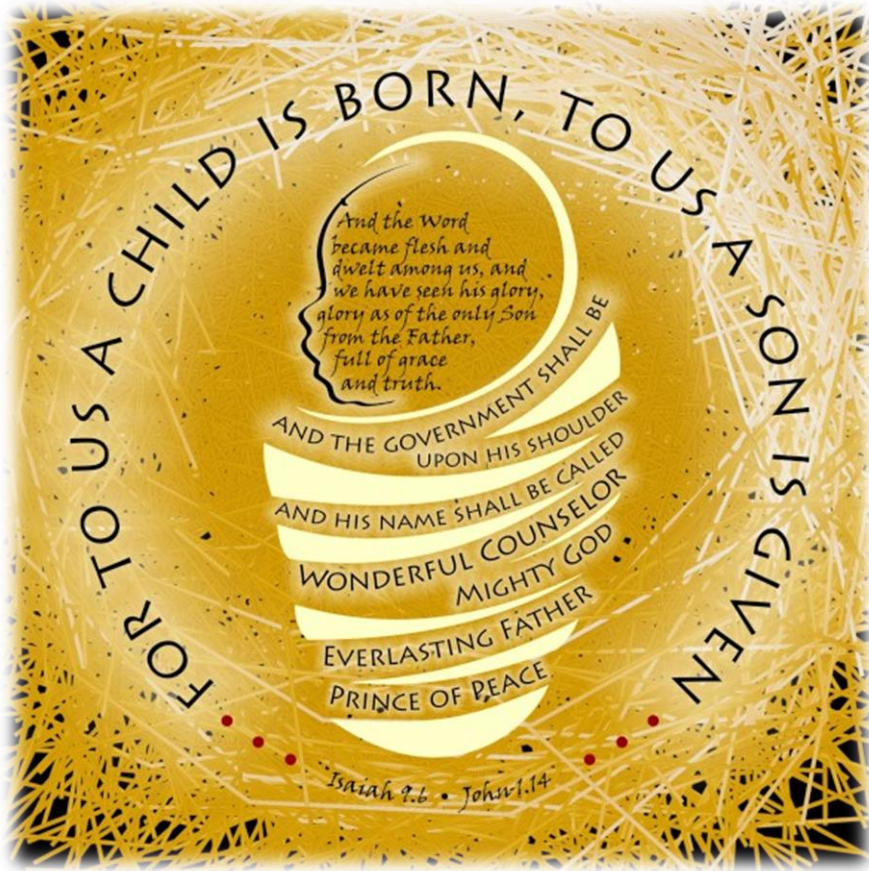


+DIVINE SERVICE II+
OF THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
+CHRISTMAS DAY+ 25 DECEMBER 2023+



The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

A member congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

902 S. Maple

Inglewood, CA 90301-3824

tgslcms.org

The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

“A Church where God gives and we receive.”

- ❖ The Rev. Edward Killian, Pastor (mobile) 424.293.6588
- ❖ Ms. Moira Killian, Secretary (Office) 310.671-7644
 - ❖ Mr. Jay Rogers, Organist/Music Director
 - ❖ Mr. Jose Lopez, Congregational Chairman
 - ❖ Mr. Greg Griffin, Acolyte

Welcome to our Divine Service!

We are pleased that you are with us.

+Worship Notes+

The entire service, including the rubrics of when to sit and when to kneel or stand, and

what to say, is printed out in this folder so you may follow along.

Welcome to our Christmas Divine Service at The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church! We are a congregation that confesses the Holy Bible as inerrant, that justification is by faith according to the Holy Bible and confessed in the 1580 Book of Concord. God bless you.

To all of you who are visiting our service this morning, we extend a most cordial welcome in Jesus' name. Please introduce yourself to our pastor. It is our hope that you will feel at home in our midst and will be blessed by our message of Christ crucified and risen for the sins of the world. If you are looking for a church home and would like to know about our membership, pastor would love to speak with you!

