

## The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 20, 2020

Note: In preparation for this service, you may choose to use an Advent wreath. The Advent wreath has four candles around its circumference. Three of them are blue or purple. One is rose-colored. A white candle is in the middle of the wreath. On the Fourth Sunday in Advent, we light all four candles around the Advent wreath. You may choose to light it now or in the service where indicated.

God chose a faithful young woman to be the mother of our Savior. She recognized that in the eyes of the world she was not highly regarded but God set the might of the world in motion to bring her and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus to be born. He brings down rulers from their thrones but lifts up the humble. During this Advent time and always may we, like Mary, humbly serve the Light of the World.

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!

*Psalm 24:7-10*

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel** Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62  
Stanzas 1-3



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive  
2 O come, Thou Wis - dom from on high, Who or - d'rest all things  
3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on



Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here  
might - i - ly; To us the path of knowl - edge show,  
Si - nai's height In an - cient times didst give the Law



Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!  
And teach us in her ways to go. Re - joice! Re - joice!  
In cloud and maj - es - ty and awe. Re - joice! Re - joice!



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

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**L** In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

**L** Our help is in the name of the Lord,

**C** **who made heaven and earth.** (*Psalm 124:8*)

**L** Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

**C** **Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.** (*Psalm 19:12, 13*)

**L** If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

**C** **But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.** (*Psalm 130:3–4*)

**L** Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

**C** **God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.** (*Luke 18:13*)

**L** Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C** Amen.

#### LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH - THE FOURTH CANDLE:

**L** As we light the fourth candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice that God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of Immanuel, God with us, our Savior, Jesus. May we join with Mary in magnifying the Lord for doing great and mighty things through such a lowly birth in Bethlehem. Let us also humble ourselves to prepare for our Savior, the Light of the World, to come.

**C** 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.

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.

From the manger newborn light  
Shines in glory through the night.  
Darkness there no more resides;  
In this light faith now abides.

## Introit Psalm 19:1, 4c, 5–6; antiphon Isaiah 45:8a, b

- L** Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness;  
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.
- C** **The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
In them he has set a tent for the sun,**
- L** which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
- C** **Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**
- C** **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.**
- L** Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness;  
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.

## Kyrie

- |                    |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> <b>Have Mercy on us.</b> |
| <b>L</b> O Christ, | <b>C</b> <b>Have Mercy on us.</b> |
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> <b>Have Mercy on us.</b> |

## Gloria in Excelsis ~ (omitted during the season of Advent)

## Collect of the Day

- L** Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** **Amen.**

## 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

<sup>1</sup>Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, <sup>2</sup>the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” <sup>3</sup>And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.” <sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup>“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup>In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’” <sup>8</sup>Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup>And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’”

- L** This is the Word of the Lord.
- C** **Thanks be to God.**

## Gradual Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26 alt.

- L** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.
- C** **Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.**
- L** Behold, your king is coming to you;
- C** **righteous and having salvation.**
- L** Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
- C** **From the house of the Lord we bless you.**

## Psalm 89:1–5

- L** <sup>1</sup>I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;  
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.
- C** <sup>2</sup>**For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;  
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”**
- L** <sup>3</sup>You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:
- C** <sup>4</sup>**“I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.”**
- L** <sup>5</sup>Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
- C** **your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!**

## Romans 16:25–27

<sup>25</sup>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 <sup>26</sup>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— <sup>27</sup>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.**

## Verse of the Day: Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
- C** **Alleluia, Alleluia, And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.**

## Luke 1:26–38

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.
- C** **Glory to You, O Lord.**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

<sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> 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.

**L** This is the Gospel of the Lord.

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

**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 everlasting. Amen.

**Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus** Lutheran Service Book 338, Lutheran Worship 22, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a



1 Come, Thou long - ex - pect-ed Je-sus, Born to set Thy peo-ple free;  
2 Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er; Born a child and yet a king!



