

Sunday, December, 24, 2023  
4th Sunday in Advent  
*Bright Lights of Bethlehem...The Brightest and Best Light*



*Soon our waiting and planning for Christmas celebrations will come to a close, and we will rejoice in Christ's coming.*

*Such waiting and planning can also guide us as we prepare for Christ's final advent, His ultimate coming, when He returns on the Last Day.*

*Until that glorious Day, when all portions of God's plan for our salvation will be accomplished, we are blessed with the peace which surpasses all understanding.*

*Such peace is an amazing gift that Jesus gave to Mary, the mother of our Lord, when she received God's Word from the angel Gabriel.*

*According to God's amazing plan, Mary would carry our salvation in her womb and then, some 9 months later, deliver Him into the world He would die and rise again to save.*

*Let it be to me according to Your word, she said, accepting God's plan for her life.  
May we say the same today.*

## ***Prelude***

### **#352, Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord**

- 1 Let the earth now praise the Lord, Who has truly kept His word And at last to us did send  
Christ, the sinner's help and friend.
- 2 What the fathers most desired, What the prophets' heart inspired, What they longed for many\_a year,  
Stands fulfilled in glory here.
- 3 Abram's promised great reward, Zion's helper, Jacob's Lord— Him of twofold race behold—  
Truly came, as long foretold.
- 4 As Your coming was in peace, Quiet, full of gentleness, Let the same mind dwell in me  
Which is Yours eternally.
- 5 Bruise for me the serpent's head That, set free from doubt and dread, I may cling to You in faith,  
Safely kept through life and death.
- 6 Then when You will come again As the glorious king to reign, I with joy will see Your face,  
Freely ransomed by Your grace.

Text: Heinrich Held, 1620–59; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–78, alt.  
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**P:** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

**P:** Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

**C: Wait for the Lord and keep His way.**

**P:** The Lord waits to be gracious to you.

**C: He exalts Himself to show mercy to you.**

**P:** For the Lord is a God of justice;

**C: blessed are all those who wait for Him.**

P: So that we may experience the peace of sins forgiven, let us come before our Lord with humble hearts as we confess,

**C: Gracious Father, I have sinned and fallen short of Your glory. By what I have done and by what I failed to do. I have broken Your commands and have not accomplished Your plans for my life.**

P: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, You alone give us the redemption and the restoration, the absolution and the ability to follow Your Word. Through the work of Jesus, the Word made flesh, do for us what is impossible apart from You.

**C: Forgive me, renew me, and lead me so that I may follow Your plan for my life and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your Holy name, Amen.**

P: In the mercy of our gracious Father, Jesus came into this world, journeying from the crib to the cross, from the tomb and to His throne of glory in order to secure your forgiveness according to God's plan of salvation. Receive His assurance of pardon this day as we celebrate Jesus' coming to save us. As a called and ordained servant of Jesus and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

P: Shower, O heavens, from above, and rain down Your righteousness;

**C: let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.**

P: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.

**C: In them He has set a tent for the sun,**

P: which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,

**C: and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.**

P: Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them,

**C: and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**

P: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

**C: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

P: Together, we pray,

**C: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that we may experience the peace of knowing all things are possible with You; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.**

## Children's Time

### Isaiah 9:2-7 [Sermon Text]

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; You have

increased its joy; they rejoice before You as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of His burden, and the staff for His shoulder, the rod of His oppressor, You have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Romans 16:25–27**

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

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

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

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the Child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."



And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

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

### **#357, *Verses 1-4, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear. Refrain

ref: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!

2 O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, Who ord’rest all things mightily; To us the path of knowledge  
show, And teach us in her ways to go. Refrain

3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on Sinai’s height In ancient times didst  
give the Law In cloud and majesty and awe. Refrain

4 O come, Thou Branch of Jesse’s tree, Free them from Satan’s tyranny That trust Thy mighty pow’r  
to save, And give them vict’ry o’er the grave. Refrain

**The Sermon                      *The Brightest and Best Light***

**The Gathering of our Gifts and Tithes**

**The Prayers of His Children:**

P: ...let us pray to the Lord,    **C: Lord, have mercy.**

P: ...who taught us all 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.**

**God’s Benediction**

### **#349, *Hark the Glad Sound***

1 Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes, The Savior promised long; Let ev’ry heart prepare a throne  
And ev’ry voice a song.

2 He comes the pris’ners to release, In Satan’s bondage held. The gates of brass before Him burst,  
The iron fetters yield.

3 He comes the broken heart to bind, The bleeding soul to cure, And with the treasures of His grace  
To enrich the humble poor.

4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, Thy welcome shall proclaim, And heav’n’s eternal arches ring  
With Thy belovèd name.

*Postlude*