A Note From The Organist:

Wilbur Held's setting of "Of the Father's Love Begotten" features flutes and strings, with a fuller middle section. His skillful use of color is evident.

The Prelude and Fugue in C Major is from the Eight Short Preludes and Fugues sometimes attributed to Bach. The BWV catalog was compiled around 1950, and authorship was still uncertain, so they were assigned numbers in the catalog. A number of composers for these pieces have been proposed, but no definitive evidence has yet surfaced. The C Major piece has a sunny mood, which reflects the joy of Christmas.

Confession and Absolution

Hymn of Invocation

384 Of the Father's Love Begotten



1 Of the Fa - ther's love be - got - ten Ere the worlds be -
 2 Oh, that birth for - ev - er bless - ed, When the vir - gin,
 3 This is He whom seers in old time Chant - ed of with
 4 O ye heights of heav'n, a - dore Him; An - gel hosts, His
 △ 5 Christ, to Thee, with God the Fa - ther, And, O Ho - ly



gan to be, He is Al - pha and O - me - ga,
 full of grace, By the Ho - ly Ghost con - ceiv - ing,
 one ac - cord, Whom the voic - es of the proph - ets
 prais - es sing. Pow'rs, do - min - ions, bow be - fore Him
 Ghost, to Thee Hymn and chant and high thanks - giv - ing



He the source, the end - ing He, Of the things that are, that
 Bore the Sav - ior of our race, And the babe, the world's Re -
 Prom - ised in their faith - ful word. Now He shines, the long - ex -
 And ex - tol our God and King. Let no tongue on earth be
 And un - end - ing prais - es be, Hon - or, glo - ry, and do -



have been, And that fu - ture years shall see
 deem - er, First re - vealed His sa - cred face
 pect - ed; Let cre - a - tion praise its Lord
 si - lent, Ev - 'ry voice in con - cert ring
 min - ion, And e - ter - nal vic - to - ry




Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.

A - men.

Stand

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

Invocation

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

C Amen.

Exhortation

LSB 167

P If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

C **But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Kneel/Stand

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

Confession of Sins


LSB 167

P Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

C **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 will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

Absolution

LSB 167

P Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake 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.

C Amen.

Stand

Service of the Word

Introit

Psalms 93:1–2, 5; antiphon: Isaiah 9:2a, 6a, c

The people who walked in darkness have seen a | great light.*

To us a | child is born.

**His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, | Mighty God,*
Everlasting Father, | Prince of Peace.**

The LORD reigns; he is robed in | majesty;*

the LORD is robed; he has put on strength | as his belt.

**Yes, the world is es- | tablished;*
it shall nev- | er be moved.**

Your throne is established | from of old;*

you are from ever- | lasting.

Your decrees are very | trustworthy;*

holiness befits your house, O LORD, for- | evermore.

Glorify be to the Father and | to the Son*

and to the Holy | Spirit;

as it was in the be- | ginning,*

is now, and will be forever. | **Amen.**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a | great light.*

To us a | child is born.

**His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, | Mighty God,*
Everlasting Father, | Prince of Peace.**

Kyrie

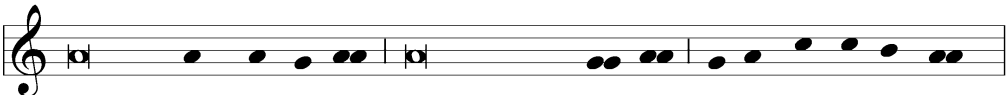
LSB 168



A In peace let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



A For the peace from a-bove and for our sal-va-tion let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



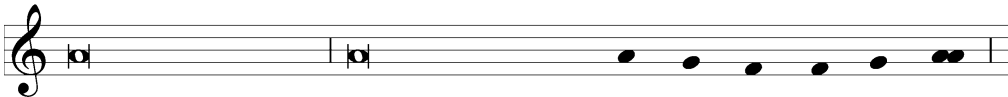
A For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,



