

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Almost Christmas

December 19 & 20, 2015

5:00pm & 8:00am

AS WE GATHER

Christmas is coming! But the coming of the promised Messiah does not just signify a baby being born in a stable; it reveals the Son of God coming to a broken, sinful world to save each of us from our own sinful nature. He comes to rule His people with loving justice; He comes to sacrifice Himself for us; He comes to fulfill all God's promises to us.

WELCOME

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman,
born under law, to redeem those under law,
that we might receive the full rights of sons. (Galatians 4:4-5 NIV)

HANDSHAKES & HUGS

✠ PREPARATION ✠

OPENING HYMN #333 "Once He Came in Blessing"

Once He came in blessing, All our sins redressing;
Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy;
Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us.

Now He gently leads us; With Himself He feeds us
Precious food from heaven, Pledge of peace here given,
Manna that will nourish Souls that they may flourish.

Soon will come that hour When with mighty power
Christ will come in splendor And will judgment render,
With the faithful sharing Joy beyond comparing.

Come, then, O Lord Jesus, From our sins release us.
Keep our hearts believing, That we, grace receiving,
Ever may confess You Till in heav'n we bless You.

(Rise)

INVOCATION

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

People: Amen.

OPENING SENTENCES *Micah 5:2*

Pastor: Bethlehem, although "too little to be among the clans of Judah,"

People: was blessed as the birthplace of the "one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old."

Pastor: Elizabeth, although barren in her old age,

People: was blessed as John's mother and, filled with the Holy Spirit, welcomed Mary and the unborn Savior.

Pastor: Mary, although a young virgin,

People: was blessed to believe the promise and bear the Savior of the world.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION *Hebrews 10:7*

Pastor: Brothers and sisters in Christ, although we have been blessed with faith by the Holy Spirit to put our trust in our Lord Jesus, by nature we daily and presently lack faith in the Father's saving work of sending His Son to Bethlehem. Therefore, let us go to God, our Father, confessing our sins.
Most merciful God,

People: we confess that we have not always seen your daily and eternal blessings throughout our lives. We have let the troubles of this world overwhelm us. We have failed to share our Christian faith. We have neglected to hear your Law and to let your Gospel increase our hope and joy. For Jesus' sake, forgive us; renew your grace; and lead us with the saints before us to magnify your holy name.

Pastor: Jesus told His heavenly Father, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the book." He has won forgiveness and eternal life for us by His obedient life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection. 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.

People: Amen.

SALUTATION

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Pastor: Let us pray. Stir up your power, O Lord,

People: and come and help us by your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by your grace and mercy;

Pastor: for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

(Be seated)

✠ WORD ✠

OLD TESTAMENT READING Micah 5:2–5 (Little Bethlehem shall be the birthplace of the promised ruler of Israel.) "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace. When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men.

EPISTLE Hebrews 10:5–10 (Jesus came to earth to do His Father's will.)

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.' " First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

8:00 CHOIR ANTHEM

"Christmastime" Arr. by Lloyd Larsen

St. Paul's Choir

(Rise)

HOLY GOSPEL *Luke 1:39–56* (Elizabeth greets Mary and the unborn Jesus, and Mary rejoices in God, her Savior.) At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When

Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

(Be seated)

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SERMON HYMN #361 "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

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.

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!

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.

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!

SERMON

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Micah 5:2-5

(Rise)

APOSTLES' CREED *(found on the inside back cover of the hymnal)*

(Be seated)

OFFERINGS As your offering is collected, *please sign our attendance book* located at the end of the pew. If you are a visitor, please leave your address and phone. After you are finished, please pass the book along to others in your pew, and return the book to the center aisle. You may check the register to see the names of those to greet after the service.

(Rise)

DEDICATION OF OUR RENEWED IN CHRIST COMMITMENTS

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Pastor: Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their need.

After each petition:

Pastor: Lord, in your mercy,

People: hear our prayer.

At the conclusion of the prayers:

Pastor: . . . one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

✠ SACRAMENT ✠

WORDS OF OUR LORD

THE PEACE OF THE LORD

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: Amen.

AGNUS DEI

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Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

(Be seated)

DISTRIBUTION Those guests who desire to commune who are members of another LCMS congregation may do so; if you are coming from another church background, please see the pastor or an elder first.

HYMN #632 "O Jesus, Blessed Lord, to Thee"

O Jesus, blessed Lord, to Thee My heartfelt thanks forever be,
Who hast so lovingly bestowed On me Thy body and Thy blood.

Break forth, my soul, for joy and say: What wealth is come to me this day!
My Savior dwells within my heart: How blessed am I! How good Thou art!

HYMN #649 "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christians love;
The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear.

When here our pathways part, We suffer bitter pain;
Yet, one in Christ and one in heart, We hope to meet again.

From sorrow, toil, and pain, And sin we shall be free
And perfect love and friendship reign Through all eternity.

HYMN # 617 "O Lord, We Praise Thee"

O Lord we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee,
In thanksgiving bow before Thee.

Thou with Thy body and Thy blood didst nourish
Our weak souls that they may flourish: O Lord, have mercy!
May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary, That our sins and sorrows did carry,
And Thy blood for us plead In all trial, fear, and need: O Lord, have mercy!

Thy holy body into death was given, Life to win for us in heaven.
No greater love than this to Thee could bind us;
May this feast there-of remind us! O Lord, have mercy!
Lord, Thy kindness did so constrain Thee
That Thy blood should bless and sustain me. All our debt Thou hast paid;
Peace with God once more is made: O Lord, have mercy!

May God bestow on us His grace and favor That we follow Christ our Savior
And live together here in love and union
Nor despise this blest Communion! O Lord, have mercy!
Let not Thy good Spirit forsake us; Grant that heav'nly-minded He make us;
Give Thy Church, Lord, to see Days of peace and unity: O Lord, have mercy!

COMMON DISMISSAL

(Rise)

POST-COMMUNION THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Let us pray. We give thanks to you, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore you that of your mercy you would strengthen us through the same in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

People: and they shall call His name Immanuel.

Pastor: 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.

People: Amen.

CLOSING HYMN #332 "Savior of the Nations, Come" Stanzas 1, 2, 3 & 8

Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here Your home!
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood, By the Spirit of our God,
Was the Word of God made flesh-Woman's offspring, pure and fresh.

Here a maid was found with child, Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown: God was there upon His throne.

Glory to the Father sing, Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be Now and through eternity.

Preacher
Liturgist
Lectors
Acolytes
Choir Director
Organist

Pastor Gregg Stanton
Pastor Harold Bender
Jim Adams, Jodi Drew
Liz Percell, Elena Gonzalez-Clark
Nancy Hoelke
Roger Gottschalk

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Christmas Worship Opportunities

December 24th - Christmas Eve 4:00, 6:00pm

Christmas Candlelight Service 11:00pm

December 25th - Christmas Day - 9:00am

December 26th - 5:00pm

December 27th - 8:00 & 10:30am

December 31st - New Year's Eve - 6:00pm

