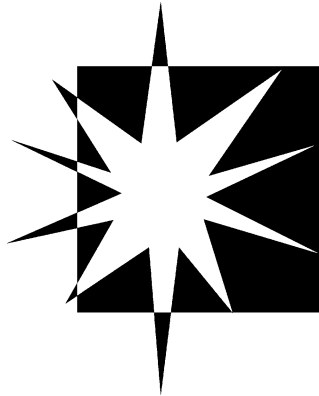
Website: www.graceburnaby.com

Email and e-transfers: office@graceburnaby.com

Pastor's email: pastor@graceburnaby.com

Follow us on Twitter! [@GraceLutBurnaby](https://twitter.com/GraceLutBurnaby)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/GraceLutBurnaby



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

December 24, 2024

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.

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 hə́nqəmíñə́m̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CHRISTMAS DIALOG and LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH (Psalm 96)

- ¹ Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² **Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.**
- ³ Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
- ⁴ **For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.**
- ⁵ As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
- ⁶ **Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.**
- ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honour and power.
- ⁸ **Ascribe to the LORD the honour due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.**
- ⁹ Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.
- ¹⁰ **Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples with equity."**
- ¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
- ¹² **Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O LORD,
for you come to judge the earth.**
- ¹³ You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.

GATHERING HYMN: Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful (#283) verses 1-3

GREETING

May the grace of the Word made flesh, the love of a God with us, and the fellowship that unites us all in the Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Creator God of all that is, was, and is to come, your radiant light shines forth and breaks through the darkness of the world, revealing to us all a truth so powerful, a promise so present with us, and a love so humble that it took form in a baby, opening our hearts to receive all that you have to offer, in Jesus Christ our Lord, born to us in the manger. **Amen.**

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

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.

¹¹ The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ 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: What Child Is This (#296) verses 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.

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

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

⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And 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!"

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

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

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

SERMON

As your grace appears to us, O God, may we see the salvation that you give. May we hear your Word come to us, ponder the love of your Spirit, and welcome into our midst the light of Jesus, through whom we pray. **Amen.**

So, here we are again, Christmas. Some of you who have been attending our Christmas Eve services for a while now may recognise that opening sentence because apparently, I've started pretty much every Christmas Eve sermon I've ever preached with that or something similar. "Here we are again, Christmas." I know that I've reused this a lot because in my sermon preparation for tonight, I went back to look at past sermons to get ideas on what to do or apparently not to do with this sermon. I look back at my past sermons when I prepare for a current one from time to time but not always, because it can be embarrassing to see some of the stuff I that I have written before. I sometimes cringe when I re-read and re-live some of those corny jokes that have escaped these lips. Sometimes when I look back, I shake my head at myself and wonder what on earth was I thinking when I said that. And this time around, well I wasn't wrong. I was actually surprised at how many times I've used that opening on these Christmas Eve sermons, but the worst part was that I also noticed that I've repeated more than just that line before.

It wasn't as bad as a word-for-word exact duplication from year to year. I've heard about some congregations that are able to lip sync their preacher's sermons because they hear the same ones so often. So I wasn't that bad, but I have repeated a lot of themes, examples, and even jokes. And I guess that's somewhat understandable. I'm not giving myself an excuse or anything, but we do get the same exact text every Christmas, this story out of Luke, so it's kind of hard to not repeat the same thing, or at least it is easy to inadvertently do so, because there is only so much "new" stuff we can get out of the same words. There are only so many ways to describe how miraculous the birth of Jesus is, how blessed Mary and those who were there are, and how God is with us throughout all circumstances.

So yeah, I've reused some of that material before. In sermons past, I've talked about things like the weather and how much we in the Lower Mainland always seem to hate it, especially if there's snow on the ground which thank goodness we don't have this year... yet. I've talked a few times about my history from before being ordained as a Lutheran pastor, how I worked in retail and how much of a nightmare the job would be during the holidays, and how glad I am to leave that "working-during-Christmas" life behind. And apparently more than once, I have talked about the lessons that we can learn from the classic Christmas movies, favourites like *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Home Alone*, and of course, *Die Hards 1 and 2*.