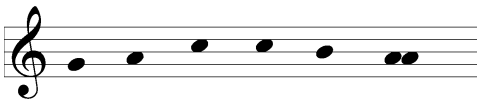
and for the uni - ty of all let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



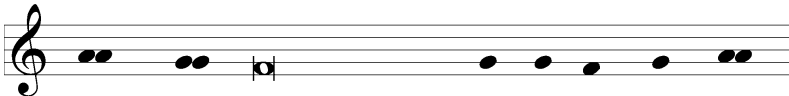
A For this holy house and for all who offer here their wor - ship and praise



let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



A Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.



C A - men.



This Is the Feast

LSB 171



A This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia.



C Wor - thy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain,



whose blood set us free to be peo-ple of God.



Pow - er and rich - es and wis - dom and strength and



hon - or and bless-ing and glo - ry are His.



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al - le -



lu - ia. Sing with all the peo - ple of



God, and join in the hymn of all cre - a - tion:



Bless - ing and hon - or and glo - ry and might be to

God and the Lamb for - ev - er. A - men.

This is the feast of vic - to - ry for our God,

for the Lamb who was slain has be - gun His reign.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

P The Lord be with you.

C And al - so with you.

P Let us pray.

Most merciful God, You gave Your eternal Word to become incarnate of the pure Virgin. Grant Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, that they may be ready for Your visitation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C A - men.

Old Testament Reading

Exodus 40:17–21, 34–38

¹⁷In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. ¹⁸Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars. ¹⁹And he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁰He took the testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark and set the mercy seat above on the ark. ²¹And he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses. . . .

The Glory of the LORD

³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual

Psalm 118:26a, 27a, 23

Blessèd is he who comes in the name | of the LORD!*

The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine up- | on us.

This is the LORD's | doing;*

it is marvelous | in our eyes.

Epistle

Titus 3:4–7

⁴When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Stand

Alleluia and Verse

LSB 173



Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia.

Holy Gospel

John 1:1-18

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



Glo - ry to You, O Lord.

The Word Became Flesh

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.


P This is the Gospel of the Lord.



Nicene Creed

C I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life  of the world to come. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

370 What Child Is This



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!

Text: William C. Dix, 1837-98

Sermon

Pastor Edward Killian

Stand

Prayer of the Church

Proper response is "Hear our prayer."

- P** Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that Your Son, the eternal Word, has become flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Extend His praise into all the world, that with us many would come to hope in His steadfast love. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C** hear our prayer.

- P** Gracious Lord, be pleased to bless all pastors and work through their proclamation of Your Son to bring the good news of happiness and salvation to all who hear them. Lord, in Your mercy,
- P** As our families gather in this holy season, give us patience, that we may be slow to judge and quick to forgive. Comfort the lonely with Your presence and help us extend the welcome of our homes and the friendship of Your grace. Make us mindful of those less fortunate, who celebrate this blessed feast in poverty and want, and teach us to be generous. Accept with our offerings the living sacrifice of our bodies to Your service and our voices in praise and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy,
- P** Your Son upholds the universe by the word of His power. Grant our nation to walk humbly before You. Bless our soldiers who stand watch this day. Keep them in safety as they serve us and uphold their families while they are apart. Lord, in Your mercy,
- P** Merciful Father, guard and keep all who are sick, lonely, overwhelmed by grief or poor in spirit, that they may be comforted and healed according to Your good and gracious will. Let them look to Jesus Christ and be reminded that He is the light no darkness can overcome. Lord, in Your mercy,
- P** Grant that we may come worthily to receive the body and blood of Jesus with faith in His bodily presence for us, that we may depart with grace upon grace from His fullness. Lord, in Your mercy,
- P** We thank You, Lord God, for all Your people who have gone before us and now rest in Your presence. Keep us faithful with them until that day when You make all things new; for You live and reign with Christ and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Offering *Collected after service in the back of the church.*

