



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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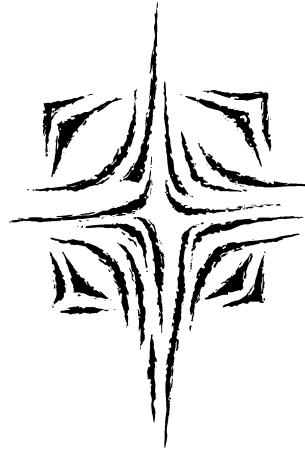
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Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025

Tree of Life

Today Isaiah prophesies that a young woman will bear a son and name him Emmanuel. The gospel is Matthew's account of the annunciation and birth of the one named Emmanuel, God-with-us. During these final days of Advent we pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," a beloved hymn based on the O Antiphons, ancient prayers appointed for the seven days preceding Christmas. On this final Sunday of Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one born to save us from the power of sin and death.

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather this day in the name of our shepherding God, who shines forth in the world and stirs in us our strength as we are helped, restored, and saved. And so we together worship and pray to the Lord God of hosts whose face shines upon us, whose grace restores us into community, and whose love brings us all into salvation, through Jesus Christ. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

And in this worship we light the candles on this wreath, which represent and reminds us of these days of preparation that we are in, looking forward to Jesus' entrance into the world. May our eyes be opened to see God's presence among us, that we be filled with hope, enlightened by peace, driven by joy, and empowered by love, through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240)

O unending love, come.

Let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

GATHERING SONG: People, Look East (#248)

GREETING

The emboldening grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the empowering love of God, and the embracing fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

HYMN OF PRAISE (TOL p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all might, you come to us in surprising and unexpected ways, and you remind us of your presence with us always. May our faith strengthen our recognition of your hand at work in the world, that we be lifted up by the hope, peace, joy, and love that you grant to us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 7:10-16

A reading from Isaiah.

An Israelite and Aramean military coalition presented a serious threat to King Ahaz of Judah. In response, Ahaz decided to secure his throne and kingdom by seeking Assyrian help. Isaiah reminds Ahaz that human attempts to establish security will fail. The prophet gives the sign that is the only source of true safety: Immanuel, God is with us!

¹⁰ The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how

to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

- ¹ Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- ² **In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and come to help us.**
- ³ Restore us, O God;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.
- ⁴ **O LORD God of hosts,
how long will your anger fume when your people pray?**
- ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
- ⁶ **You have made us the derision of our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.**
- ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.
- ¹⁷ **Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one you have made so strong for yourself.**
- ¹⁸ And so will we never turn away from you;
give us life, that we may call upon your name.
- ¹⁹ **Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

SECOND READING: Romans 1:1-7

A reading from Romans.

Most of the Christians in Rome do not know Paul. In this letter's opening he introduces himself as an apostle divinely appointed to spread God's gospel. The gospel's content is the promised coming of Christ, and Paul's mission is to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations, including his Roman audience.

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (TOL p. 10)

GOSPEL: Matthew 1:18-25

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Matthew's story of Jesus' birth focuses on the role of Joseph, who adopts the divinely-begotten child into the family of David and obediently gives him the name Jesus, which means "God saves."

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Speak to us, O God, that our hearts might burn for more of you in our lives, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

It's not every year that the 4th Sunday of Advent lands exactly on the winter solstice. I looked it up and the last time these two dates coincided was back in like 2014. It's not an exact schedule for various reasons as you know, but it happens roughly every 5 to apparently 11 years. So not super rare per se, but enough that I'm taking the time to talk about it now.

I'm assuming that we all know what I mean when I say winter solstice, yeah? The beginning of the winter season? It's the point of Earth's orbit, at least here in the Northern Hemisphere, when the sun is in the sky for the shortest amount of time. And because our orbit isn't an exactly 365-day cycle, the solstice varies, give or take a day or so. But what all that comes down to is, today is essentially the *darkest* day of the year.

And perhaps this day, this time, this point in our history is dark for reasons other than less literal light beating down on our land from a celestial ball of burning gas.

What I mean is, it's been a tough year, hasn't it? For us as individuals and as a congregation, we've been having a real tough go. We've had deaths, illnesses, just a lot of brokenness and hurt. We've felt deflated, we've been uncertain of the future, and we just seem to be really tired of it all. I'm willing to bet that more than one of us have metaphorically thrown our arms up in frustration and wondered *why*.

