

**Christmas Eve – 3:30 and 5:30 p.m.**

**December 24, 2023 – Candlelight Services**

**Love in Person**

**As We Gather**

Christmas is a celebration of love. Loving thoughts and deeds certainly are part of this holy season as goodwill among people seems more pronounced than at other times of the year. What is the source of that love? It is the love of God that is fully expressed in Christ Jesus, the babe in the manger. For centuries, hymn writers and poets have found meaningful ways of describing that love of God. A poem by English writer Christina Rossetti simply but beautifully shares the Gospel truth that blesses this season.

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign. (*LW* 46:1)

Through the words of gifted hymn writers and poets and the evangelists Luke and Matthew, we hear the angels and we see the star. Once again, the message of God's love echoes in our world!

## PREPARATION

### 379 O Come, All Ye Faithful

sts. 1, ref, 2–4

1 O come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold Him  
Born the king of angels: *Refrain*

*ref* O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!

2 Highest, most holy,  
Light of Light eternal,  
Born of a virgin, a mortal He comes;  
Son of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing! *Refrain*

3 Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God  
In the highest: *Refrain*

4 Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to Thee be glory giv'n!  
Word of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing! *Refrain*

Text: tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1802–80, alt.; John F. Wade, c. 1711–1786

Text: Public domain

## Invocation

P In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

## Opening Sentences

*John 1:14; Psalm 96:3; Psalm 98:1*

P And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

C **and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

P Declare His glory among the nations,

C **His marvelous works among all the peoples!**

P Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvelous things!

C **His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.**

## Confession and Absolution

P Joined in worship on this sacred night, let us make confession to our heavenly Father, confident of His forgiveness for Jesus' sake.

*Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination*

P Almighty Father,

C **we confess that we are sinners by nature and by thought, word, and deed. We have not always given You the best of what we have and are, and have not fully made room for You in our lives. With repentant hearts, we turn to You for mercy, seeking Your grace. In Your loving kindness forgive, restore, and lead us so that we may be renewed and live to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

P With joy I announce God's Good News to You. Our gracious God in His mercy has given His Son to be born, to live, and then to die for you and to rise again in glory. For His sake God forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Be at peace and rejoice in the Lord.

C **Amen.**

**WORD**

## Introit

*Psalm 24:1, 3–5; antiphon: Psalm 2:7*

P I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to Me, “You are My Son; today I have begotten You.”

C **The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.**

P Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place?

C **He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.**

P He will receive blessing from the LORD

C **and righteousness from the God of his salvation.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to Me, “You are My Son; today I have begotten You.”**

## 367 Angels from the Realms of Glory

1 Angels from the realms of glory,  
Wing your flight o’er all the earth;  
Ye who sang creation’s story,  
Now proclaim Messiah’s birth. *Refrain*

*ref* Come and worship, come and worship;  
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

2 Shepherds in the field abiding,  
Watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
Yonder shines the Infant Light. *Refrain*

3 Sages, leave your contemplations,  
Brighter visions beam afar;  
Seek the great Desire of nations,  
Ye have seen His natal star. *Refrain*

4 Saints before the altar bending,  
Watching long in hope and fear,  
Suddenly the Lord, descending,  
In His temple shall appear. *Refrain*

*(stand)*

5 All creation, join in praising  
God the Father, Spirit, Son,  
Evermore your voices raising  
To the eternal Three in One. *Refrain*

Text (sts. 1, ref, 2–4): James Montgomery, 1771–1854, alt.; (st. 5): Salisbury Hymn Book, 1857, Salisbury, alt.  
Text: Public domain

## Salutation

P The Lord be with you.

C **And also with you.**

## Prayer of the Day

P Let us pray.

O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

## Old Testament Reading

*Isaiah 7:10–14*

<sup>10</sup>Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup>“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” <sup>13</sup>And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

## Gradual

*Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 98:1a*

P To us a child is born, to us a son is given;

**C and the government shall be upon His shoulder.**

P And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

**C Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

P Sing to the LORD a new song,

**C for He has done marvelous things!**

## Epistle

*1 John 4:7–16*

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has



for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

**C Thanks be to God.**

## **Verse**

*Matthew 1:21*

**C Alleluia. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Alleluia.**

## **Holy Gospel**

*Matthew 1:18–25*

P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the first chapter.

**C Glory to You, O Lord.**

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup>but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C **Praise to You, O Christ.**

## Children’s Sermon

### 392 God Loves Me Dearly

1 God loves me dearly,  
Grants me salvation,  
God loves me dearly,  
Loves even me. *Refrain*

*ref* Therefore I’ll say again:  
God loves me dearly,  
God loves me dearly,  
Loves even me.