From our fears and sins re-lease us; Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Born to reign in us for-ev - er, Now Thy gra - cious king-dom bring.



Is - rael's strength and con-so - la-tion, Hope of all the earth Thou art,  
By Thine own e - ter-nal Spir-it Rule in all our hearts a - lone;



Dear de - sire of ev - 'ry na-tion, Joy of ev - 'ry long-ing heart.  
By Thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it Raise us to Thy glo - rious throne.

## Devotional thoughts:

In the Old City of Jerusalem, just north of the Temple Mount, stands a church near the Lion's Gate. Nearby are the remains of the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a man who was unable to walk. This church has some of the most wonderful acoustics. It is a spiritual experience to stand there under the dome and sing hymns with fellow believers. The church is known as the Church of Saint Anne.

Lutherans may have heard of St. Anne. On July 2, 1505, the twenty-one-year-old Martin Luther was returning to the University of Erfurt when lightning struck nearby, possibly knocking him to the ground and injuring his leg. In fear, he cried out, "Help me, St. Anne, I will become a monk!" And as they say, "The rest is history."

The Church of Saint Anne is dedicated to Anne and Joachim, the parents of the Virgin Mary. It is the traditional birthplace of Mary.

What do you know about the Virgin Mary? You may have seen a statue of her in front of a church or a home. This time of year, she graces many Nativity Scenes.

In fact, the Bible does not reveal the names of Mary's parents or her birthplace. But we do learn much about Mary by carefully reading what the Bible does say about her. The Gospel of Luke is a good starting place.

We first learn of Mary in our Gospel lesson for today, where we read, "The virgin's name was Mary." In Greek, her name is Miriam. She shared her name with Miriam of the Old Testament, the sister of Moses and Aaron. From this, we may infer that her parents (whatever their names may have been) were devout Jews.

Why is it that Luke can fill in so many details about the events surrounding Jesus' birth? A little detective work may provide the answer.

In the first verses of his Gospel, Luke informs us that he is writing about the life of Jesus after having done significant research, even contacting eyewitnesses. We then read about the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus in the first two chapters. Where does Luke get his information? Twice, Luke gives us clues. In Luke 2:19, he reports, "Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Then again in Luke 2:51, we read, "His mother treasured up all these things in her heart." These two statements lead us to deduce that Luke knew Mary personally or spoke to someone very close to her.

With this in mind, it may well be that Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel comes to us from her own memory of the event. It has been dramatically portrayed in Christian art throughout the centuries. It is retold each year by children in countless Christmas pageants. Here we learn one of the most important things about Mary. She was a woman of faith. When she was told by the angel, "Nothing will be impossible with God," she responded, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

God has seen no need to send the angel Gabriel to me. But he has spoken to me. He has spoken to me through His holy word. He has spoken to you in the same way. Like Mary, He calls us to faith. He calls us to believe that nothing will be impossible with God!

The "impossible" happened this year! At least, something that many of us thought was impossible. We are living through a worldwide pandemic of epic proportions. We have witnessed untold suffering and death.

For countless people, the impossible has happened. They have examined their personal frailty and weakness. We have learned again of our need to trust in God.

But why trust in God? After all, what is there that is good about me that would make God care? I don't belong on His "nice" list. I have fallen short of His glory. I have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Do you want to know a secret? So have you!

But the impossible has happened! God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life! I know that doesn't seem reasonable but it is true.