Offertory

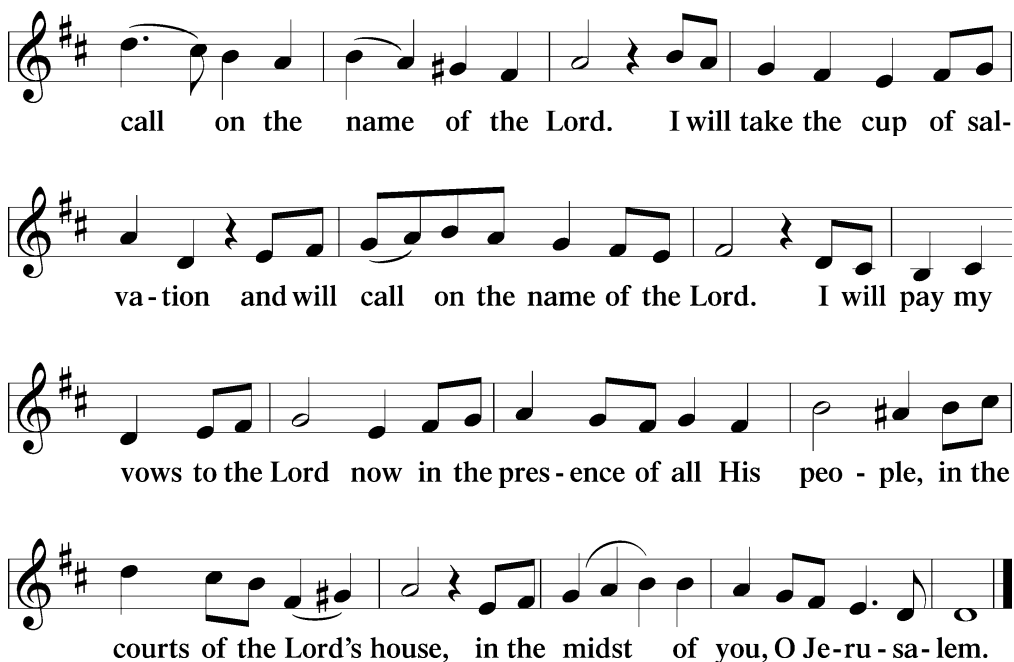
LSB 176



C What shall I ren - der to the Lord for all His ben - e-fits to



me? I will of - fer the sac - ri - fice of thanks - giv - ing and will

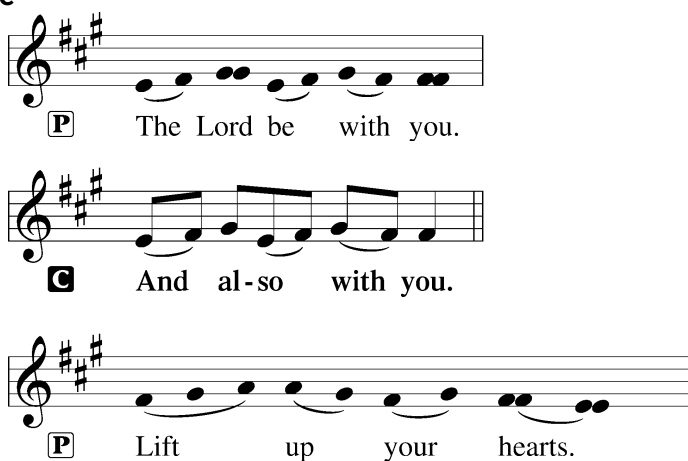


call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of sal-
va- tion and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my
vows to the Lord now in the pres- ence of all His peo- ple, in the
courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Je-ru- sa- lem.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface

LSB 177



P The Lord be with you.
G And al-so with you.
P Lift up your hearts.



C We lift them to the Lord.