But it's not all fun and games as I usually do bring it back to the typical Christmas lessons and message of God with us, God present in the world, and God appearing in the midst of the stress, the trouble, and the hardship that we experience. I often mention how our Christmas might not be as perfect as we had hoped, like maybe we don't have the perfect gifts or decorations or apparently sermons, but that Christmas is perfect anyway because we're together, we are included in this community, and that God blesses us regardless of how burnt our turkeys might be... I have talked about the history of Christmas, the meaning of Christmas, and how we probably should have exponentially more candles if we're actually celebrating Jesus' birthday. I've talked about the shepherds, angels, and even the donkeys. I've talked about seeing God, recognising God, and getting to know God... and blah blah blah.

Whoa hold up, did I just "blah blah blah" Christmas? Well, no, I "blah blah blah-ed" my Christmas *sermons*. These regular, run of the mill, very ordinary sermons. These repeated jokes, themes, and lessons. These sermons that just get tougher and tougher to write because every year it's the same thing.

Same story. Same text out of Luke. Same old, same old.

I know, I know, you might be thinking that I'm just psyching myself out. Because really, what are the chances that any of you even remember what I said in last year's sermon? How about last week's for that matter? Or even how I started this sermon you're listening to now?

Now, I should say that by telling you this, that I'm not trying to get you to feel sorry for me or anything like that. I'm not trying to get you all to have sympathy on this poor pastor that gives bad sermons that no one listens to. And I'm certainly not trying to make any of you feel bad for not retaining any of the things that I say and apparently re-say over and over.

Rather, I'm trying to point out that no matter how bad or boring or repetitive a sermon can be, that does not stop God from entering our lives, piercing our hearts, and showing us love. No matter how corny the examples or cringy the jokes are, God is still present here with us now. No matter who is or isn't listening, God still appears in the form of a baby, bringing us hope, peace, joy, and love, and showed us just how much we mean to God as God's people, welcomed into God's kingdom and community forever.

That doesn't mean that I'll preach a bad sermon on purpose, but it does mean that the good news of God doesn't depend on how good or bad a sermon might be. This doesn't mean that this sermon will be any more or less forgettable for any of you, but it does mean that in spite of how it's retained, God will not leave us but continue to hold us with arms of love. This certainly doesn't mean that this sermon won't accidentally be preached again word for word in the future, but it does mean that God's Word made flesh, God's love manifest in a human body, God with us as one of us will always be a remarkable and unforgettable event, turning the ordinary extraordinary and worthy of repeating anyway.

I mean, I wonder if the shepherds were banking on an unforgettable moment when they clocked in to watch their sheep that night. I wonder if Joseph thought, when he initially agreed to marry Mary, that his life would change the way it did. I wonder if Mary, before she had that vision of the angel telling her that she will be miraculously carrying the child of God, if she expected to have her firstborn in a barn, that the first to arrive at the reception of her baby be strangers, that her oh so very ordinary life would become extraordinary.

You see, this is the message and good news of Christmas. That God is with us in the ordinary and extraordinary moments. God is with us when we expect it or don't, see it or not, recognise it or it goes unnoticed. God is with us throughout the mundane and the thrilling, the regular and the unusual, the repetitive and the unique moments that dart our lives.

So it's ok if you might have heard parts of this sermon before, because God continues to be proclaimed anyway. If not through my words, then through this community that we are gathered with here tonight. If not through this community, then somehow in this world, in our lives, in our interactions and relationships with others, loved ones, and even strangers. God will be proclaimed, because God is with us. With us in Spirit, with us in love, with us as one of us, made possible through the mystery and miracle of the Incarnation that we remember, cherish, and like Mary, ponder this night.

In this Christmas season, let us actively look, see, and recognise God at work in the world. Let us seek out the ways in which God is present in and around our lives and the lives of others. Let us open our hearts to accept the good news of Christ that reveals to us all how God is with us, giving us hope, leading us to peace, granting us joy, and filling us with a steadfast love, even in the unexpected and ordinary ways.

May we then, as God's people blessed with this revelation, share in the wonder of the shepherds, the faithfulness of Joseph, and the strength of Mary in our learning, our growing, and our recognition of God with us in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN: Love Has Come (#292)

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

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.

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

CREED (p. 104)

Together with all who bask in the light that shines in the darkness, 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.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

And as we are gathered into this light by the Spirit, 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 the light that blesses us all give you hope and joy,
the light that shines on us with grace, grant you unsurpassing and steadfast love,
the light that the darkness cannot overcome, be with you in peace, this night and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Joy to the World (#267)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live and love in the light.

Thanks be to God.