When the disciples heard Jesus say, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24), they responded with this question, "Who then can be saved?" It seems impossible! Jesus calmed their fears by assuring them, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

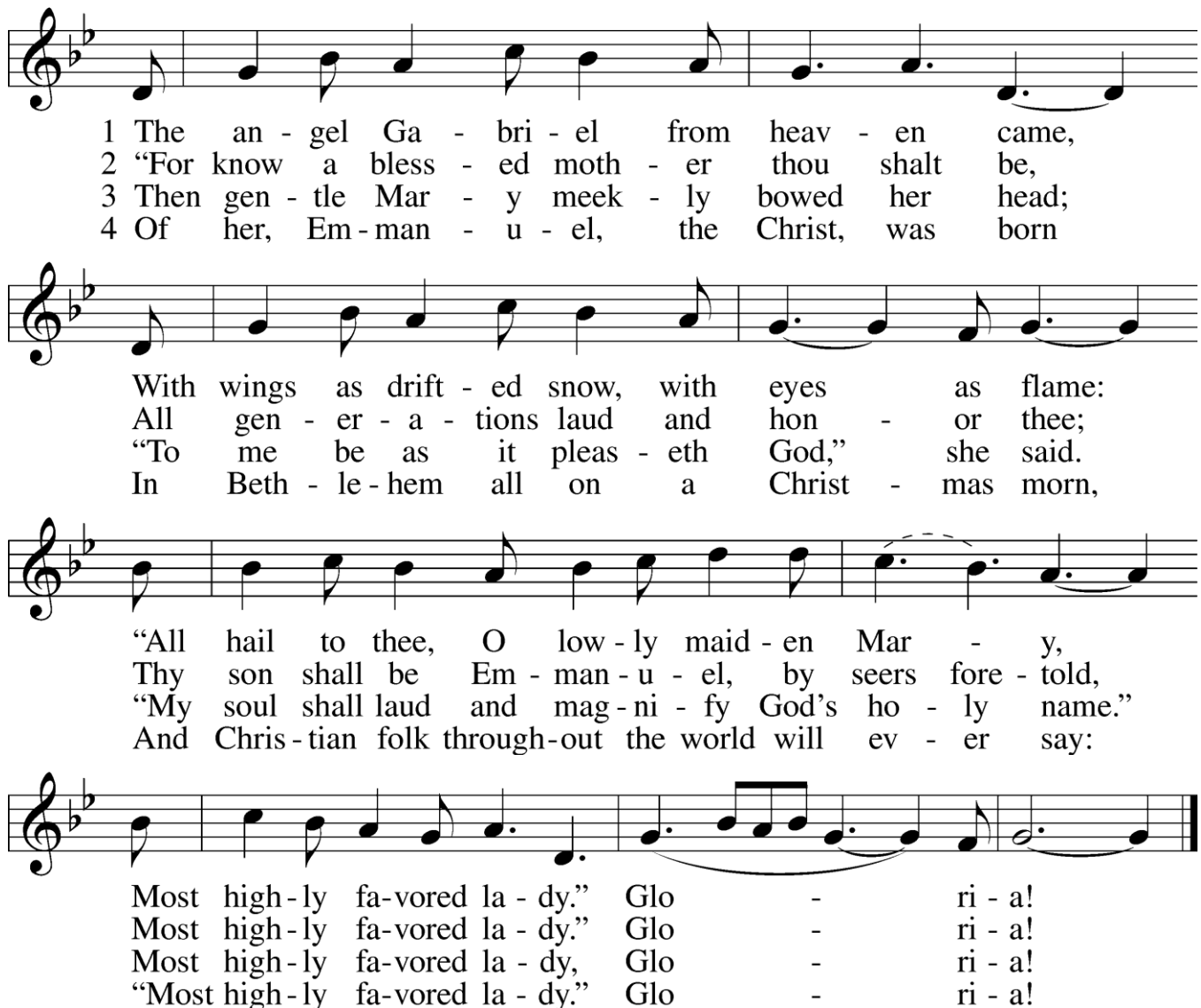
The impossible became possible when Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world. The impossible became possible when Jesus rose from the dead. The impossible became possible when God welcomed you into His family.