P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



C It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Proper Preface (Abbreviated)

LSB 177

P It is truly good, right, and salutary . . . evermore praising You and saying:

Sanctus

LSB 178



C Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of



pow'r and might: Heav'n and earth are full of Your



glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.



Bless - ed is He who comes in the name



of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

The Words of Our Lord

- P** Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My ✠ body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My ✠ blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Proclamation of Christ

- P** As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

C Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

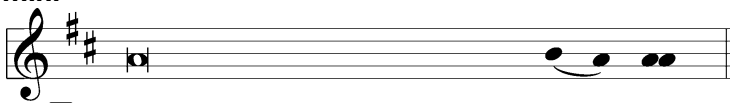
- P** O Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, in giving us Your body and blood to eat and to drink, You lead us to remember and confess Your holy cross and passion, Your blessed death, Your rest in the tomb, Your resurrection from the dead, Your ascension into heaven, and Your coming for the final judgment. So remember us in Your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

- 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.

Pax Domini

LSB 180



P The peace of the Lord be with you al - ways.



C A - men.

Agnus Dei

LSB 180



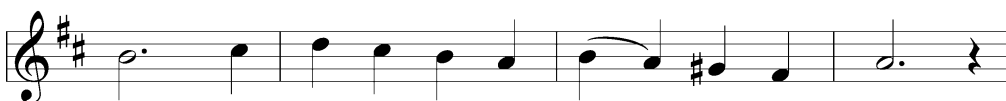
C Lamb of God, You take a - way the sin of the world;



have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, You take a - way the



sin of the world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of



God, You take a - way the sin of the world;



grant us peace, grant us peace.

Sit

Distribution



Distribution Hymn

374 Gentle Mary Laid Her Child



1 Gen - tle Mar - y laid her child Low - ly in a man - ger;
 2 An - gels sang a - bout His birth, Wise Men sought and found Him;
 3 Gen - tle Mar - y laid her child Low - ly in a man - ger;



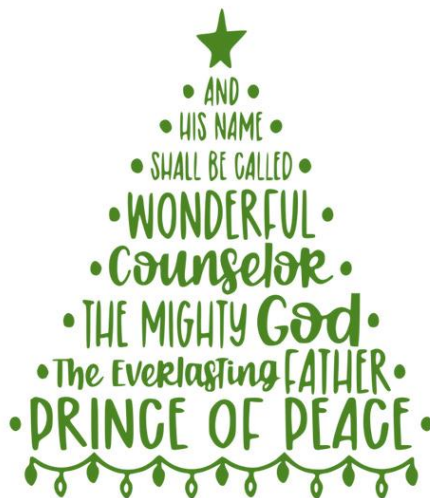
There He lay, the Un - de - filed, To the world a strang - er.
 Heav - en's star shone bright - ly forth, Glo - ry all a - round Him.
 He is still the Un - de - filed But no more a strang - er.



Such a babe in such a place, Can He be the Sav - ior?
 Shep - herds saw the won - drous sight, Heard the an - gels sing - ing;
 Son of God of hum - ble birth, Beau - ti - ful the sto - ry;



Ask the saved of all the race Who have found His fa - vor.
 All the plains were lit that night, All the hills were ring - ing.
 Praise His name in all the earth; Hail the King of glo - ry!



ISAIAH 9:6

Distribution Hymn

364 Away in a Manger

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 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.