And it's not just us, but we see it around our cities, our country, and our world. There is just so much political turmoil, war, and injustice running rampant. Just last week we heard of these horrendous acts of hatred on the opposite side of the planet in Australia. And while news like that gets more headlines, we know that sadly that kind of hate isn't unique or rare. Rather, it happens daily. In all contexts. Maybe more subtle, maybe not as violent, but no less nefarious and painful.

Why are all these things happening? Why are we going through this? Why is life so dark?

And this isn't a new phenomenon at all, is it? It isn't just localised to this point in history. But every generation that has ever lived since the beginning of time has known hardship, has suffered loss, and has felt this darkness.

A darkness that is persistent. A darkness that permeates in pretty much all areas of life. A darkness that reaches every person in every culture, without any prejudice whatsoever. It is, so it seems, inevitable.

Our bibles are testament to this. This collection of ancient stories that describe the human experience from a different period of time, coming from a different perspective, offering perhaps a different paradigm from our own. Different, yes, but starkly familiar and understandable and relatable to any one of us who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Take today's gospel lesson for example. We hear about Joseph, the human father of Jesus, and his mental and emotional rollercoaster in trying to navigate what likely was seen as disappointment, betrayal, and that darkness that I just spent like roughly 500 words describing. I mean, he just learned that his fiancée, the one to whom he was betrothed, the woman that he looking forward to spending the rest of his life with, was pregnant. And by his reaction, I take it that it wasn't by him.

This must have been so unexpected. This wasn't part of the plan. This was enough for Joseph to abandon the life that he was hoping to have, albeit in the most polite way possible. And who wouldn't? Well, maybe not the polite part, but who, after hearing such earth-shattering news, wouldn't want to just give up? Change direction? Do what needs to be done to get over it and start fresh?

Like it wouldn't be hard to buckle under that brokenness. To be overwhelmed by that kind of ordeal. To be just defeated by this encapsulating and overcoming darkness.

While we don't know exactly what Joseph was going through other than how it's described in the text, the feelings we imagine he's having sure sound familiar. Maybe we've gone through similar situations. Maybe the same exact situation. But they are feelings that were likely had by us all at some point. We've been there. We've felt this darkness. We know what it's like to be lost and unsure as to what the future will hold. And that could take the wind out of our sails. We could be left deflated, dejected, and despondent. We might wish that whatever it was that happened just didn't happen. It would have been easier, more comfortable, and better if things had just stayed as they were. But the fact of the matter is that whatever happened did happen, and if it didn't, it probably will eventually. Difficulties, disruptions, darkness... again, all inevitable. And it's not exactly comfortable or wanted. But they will happen.

As you may know, I serve on the currently named Facing Today – Dreaming for the Future committee for our National Church of the ELCIC, that's actually where I was last week instead of being here. And as I've explained before, this committee is tasked to do exactly what that very wordy name states, we look at who we are as a church today... with all the shortcomings, all the struggles, and all the unfortunate shrinkage, and we dream about what we can be in the future, not just to survive but how we can be more faithful to who we are and our call to be God's people in this part of the world. This might mean change. This probably will lead to a shift of some kind. And from what I've heard so far, it has also caused some discomfort.

And I get it, change is hard. We don't always like it. We'd like to keep things the same. But the thing is, change is happening with or without us. No matter what our feelings are about it, the world is different from what it was. And the feelings that will come up because of it all are inevitable.

Can it be overwhelming? For sure, much of life is like that. But just because it can be, that doesn't mean that it's bad or damaging or even unnecessary. Rather, it means that there is *hope*. Hope for a brighter future. Hope that leads us to a peace in knowing that while we're in what we're in, we know that our position and regard in God's family remains unchanged. And this peace might stir in us a joy that reveals that no matter where life has us, where our situations have put us, or how deep we are in that darkness, we are dearly loved beyond measure.

All that doesn't take away the darkness per se, but it does remind us that the light is stronger, and able to dispel the darkness enough for us to see and feel that empowering love.

And I think that's what changed Joseph's mind about leaving what he probably assumed was an unfaithful life partner. I mean, the talking angel probably helped, but I think it was the realisation that the darkness doesn't last, that love prevails, and that God is, has always been, and always will be *with us*. This might not have taken away all of his feelings that he was feeling, but it probably helped him to further trust in God's hand of providence, leading and guiding him through the messiness of life, and revealing to him the light of God's love.