This Advent and Christmas are difficult. We are pressed upon and strained in many ways. But this does not lessen our true joy. The impossible foretold by Isaiah has happened, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14 KJV). “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)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

### The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came Lutheran Service Book 356, Lutheran Worship n/a, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a



1 The an - gel Ga - bri - el from heav - en came,  
 2 “For know a bless - ed moth - er thou shalt be,  
 3 Then gen - tle Mar - y meek - ly bowed her head;  
 4 Of her, Em - man - u - el, the Christ, was born

With wings as drift - ed snow, with eyes as flame:  
 All gen - er - a - tions laud and hon - or thee;  
 “To me be as it pleas - eth God,” she said.  
 In Beth - le - hem all on a Christ - mas morn,

“All hail to thee, O low - ly maid - en Mar - y,  
 Thy son shall be Em - man - u - el, by seers fore - told,  
 “My soul shall laud and mag - ni - fy God’s ho - ly name.”  
 And Chris - tian folk through - out the world will ev - er say:

Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.” Glo - ri - a!  
 Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.” Glo - ri - a!  
 Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy, Glo - ri - a!  
 “Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.” Glo - ri - a!

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**L** O Most High, You have favored us in the incarnation of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Mary. In everything, let it be to us according to Your Word. Give us faith to believe that nothing is impossible with You, and so to pray boldly in childlike confidence.

**G** Amen.

**L** O Most High, we give You thanks for Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Key of David and the scepter of the house of Israel. By His death, He has opened the kingdom of heaven and closed the gates of hell for all who trust in Him. By His resurrection, He has rescued the prisoners who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. Grant that, as we recall with thanksgiving His advent in the flesh, we may always confess Him and remain watchful for His advent in glory at the Last Day; 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.

**L** Almighty God, in this time of national distress and distrust, give our leaders wisdom for the challenges ahead. Send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. Protect all who attend to our needs during this time of national emergency and pandemic.

**C** Amen.

**C** I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

**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.

**L** Let us bless the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

**L** The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

**C** Amen.

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel** Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62  
Stanzas 4-7

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

5 O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery. Refrain

6 O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight. Refrain

7 O come, Desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,  
And be Thyself our King of Peace. Refrain



**Service Notes:**

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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# Enhancing Your Worship

## Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27  
My eyes are awake through the night watches,  
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

### The Fourth Sunday in Advent

### December 21 – December 26

Note: The Christmas season begins with the Christmas Eve service.  
It is preferably conducted after sunset on December 24.

#### Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you mediate on what God has done for you.

#### Monday

Light all four candles around the Advent wreath.

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
**C** Amen.

#### Introit Psalm 19:1, 4c, 5–6; antiphon Isaiah 45:8a, b

- L** Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness;  
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.  
**C** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
**L** which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.  
**C** Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.  
**C** 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.  
**L** Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness;  
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.

#### Kyrie

- |                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |
| <b>L</b> O Christ, | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |

Today is the winter solstice. Today is also the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, the so-called, “Christmas Star.” You might be able to see them just after sunset in the southwest sky.

While Christmas does fall close to the solstice, an honest and thorough study of the history of the date of Christmas will show that early Christians did not celebrate the Savior’s birth at this time of year because of the solstice. That’s a story for another day.

Likewise, many have sought to explain the Star of the Wise men as a conjunction of planets. However, a careful reading of Matthew will show that such a heavenly event does not fit the text. Again, this is a story for another day.

What we do learn by looking at the sky is explained in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

Before electric lights, the night sky was a universal experience of humanity. Today, we spend most nights inside our homes. When we do go out at night, the stars fade from sight. I am fortunate enough to spend some nights each year many miles from electricity. There, I often go out at night and think of shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night.

When you can, take a moment a look up on a clear night. Marvel at the moon and the stars. Enjoy the northern lights when you have the opportunity. Then pause and realize that the God of creation has revealed Himself to you in the Bible.

There you learn that the baby born in Bethlehem came into the world to save sinners! There is nothing more marvelous than that.

**L** Let us pray. O Great Shepherd of the sheep grant to us true repentance and faith as You restore us and save us. Let your face shine upon us and give us peace.

**C** Amen

## Tuesday

Light all four candles around the Advent wreath.

