



The Lutheran Church of Vestavia Hills
"Prepare the Way of the Lord"

**THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT:
THE POWER AND PROMISE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

December 17, 2023



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF VESTAVIA HILLS

201 So. Montgomery Highway Birmingham, Alabama 35216
Church office: 205-823-1883 PreSchool/MDO: 205-791-5200
Web Site: www.vestavialutheran.org
WORSHIP: 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. Sundays
SUNDAY SCHOOL: 9:15 a.m.
Church Office Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Monday thru Thursday



PASTOR: The Reverend Michael D. Ahlemeyer – pastor@vestavialutheran.org text: 205-201-8866
PASTOR EMERITUS: The Reverend Clifford Hellmers – vestluth@juno.com
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BOOK KEEPER: Melanie Goodson - bookkeeper@vestavialutheran.org
ADOPTED MEDICAL MISSIONARIES - Arianna and David Shirk, Madeline & Annabelle - shirkdavid@gmail.com



TO OUR GUESTS: We offer you a warm welcome in the name of Jesus. Please sign the Friendship Register. If you do not have a church home, we would be delighted to have you become a part of our church family. Please feel free to speak with the Pastor about membership in our congregation. If you do have a church home, we pray that God will bless you as you continue your growth in faith and love.



SUNDAY SCHOOL Adult Bible Classes meets in the Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall at 9:15 a.m. Children, Confirmation, and Youth classes also meet at 9:15 a.m. in the class rooms downstairs.



CHILDREN'S CHURCH and NURSERY Following the Children's Message, all children ages 3-7 are invited to Children's Church downstairs. They will return to the sanctuary after the sermon. A nursery attendant is provided for children ages birth to 3 years during our 8:00 AM and 10:30 AM services.



COMMUNION We invite all baptized Christians who acknowledge their sinfulness, trust in Christ as their Savior, and who recognize the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the bread and wine to join us at the Communion table. The practice of our congregation is to place the bread into the extended hand of the communicant. The wine is offered in individual cups; please take one from the tray as it is offered by the Elder. The common cup will be offered to those who do not take an individual cup. The cups in the center of the tray are filled with non-alcoholic wine, in consideration of persons who should not drink wine. Also, children who have not received Communion instruction are invited to come to the Communion rail, fold their hands and receive a blessing. Please notify an usher if you need a communion assistant to bring the Lord's Supper to you in the pew.

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PRELUDE/WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

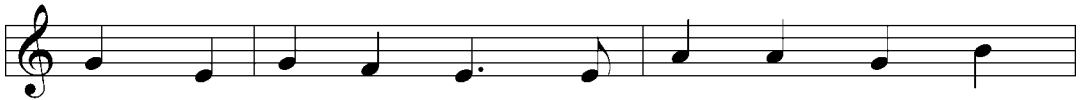
OPENING HYMN

"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"

LSB #358 (v. 1,5,7,13)



1 "From heav'n a - bove to earth I come To bear good
5 "These are the signs that you shall mark: The swad-dling



news to ev - 'ry home; Glad tid - ings of great
clothes and man - ger dark. There you will find the



joy I bring, Where - of I now will say and sing:
in - fant laid By whom the heav'ns and earth were made."

7 Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes,
And see what in the manger lies.
Who is this child, so young and fair?
It is the Christ Child lying there.

13 Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Prepare a bed, soft, undefiled,
A quiet chamber set apart
For You to dwell within my heart.

CALL TO WORSHIP

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

Come, Lord Jesus. Come. Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." (Luther: *The Ninety-Five Thesis*)

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestow on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

~John 1:4, 6-8

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light so that all might believe.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

~Advent Wreath Is Lit While Singing Hymn~

RESPONSE

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

LSB #357 (v.1)



O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive



Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here



Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!



Em - man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son. You sent John the Baptist to point to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now grant that we may know the promise and power of this salvation and serve You with the fruits of repentance all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Isaiah 53 :7-12

⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHORAL ANTHEM (10:30 a.m.)

S. Pethel

"How Far Is It to Bethlehem?"

*How far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.
Shall we find the stable-room lit by a star?
Can we see the little Child, is He within?
If we lift the wooden latch may we go in?*

*May we stroke the creatures there, oxen and sheep?
May we peep like them and see Jesus asleep?
If we touch His tiny hand will He awake?
Will He know we've come so far just for His sake?*

*Great kings may have precious gifts, and we have naught;
Little smiles and little tears are all we've brought.
For all weary children Mary must weep,
Her on His bed of straw, sleep, children, sleep.
How far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.*

EPISTLE LESSON

Galatians 4:4-7

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

THEME HYMN

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist Cry"

LSB #344 (v. 1-2)



1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry An - nounc - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin; Make straight the



that the Lord is nigh; A - wake and hear - ken,
way for God with - in, And let us all our



for he brings Glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare For Christ to come and en - ter there.

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the first chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." ²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Augsburg Confession: *Article XII. Of Repentance*

Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts:

One is contrition, that is terror striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin;

The other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution,
and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comfort the conscience, and delivers it from terrors.