I don't know what the future holds for me, this church, or the whole of the ELCIC. I wish I did. I don't know how to solve all our problems. I wish I could. I don't even know if I'll be around long enough to see anything through. I hope I will be. But I do know, as sure as the days are getting brighter at least for the next 6-ish months, that God is with us even in the darkness. God is with us through all of whatever it is that we are facing. God is with us, in hope, in peace, in joy, and in love.

There's a reason that the winter solstice can sometimes land on the 4th Sunday of Advent. There's a reason that the proximity of our recognition of God Incarnate entering into the world and the shortest day of the year is so close. There's a reason that we can celebrate the light in the darkness, because this is a light that the darkness cannot overcome. That even when things can seem so awful, so broken, so dark, we can trust in a brighter tomorrow as we continue to better recognise the presence of the Christ, the Emmanuel, the *God With Us*.

So on this final Sunday of Advent, as we look forward to the coming birth of the Christ child on Christmas, may we hold onto the hope, peace, joy, and love of this season and be open to

accept God's promises, gifts, and grace today and throughout the year. Thanks be to God.
Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: He Came Down (#253)

APOSTLES' CREED (TOL p. 12)

Gathered together in God's encompassing love, 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 to have faith in God's truth and promises, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "in your loving mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Hear us your children, O God, as we pray for all who belong to Christ. Remind us of your presence with us even in our trouble, that we might live in confidence and faith. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Hear us your church, O God, as we pray for hope in the world. Grant us wisdom in our ministry and humility in our service to all people, that all might see you present with them always. We pray especially for 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. In particular, we pray for Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Coquitlam and their pastor Eric Krushel; and for Trinity Lutheran Church in North Delta and their pastor Jennifer Wilson. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Hear us your people, O God, as we pray for its healing and care. Protect the lands and seas and all that is in them, that life might flourish and prosper. And strengthen us in our stewardship of

all that you've entrusted to us, and may the world continue to reflect your love on us all. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us in the nations, O God, as we pray for those who hold power and authority over people and borders. Help those who create and uphold good laws and those working to reform what is unjust, that the world might better reflect your grace and that hatred toward those who are different might give way to an encompassing and unconditional love. We pray also for the continued support of those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; Filimon Abraha; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Meri Gabramikael. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us who are in need, O God, as we pray for all who face hardship in life, especially those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely. Fill us all with your love and grace and may we always look to you and lean on your strength. We pray especially for Kathy and family; Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Greg; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Kelly; Betty; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us in your community of faith, O God, as we remember the lives of our beloved dead. Encourage us through the rest of our journeys together and apart, that we might learn from those we've loved and lost and continue to feel them living still within our hearts and relationships. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the strength of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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 lifts us up out of fear and worry and brings us back into the confidence of your promises of presence and love, joining us together with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p.14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy God, holy and mighty, gracious and merciful, eternally loving and present among us, you enter our lives where we are in the midst of brokenness and pain, and you bring us into your salvation and peace, lifting us up out the uncertainties of life to make certain your grace and mercy. For in the fullness of time you send to us Jesus, you Son, as the one who would reveal your ways of redemption, restoration, and resurrection, and welcoming us to live with you and all the saints as your holy church.

For your Son Jesus revealed to us all the wonders of your love on that night that he was betrayed, when he sat with his friends for a meal, and upon taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it 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 continued to reveal your love by taking the cup, giving thanks, and giving 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 is by this food and drink that we are reminded of our connection to you, O God and to each other, as we continue to live in love and support, and together proclaiming this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

All honour and glory belong to you, O God, for you remain true as you have throughout the ages, showing all people the expanse of your love and grace, and welcoming us all to feast on your love, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, as one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p.17)

Welcomed into God's love and presence, 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 empowering us with love and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS

Lamb of God p. 17

I Come with Joy (#482)

Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory (#561)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have again fed and nourished us with your Word and love, and by the grace of your promises. Continue to work in us through all that we do in your name, that we be faithful examples of your mercy in all the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God the Shepherd bless you with strength and salvation,
God our Saviour shine forth in your lives and fill you with love,
God the Spirit look on you with favour and endow you with the peace in knowing the
Emmanuel, God with us, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light (#815)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, strengthened by God's love.

Thanks be to God.