

The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 24, 2023

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.

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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

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

Gloria in Excelsis ~ Glory to God in the Highest (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

¹Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ²the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” ³And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.”

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁵“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? ⁶I 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. ⁷In 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?”’” ⁸Now, 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. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰And 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, ¹¹from 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.

¹⁶And 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** Blessed 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** ¹I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.
- C** ²**For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”**
- L** ³You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
- C** ⁴**“I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.”**
- L** ⁵Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
- C** **your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!**

Romans 16:25–27

²⁵Now 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 ²⁶but 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— ²⁷to 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 1st chapter.
- C** **Glory to You, O Lord.**

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

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

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ 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 for me this year! At least, something that I thought was impossible, my two daughters and their families moved from faraway places back to our area. It's been an impossibly wonderful year.

But for countless other people, something immeasurably more impossible and more wonderful has happened. They have examined their personal frailty and weakness and have trusted in God for life and salvation.

But why trust in God? After all, what is there that is good about me that would make God care about me? 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. In fact, it seems absolutely impossible but it is absolutely 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 may be difficult for you. You may have experienced unbearable losses in this past year. You may be pressed upon and strained in many ways. But this does not lessen your 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).

As we celebrate again the impossible virgin birth of God’s own son, let every heart prepare him room, And heaven and nature sing because in Jesus you have become part of God’s own family for time and eternity!

“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!

Prayers

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.

C 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 O Lord, our God, let Your favor rest upon all expectant mothers and mothers of young children, that they may rejoice in the blessing of the new lives You have privileged them to nurture.

C Amen.

L Heavenly Father, bless the homes of all Your people, that the peace and joy of Christmas would rest in their hearts now and throughout the year.

C Amen.

L O God of peace, during this time of war in the ancient land of Jesus' birth and in Ukraine, we pray that You would grant a swift end to the conflict and lasting peace, that right and justice would prevail, and that You would grant Your mighty hand of protection to the innocent and helpless.

C Amen.

L Righteous God, You give leaders to every nation and people. Grant us good and wise public servants to defend the innocent and punish evil. Guard those who protect us, especially our armed forces, police, and firefighters.

C Amen.

L Visit us in Your compassion, O Lord. Deliver the sick from their infirmity, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow, and the dying from their fear. May all who cry to You receive grace according to Your will.

C Amen.

L O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; 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.

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

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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 Week of Christmas

The Nativity of Our Lord

December 25-30, 2023

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 meditate on what God has done for you.

Monday – 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

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

Luke 2:15–20

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And 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.

Tuesday – The Second Day of Christmas, Boxing Day, St. Stephen's Day

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.

Gradual Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 98:1a

L To us a child is born, to us a son is given;

C and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

L And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

C Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

L Sing to the Lord a new song,

C for he has done marvelous things!

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 34th 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.

Wednesday – The Third Day of Christmas

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 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.

- L** Let us Pray: 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.
C Amen.

Wow. Christmas is over. Well, the hoopla is over but Christmas isn't. Christmas is always here because Jesus is always here with us!

God's only-begotten Son has entered the world in our human flesh. Humanity has changed. We live in the time of Christmas. We live in the time when we have been freed from the bondage of sin. Isaac Watts put it this way:

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

Did you know that "Joy to the World" is Isaac Watts' interpretation of Psalm 98 which is part of our introit for this week? He understood that the birth of Jesus is the reason to "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" (Psalm 98:4).

We break forth into joyous song each and every day because Christ the Savior is born, our sins are forgiven, and heaven is our home.

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.

A footnote about “Joy to the World”: The tune for “Joy to the World” was written by Lowell Mason in 1836 and our arrangement in 1842. Lowell Mason attributed the inspiration for his tune and arrangement to Handel’s Messiah! Lowell Mason, as Superintendent of the Independent Presbyterian Church, is credited with organizing the first Sunday school for blacks in 1826 at First Bryan Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia.

Thursday – The Fourth Day of Christmas

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 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.

Psalm 2

L ¹Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

C ²The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,

L ³“Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”

C ⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

L ⁵Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,

C ⁶“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

L ⁷I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me,

“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

C ⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

L ⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

C ¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

L ¹¹Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

C ¹²Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessèd are all who take refuge in him.

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.

You may have noticed that Psalm 2 was chosen for our Christmas psalm because of verse 7, “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’” God’s only-begotten Son has come into the world to be our Savior and King!

The ungodly nations may rage and plot against the people of God. But this is just a waste of time. God sits on His throne in heaven and laughs at their foolishness. God has set in motion His plan to win the ultimate victory over evil through His only-begotten Son.

Whenever you feel frustrated by the sinful world and its foolish schemes, read Psalm 2. Remember that God laughs at their silliness. He has already won the final victory for us through Jesus!

George Frideric Handel understood Psalm 2 this way. In Part 2 of Messiah, he uses Psalm 2 as a prelude to his famous Hallelujah chorus. The nations may rage but:

Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

**The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and
He shall reign for ever and ever.**

King of kings, Lord of lords.

(Revelation 19:6; 11:15; 19:16)

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for sending Your only-begotten Son into the world to win for us the victory over all evil. Move our hearts to sing in faith, “Hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! The Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord!” Amen.

Friday – The Fifth Day of Christmas

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 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.

Isaiah 52:7–10

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

⁸The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

Continuing the Messiah theme, you may have noticed that Handel included Isaiah 52:7 as quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:15 in the King James Version, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” It appears as Movement 38 in Part II. Handel knew that

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection must be proclaimed for people to believe and receive the blessings of salvation.

Talking about the "beautiful feet" of God's messenger seems odd to our modern ears. However, throughout most of history, news was delivered by messengers who walked or ran to bring good news!

Isaiah tells us that his message is so wonderful that the messenger traveled over the mountains to bring the good news of happiness. What is the message that causes us to sing for joy? "Your God reigns!"

Salvation has come to us. Evil has been defeated. Sin does not rule our hearts. The Devil can only scowl at us. Death has been overcome in the victory of the resurrection.

Distress does not overwhelm us. We are comforted by the love and grace of God shown to us in His only-begotten Son!

Prayer: O Lord God, thank You for the Good News of the victory won for us by Jesus. Rule our hearts with joy and peace. Grant us the comfort of Your salvation. Let our singing be filled with joy! Amen.

Saturday – The Sixth Day of Christmas

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 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.

Hebrews 1:1–6

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you"?

Or again,

"I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son"?

⁶And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

Our Epistle lesson for Christmas brings us to Handel's Messiah Part II, Scene 4, Movements 34 and 35. A solo tenor sings these words from Hebrews 1:5 KJV, "Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" This is followed by a joyful and festive chorus singing from verse 6, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

Christmas and Christianity are not about a better set of rules for living. It is not about following the principles of a great teacher or the example set by a noble man.

Christmas is about God's only-begotten Son being born in Bethlehem to the Virgin Mary. The Baby lying in a manger is the creator of the world. He shares the glory of God and His complete nature. He upholds the universe by the word of His power!

But He humbled Himself to become one of us so He could take our place and suffer the punishment that our sins deserve. Now He sits at the right hand of God and the angels worship Him!

Jesus is God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made being of one substance with the Father! This is the Babe born in Bethlehem who came into the world to save His people from their sins! We join the angels in singing, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth, goodwill toward men."

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for sending Your only-begotten Son, Jesus to be our savior. Grant us faith to trust completely in Him for our salvation. Amen.

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