2 I was in slav'ry,  
Sin, death, and darkness;  
God's love was working  
To make me free. *Refrain*

3 He sent forth Jesus,  
My dear Redeemer,  
He sent forth Jesus  
And set me free. *Refrain*

4 Jesus, my Savior,  
Himself did offer;  
Jesus, my Savior,  
Paid all I owed. *Refrain*

5 Now I will praise You,  
O Love Eternal;  
Now I will praise You  
All my life long. *Refrain*

Text: August Rische, 1819–1906; tr. composite  
Text: Public domain

## Sermon

## **Creed**

## *Apostles' Creed*

**C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell.  
The third day He rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.  
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life T everlasting. Amen.**

## **Prayer of the Church**

**P** Let us pray for God's great mercy, asking that He would hear our petitions and grant them according to His gracious will.

Almighty and everlasting God, as we recall the first Christmas, we thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ, who came to earth in deep humility. We bless You that there was room in Your heart for the people of earth and for the sacrifice of Jesus as He left the glory of Your eternal kingdom in coming to earth to be our Savior, our Brother and our Friend. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

**P** As we think of Your chosen servants Mary and Joseph, we thank You for the gift of family. Grant that we always treasure the gifts we receive through them and seek to be those who cherish our family, our church family, our friends, and our neighbors. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

**P** As we fill this sacred space with song, we thank You for the gifts of poetry and music and for writers and composers who have enriched our celebration with their devotion and creativity. Grant that we ever seek to bring You all that is the best and most beautiful in our worship. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P As we hear again of the shepherds to whom the angel brought the greatest of news, we thank You for those who serve in the various vocations of life, including those whose daily work goes unnoticed or underappreciated. We commend to Your special care, Lord, those in the military, our first responders and medical personnel, and all whose service keeps them distanced from their family homes in these days. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P We pray for all situations and conditions of people, especially those on our hearts at this time. Be with all who need our petitions and our concern. Bless them according to their needs, Lord, and give us opportunities to be of comfort and assistance in Your name. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P As we pray, gracious God, we remember our dear ones who have completed their earthly lives and now are in Your eternal keeping. Grant that we follow their footsteps in ways of peace and love throughout our lives as we live to Your glory as those on whom Your favor rests. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P These and any other things You would have us ask of You, heavenly Father, grant to us for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C Amen.**

## **Lord's Prayer**

*LSB 162*

**P** Lord, remember us in Your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**C Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

## **Sharing of the Peace and Offering**

**Special Music:** “Still, Still, Still” —Wetzler

*After the Offering, candles are distributed, and we stand for the next hymn.*

## CAROLS

### 368 Angels We Have Heard on High

1 Angels we have heard on high,  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply,  
Echoing their joyous strains. *Refrain*

*ref* Gloria in excelsis Deo.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

2 Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be  
Which inspire your heav'nly song? *Refrain*

3 Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come, adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King. *Refrain*

Text: tr. The Crown of Jesus, 1862, Part 2, London, alt.; French  
Text: Public domain



## Lighting of the Candles

*The first person in the pew is asked to tip his/her unlit candle to receive the light from the usher. The light is passed along as each person tips an unlighted candle toward the lighted one.*

### 361 O Little Town of Bethlehem

- 1 O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.
- 2 For Christ is born of Mary,  
And, gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wond'ring love.  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the king  
And peace to all the earth!

3 How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heav'n.  
No ear may hear His coming;  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still  
The dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel!

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835–93

Text: Public domain

*The lights are turned off and “Silent Night” is sung by candlelight.*

### 363 Silent Night, Holy Night

*sts. 1–3*

- 1 Silent night, holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child.  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.
- 2 Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight;  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia!  
Christ, the Savior, is born!  
Christ, the Savior, is born!
- 3 Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Text: Franz Joseph Mohr, 1792–1848; tr. John F. Young, 1820–85  
Text: Public domain

*Candles are extinguished and the lights are turned back on.*

## **Closing Prayer**

P Let us pray.

O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that Light on earth we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

## **Benediction**

P The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace.

C **Amen.**

## **364 Away in a Manger**

1 Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.  
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,  
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

3 Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
And take us to heaven to live with Thee there.

Text (sts. 1–2): Little Children's Book, 1885, Philadelphia; (st. 3): Vineyard Songs, 1892, Louisville, alt.  
Text: Public domain

Creative Worship for the Lutheran Parish, Series B, Quarter 1.  
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