**L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

## Verse of the Day: Matthew 1:23a

**L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.

**C** Alleluia, Alleluia, And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.

## Kyrie

**L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

**L** O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.

**L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

**L** Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** Amen

This week, we have our third and final “stir up” collect of Advent. Again we pray for God’s power to be stirred up on our behalf. What do you beg God to do with His power? Heal an illness? Provide financial

support? Restore a relationship? Grant authority to the righteous? These are all noble prayers. But our prayer today is for God's power to lift from our shoulders the crushing burden of sin.

There is only one solution to the problem of sin, God's grace and mercy for us in Jesus. Soon the Hallmark Christmas movies will end. Stores will start selling Valentine's Day candy. Christmas lights will go away. Christmas carols will no longer be sung. But Christmas continues.

Christmas continues because God's grace and mercy continue. They are new every day. We live under the cross, in view of the empty tomb. We will always sing in our hearts, "Christ the Savior is born!."

Prayer: Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## Wednesday

Light all four candles around the Advent wreath.

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
**C** Amen.

## Verse of the Day: Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.  
**C** Alleluia, Alleluia, And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.

## Psalm 89:1–5

- L** <sup>1</sup>I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;  
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.  
**C** <sup>2</sup>For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever;  
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."  
**L** <sup>3</sup>You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
**C** <sup>4</sup>"I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations."  
**L** <sup>5</sup>Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,  
**C** your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

## Kyrie

- L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.  
**L** O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.  
**L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

As we often say in our family, happy Christmas Eve Eve! Advent has been an especially difficult journey this year. Covid-19 cases are surging. The economy is staggering. It's been a long and winding road! How did we ever make it?

There is only one answer to that question. God's steadfast love!

Psalm 89 has a total of 52 verses! Our psalm this week is only the first 5. Let's look at a few more.

Not only do the heavens praise the wonders of the Lord (v5) but He also rules "rule the raging of the sea." (v.9),

Consider verses 11- 18:

- <sup>11</sup> The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;  
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.
- <sup>12</sup> The north and the south, you have created them;  
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.
- <sup>13</sup> You have a mighty arm;  
strong is your hand, high your right hand.
- <sup>14</sup> Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;  
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.
- <sup>15</sup> Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,  
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,
- <sup>16</sup> who exult in your name all the day  
and in your righteousness are exalted.
- <sup>17</sup> For you are the glory of their strength;  
by your favor our horn is exalted.
- <sup>18</sup> For our shield belongs to the Lord,  
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

When we consider God's might and power and the blessings that He brings to us, especially in Jesus, we cannot help but conclude our thoughts with the last verse of this psalm:

- <sup>52</sup> Blessed be the Lord forever!  
Amen and Amen.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for Your steadfast love in Christ. You are the King of the Universe, yet You love us as Your children, grant that we would be forever grateful, through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

## Thursday – Christmas Eve

Today is the final day of Advent. There is a Christmas Eve service of Nine Lessons and Carols for you to download to use in the evening if you like. It is the first service of the Christmas season.

Light all four candles around the Advent wreath.

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
**C** Amen.

## Verse of the Day: Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.  
**C** Alleluia, Alleluia, And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.

## Kyrie

- |                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |
| <b>L</b> O Christ, | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |
| <b>L</b> O Lord,   | <b>C</b> Have Mercy on us. |

## 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

- <sup>1</sup>Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies,  
<sup>2</sup>the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."  
<sup>3</sup>And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."  
<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup>"Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the

LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup>In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”” <sup>8</sup>Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup>And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.

<sup>16</sup>And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.””

This portion of 2 Samuel talks about the building of the temple in Jerusalem. David is concerned that he lives in a nice house of cedar but God is still dwelling in a tent (the tabernacle). Of course, David is not permitted to build the temple as a house in which God dwells. He may raise the finances but building it will be left to his son, Solomon. The temple built by Solomon was magnificent. It stood for centuries until destroyed by the Babylonians.

Following the exile, the returning Jews again built a temple. Unfortunately, this temple could not compare with the one built by Solomon, When people who remembered the original temple saw the second one, they wept!

In Jesus’ time, the temple was again spectacular. It had been expanded and rebuilt by Herod the Great. Yet Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Jesus wasn’t speaking of the temple built with stones, He was speaking about the temple of his body (John 2:21).

The story of Christmas is the story of God Himself coming to live with His people in the person of Jesus. This is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah referenced in Matthew 1:23, “ ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”

God is still living with us today, wherever we are. This is the promise recorded in the last words of the Gospel of Matthew, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Christmas is the story of God coming into our world so that we will one day live in eternity with Him forever.

Prayer: Mercifully hear, O Lord, the prayers of Your people, that we may always be aware of Your presence in our lives and grant us the faith to trust Your promise of eternity with You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **Friday – Christmas, The Nativity of our Lord**

There is a separate complete service for Christmas Day for you to download.  
Light all the candles on the Advent wreath.

**L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

### **Verse of the Day: Luke 2:14**

**L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Glory to God in the highest, Alleluia.

**C** Alleluia, Alleluia, And on earth peace, good will toward men. Alleluia.

## Kyrie

<b>L</b>	O Lord,	<b>C</b>	<b>Have Mercy on us.</b>
<b>L</b>	O Christ,	<b>C</b>	<b>Have Mercy on us.</b>
<b>L</b>	O Lord,	<b>C</b>	<b>Have Mercy on us.</b>

## Luke 2:15–20

<sup>15</sup>When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

God has granted me the privilege of traveling to Bethlehem twice. Each time, I was able to visit the Church of the Holy Nativity and descend to the grotto of the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

I also visited two different sites identified as the Shepherd’s Fields. Both sights featured caves. One of them had an extensive underground structure that was ideal for a dwelling. It is easy to imagine shepherds living in these cozy surroundings.

One argument against a December date for Jesus’ birth is the fact that Luke reports shepherds in the fields at night. The complaint is that December is the rainy season and shepherds wouldn’t be in the fields. Clearly, these critics have never visited Bethlehem. In this particular field, the caves were spacious enough for shepherds, their families, and their flocks to find shelter in times of rain.

Of course, it doesn’t matter if Jesus was born in December or July or any other month. The most important thing is that God’s own Son was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. He came to bring salvation to shepherds and tax collectors, fishermen and farmers, young and old, Jew and gentile, men and women, young and old. He came to save sinners of whom I am chief.

Prayer: 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.. Amen.

## Saturday – The Second Day of Christmas, Boxing Day, St. Stephen’s Day

Light all the candles on the Advent wreath.

<b>L</b>	In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
<b>C</b>	<b>Amen.</b>

## Gradual Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 98:1a

<b>L</b>	To us a child is born, to us a son is given;
<b>C</b>	<b>and the government shall be upon his shoulder.</b>
<b>L</b>	And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
<b>C</b>	<b>Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.</b>
<b>L</b>	Sing to the Lord a new song,
<b>C</b>	<b>for he has done marvelous things!</b>

## Verse of the Day: John 1:14

**L** Alleluia, Alleluia, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, Alleluia.

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

## Kyrie

**L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

**L** O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.

**L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

So what is Christmas? The Miracle of 34<sup>th</sup> Street? Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus? Snow and Mistletoe? Presents under the tree?

Christmas can be all these things as long as they do not obscure this one most important truth, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Without God in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, Christmas is no more than a warm fuzzy feeling. But thanks be to God. He has revealed to us in Jesus, a Savior who is Christ the Lord! Yes, on that first Christmas, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Yes, on the first Good Friday, He was stripped of His clothes and nailed to a cross, Yes, on the first Easter, the tomb was empty and He was raised from the dead. But today, He is with us always, even to the end of the age. And one day, He will take us to be with Him in paradise.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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