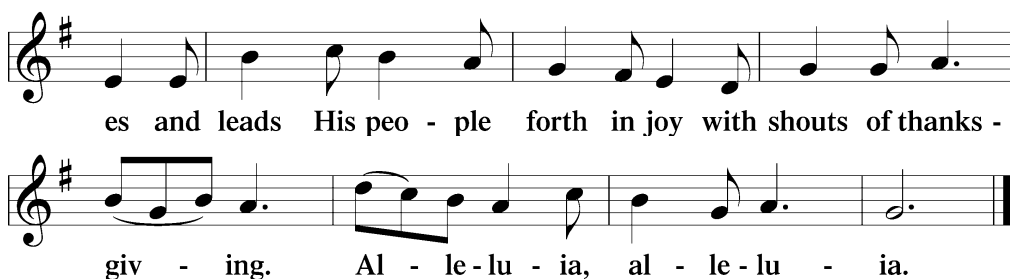
Text (sts. 1–2): Little Children's Book, 1885, Philadelphia; (st. 3): Vineyard Songs, 1892, Louisville, alt.
 Tune: James R. Murray, 1841–1905
 Text and tune: Public domain

Stand

Thank the Lord

LSB 181

C Thank the Lord and sing His praise; tell ev - 'ry-one what
 He has done. Let ev - 'ry-one who seeks the Lord re -
 joice and proud - ly bear His name. He re-calls His prom-is-



Post-Communion Collect

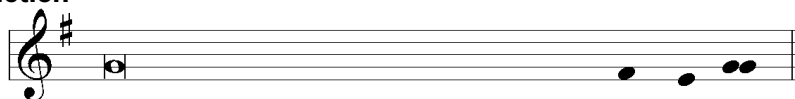
P Let us pray.

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.



Benediction

LSB 183



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.



Hymn to Depart

388 Go Tell It on the Mountain

Refrain

Go tell it on the moun - tain, O-ver the hills and ev - 'ry - where;

Go tell it on the moun - tain That Je - sus Christ is born!

- 1 While shep-herds kept their watch-ing O'er si - lent flocks by night,
- 2 The shep-herds feared and trem - bled When lo, a - bove the earth
- 3 Down in a lone - ly man - ger The hum-ble Christ was born;

Refrain

Be - hold, through-out the heav-ens There shone a ho - ly light.
 Rang out the an-gel cho - rus That hailed our Sav - ior's birth.
 And God sent us sal - va - tion That bless - ed Christ-mas morn.

Text (sts. 1-3): John W. Work II, 1873-1925, alt.
 Text (ref) and tune: African American spiritual
 Text and tune: Public domain

Prelude and Fugue in C Major BWV 553

Bach Circle

Acknowledgments

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A Prayer on Christmas Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give thanks to You that of Your mercy and compassion You caused Your Son to become incarnate, and through Him redeemed us from sin and everlasting death: We beseech You, enlighten our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may ever be thankful for such grace, and comfort ourselves thereby in all tribulation and temptation, and at last obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

An Exert from Martin Luther

“See, such great things are contained in these seemingly unimportant words, ‘Behold, thy king.’ Such boundless gifts are brought by this poor and despised king. All this reason does not understand, nor nature comprehend, but faith alone does. Therefore, he is called your king; yours, who are vexed and harassed by sin, Satan, death and hell, the flesh, and the world, so that you may be governed and directed in the grace, in the spirit, in life, in heaven, in God” (5).

“This is what is meant by ‘Thy king cometh.’ You do not seek him, but he seeks you. You do not find him, he finds you” (7).

“If, here upon earth, the body is unwilling, not capable of grace and Christ’s leading, it must bear the Spirit, upon which Christ rides, who trains it and leads it along by the power of grace, received through Christ. The colt, ridden by Christ, upon which no one ever rode, is the willing spirit, whom no one before could make willing, tame, or ready, save Christ by his grace” (28).

Lectionary Summary for Christmas Day

The Living and Life-Giving Word of God Dwells Among Us in the Flesh

The Lord sends out His ministers of the Gospel to make disciples *“of all the nations,”* so that *“all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”* For the Lord has *“bared his holy arm”* in the incarnate Christ (Is. 52:7, 10). The child in the manger, born of the Virgin Mary, is the very Word of God, the only begotten Son of the Father, *“whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world”* (Heb. 1:2). As *“all things were made through him”* (John 1:3), so are all things redeemed and made new in Him. In His body of flesh and blood, we behold *“the radiance of the glory of God”* (Heb. 1:3), *“glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). He dwells among us in peace, that we might have life and light and salvation in Him. For by His Word of the Gospel, we are born again as the children of God, bearing His name and sharing His eternal life.

Verse of the Week

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

A Snippet From 1517

"A Christmas From Below"

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"Whoever wants a gracious God must not bypass Jesus Christ, the proper mercy seat (Rom. 5:25); whoever seeks God apart from Christ will end up meeting the God, not of mercy but of wrath, as described by Moses as a 'devouring fire' (Deut.4:24).[1]

If we look back on his body of work during this season, we find Martin Luther's Christmas preaching is strikingly earthly. Commenting on the *Magnificat*, Luther speaks of God's work in the womb of Mary as a work done in the depths: "Thus God's work and His eyes are in the depths, but man's only in the heights" (AE 21:301). Christmas wrecks all attempts to penetrate God's hiddenness and seek Him out in Heaven. He comes to us clothed in our humanity. In obscure Bethlehem, God demonstrates His favor for sinners, "by stepping down so deep into flesh and blood" (AE 52:12). The eternal Word of the Father is made flesh to dwell among us. The incarnation is not a sign that points us to an absent deity, but the Creator of all things now Himself a creature without ceasing to be Creator!

This is no theoretical incarnation as if the message of Christmas was simply that God is like Jesus or that Jesus is a window through which we see God more clearly. No this boy in the manger is God. More than that, He is God for us. If John the Baptist was the great preacher of Advent, then the angel of Luke 2:10ff is the first and greatest preacher of Christmas. "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Preaching the Gospel always hangs on the "for you." This simple phrase saves hearers from being subjected to merely a lesson in history or chided with moralistic exhortations to strive for more joy or give more generously. Preachers imitate the angel announcing that the Savior born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes and resting in a manger is for you. The boy lying in a crib is the Word made flesh for you.

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In the fullness of time, God did not send a book, an ethicist, an action plan, a mystical experience, a liturgy or a church. He sent the Word. Hermann Sasse helpfully explains, "the consummation of revelation, the incarnation of the only Son of God is described in this sentence: 'The *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us, and we *beheld* his glory' (John 1:14). The characteristic feature of biblical revelation is that it is *historical* revelation." [2] In Christ, God "the King of kings and lord of lords, who alone has immortality" steps out of His dwelling "in inapproachable light " where no mortal can ever see or know Him (cf. I

Timothy 6:16) to be born of a woman located in what Martin Franzmann once referred to as “garden variety history” when Caesar Augustus ruled Rome (cf. Luke 2:1).

The preaching of Christmas brings us not to God in His majestic and terrifying hiddenness forever out of reach, but to God hidden in flesh and blood to reveal Himself as our Savior. God condescends to be Emmanuel among and for sinners. Luther observes that if God were out to destroy us, He would have not taken on our flesh. “He has the power to cast us into hell, yet he took soul and body like ours... If he were against us he would not have clothed himself in our flesh”[3]. In the weakness of Mary’s baby and in the poverty of a cattle shed, the glory of the glory is revealed in the flesh of our flesh to see, touch, and hear. Christmas is more than an object lesson or an iconic illustration of God’s good will; it is God coming in the flesh to die for those who despised Him. The crib and the cross are of the same wood, as Helmut Thielicke quipped.[4] The Lord takes on flesh and blood to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world by making Himself the once and for all sacrifice for sin. He was born to die and through His death we are reconciled to our Creator (cf. II Corinthians 5:18-6:2).

The heavens were opened above the prairies of Bethlehem, not to give the shepherds a glimpse into the celestial sphere, but to announce to them the birth of Him who was given for them and for us. God grant us preachers who mimic the angel in proclaiming the Savior as the Father’s gift for you. *John T. Pless, Pastor Craft: Essays and Sermons*