Then good works are bound to follow,
which are the fruits of repentance.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE



HYMN OF THE DAY

"When All the World Was Cursed"

LSB #346 (v. 1-3)



1 When all the world was cursed By Mo-ses' con-dem-na - tion,
2 Be - fore he yet was born, He leaped in joy - ful meet - ing,
3 Be - hold the Lamb of God That bears the world's trans-gres - sion,



Saint John the Bap - tist came With words of con - so - la - tion.
Con - fess - ing Him as Lord Whose moth - er he was greet - ing.
Whose sac - ri - fice re - moves The dev - il's dread op - pres - sion.



With true fore - run - ner's zeal The great - er One he named,
By Jor - dan's roll - ing stream, A new E - li - jah bold,
Be - hold the Lamb of God, Who takes a - way our sin,



And Him, as yet un - known, As Sav - ior he pro - claimed.
He tes - ti - fied of Him Of whom the proph - ets told:
Who for our peace and joy Will full a - tone - ment win.

SERMON

Sermon Series: "Prepare the Way of the Lord"

Part 3: The Power and Promise of John the Baptist

Vicar Matthew Vathauer

VOLUNTARY

OFFERING

~please sign the Record of Fellowship during the Offering

OFFERTORY

"The Advent of Our King"

LSB #331 (v. 1)



1 The ad - vent of our King Our prayers must now em - ploy,



And we must hymns of wel-come sing In strains of ho - ly joy.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

LORD'S PRAYER

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.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

~Please be seated for the Distribution~

DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTION HYMNS

"What Child Is This"

LSB #370



1 What child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mar - y's lap is
2 Why lies He in such mean es - tate Where ox and ass are
3 So bring Him in - cense, gold, and myrrh; Come, peas - ant, king, to



sleep - ing? Whom an - gels greet with an - thems sweet While
feed - ing? Good Chris - tian, fear; for sin - ners here The
own Him. The King of kings sal - va - tion brings; Let



shep - herds watch are keep - ing? This, this is
si - lent Word is plead - ing. Nails, spear shall
lov - ing hearts en - throne Him. Raise, raise the



Christ the king, Whom shep - herds guard and an - gels sing;
pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you;
song on high, The vir - gin sings her lul - la - by;



Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The babe, the son of Mar - y!
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The babe, the son of Mar - y!
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, The babe, the son of Mar - y!

"When God Is a Child" (10:30 a.m.)

LCVH Adult Choir

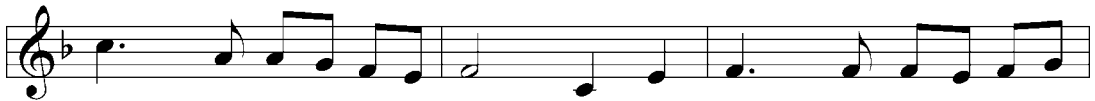
~Distribution Hymns continue on the following page~

"Once in Royal David's City"

LSB #376



1 Once in roy - al Da - vid's cit - y Stood a
2 He came down to earth from heav - en, Who is
3 For He is our child - hood's pat - tern, Day by
4 And our eyes at last shall see Him, Through His



low - ly cat - tle shed, Where a moth - er laid her
God and Lord of all, And His shel - ter was a
day like us He grew; He was lit - tle, weak, and
own re - deem - ing love; For that child so dear and



ba - by In a man - ger for His bed: Mar - y
sta - ble, And His cra - dle was a stall; With the
help - less, Tears and smiles like us He knew; And He
gen - tle Is our Lord in heav'n a - bove; And He



was that moth - er mild, Je - sus Christ her lit - tle child.
poor and mean and low - ly Lived on earth our Sav - ior ho - ly.
feels for all our sad - ness, And He shares in all our glad - ness.
leads His chil - dren on To the place where He is gone.

5 Not in that poor, lowly stable
With the oxen standing by
Shall we see Him, but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars His children, crowned,
All in white, His praise will sound!

"Away in a Manger"

LSB #365



1 A - way in a man - ger, no crib for a bed,
2 The cat - tle are low - ing, the ba - by a - wakes,
3 Be near me, Lord Je - sus; I ask Thee to stay



The lit - tle Lord Je - sus laid down His sweet head.
But lit - tle Lord Je - sus, no cry - ing He makes.
Close by me for - ev - er and love me, I pray.



The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay,
I love Thee, Lord Je - sus! Look down from the sky,
Bless all the dear chil - dren in Thy ten - der care,



The lit - tle Lord Je - sus a - sleep on the hay.
And stay by my cra - dle till morn - ing is nigh.
And take us to heav - en to live with Thee there.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

BENEDICTION

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.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"Prepare the Royal Highway"

LSB #343 (v. 1,3-4)



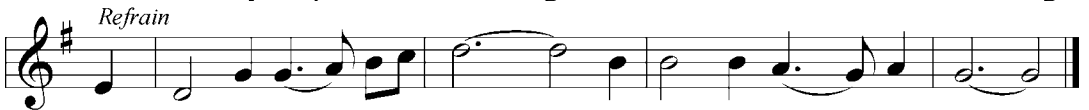
1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; The King of kings is near!
3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen To greet your prom-ised king!
4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; It comes from heav'n a - bove.



Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley A lev - el road ap - pear!
Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion Its trib - ute too should bring.
His rule is peace and free - dom And jus - tice, truth, and love.



Then greet the King of Glo - ry Fore-told in sa - cred sto - ry:
All lands, bow down be - fore Him! All na - tions, now a - dore Him!
So let your praise be sound - ing For kind - ness so a - bound - ing:



Ho - san - na to the Lord, For He ful - fills God's Word!

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE