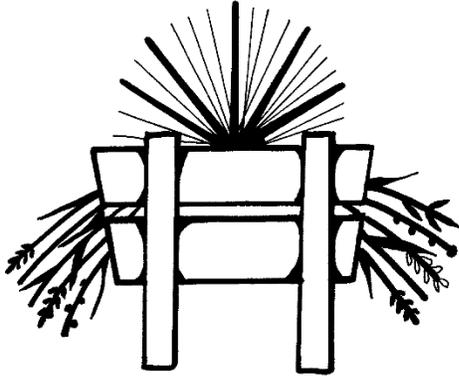


Christmas Eve December 24, 2020



Introduction

In winter's deepest night, we welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. Paul reminds us that the grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including lowly shepherds. Filled with the light

that shines in our lives, we go forth to share the light of Christ with the whole world.

Opening Prayer

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all the peoples.

Give to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea roar, let the field be joyful.

All the trees of the forest, shout for joy before the Lord,

who comes to judge the earth with righteousness and the peoples with truth.

Gathering Hymn ELW # 283 / LBW # 45

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

This poem promises deliverance from Assyrian oppression, a hope based on the birth of a royal child with a name full of promise. While Judah's king will practice justice and righteousness, the real basis for faith lies in God's passion for the people: The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

Read the text [here](#).

Hymn of Praise ELW # 282 / LBW # 54 *It came Upon a Midnight Clear*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

The appearance of God's grace in Jesus Christ brings salvation for all humanity. Consequently, in the present we live wisely and justly while also anticipating the hope of our Savior's final appearance.

¹¹The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Hymn of Praise ELW #289 / LBW # 71 *Angels We Have Heard on High*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

God's greatest gift comes as a baby in a manger. Angels announce the "good news of great joy" and proclaim God's blessing of peace.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Like many of you, I come to this Christmas Eve worship with many things on my mind. It seems we walk in darkness – not just through these longest nights of the year, but through all the challenges and struggles we face.

We struggle with the staggering toll that the Covid pandemic is taking on our friends and family, and on communities across our country and around the world. We pray regularly for those recovering from the many recent natural disasters including hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and wildfires; not even knowing the difficulties they face.

I am sure I am not alone as I struggle with a To-Do list that never comes to an end. I will readily admit that I get teary when I remember Christmases past with my extended family and times when our congregations could gather with music and candlelight and fellowship in a way that we cannot this year.

And the list goes on. We all come to this worship service – whether in person, watching a video onscreen, or reading this on a piece of paper that arrived in the mail – with all the stories and concerns of our lives in a time that seems very dark.

As we read these scripture texts for Christmas Eve, we find glimpses of God’s light and love and grace and promises of far more to come.

I am reminded that the bible is a collection of very different writings gathered together into one cohesive whole. We tend to forget that each book was written for a particular group of God’s faithful people in a specific moment of time before being gathered into one large collection that we call **The Bible**. We can look at this complete library of God’s word for God’s people and KNOW with certainty that it speaks to us in our time, too!

The prophet Isaiah recorded words of promise which he had received directly from God, giving hope to the people of God in a dark time. His words still give us hope as we read the description of the promised Messiah as the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, [the] Prince of Peace” who will bring peace and justice to the entire world!

The physician Luke wrote down an orderly account of the life of Jesus the Christ – the long-awaited Messiah - for his friend, Theophilus (which means the lover of God or the beloved of God). For nearly two thousand years, those who love God and are beloved by God have been reading this gospel for the beautiful and detailed story of Jesus’ life – from his birth as a baby in Bethlehem to his crucifixion and resurrection – which shows us the depth and power of God’s love for each and every single one of us.

And in Titus, the author of a tiny and often overlooked letter located near the end of your bible, writes just a few precise sentences that tell us how very important Jesus’ birth and life and death and resurrection are for each and every one of us. At the same time, he reminds us that we are to wait in hope for Jesus to return.

Each of these passages reminds us of a different time in history. Times when things were dark and worrisome, yet the faithful prophets and followers recorded words of promise and history and explanation that we still cling to today!

Martin Luther said, “Scripture is the manger in which we find the Christ Child.” Today we have truly come to the manger to see Jesus Christ! Along with these passages, all of the stories of God’s people gathered together in holy scripture point us toward Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who gave up his glory to be born as a tiny, helpless, human baby in Bethlehem that long ago night. God’s own grace, bringing salvation to all creation.

Somehow on this day of all days, in the words of the hymn we will sing in a few minutes, “the hopes and fears of all the years are met” in Jesus tonight! (*O Little Town of Bethlehem*)

And all of our stories, our worries and our joys are drawn together to point us hopefully toward Christ yet again. Even while we wait for Jesus to come again, may we see and feel the light of his presence with us now. May we celebrate this holy day with great joy; live always in faith; walk and work each day in hope; and share the abundance of God’s unending love. Amen

Hymn of the Day ELW # 279 / LBW # 41 *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father, through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human .**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

The shepherds sing, “Jesus Christ is born!” Let your church throughout the world proclaim this good news, over the hills and everywhere. Unite the voices of all your faithful people in songs of praise and rejoicing.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Heaven and nature sing, “Joy to the world!” Give respite to flocks, fields, and those who tend them. Come near to us in the beauty of nighttime, the shining of the stars, and the hush of a world at rest. May our wonder at your creation rouse our care for all the earth.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

The angels sing, “Peace on earth!” Come quickly to still the strife of this world. Hush the noise of war and violence in places of unrest. Inspire leaders of nations to seek lasting peace and sustainable provision for all in their care.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Mary sings melodies of comfort to her newborn child. Bring rest and reassurance to those facing struggles this night. Shelter travelers and those without homes. Console those who lie awake due to pain or anxiety. Heal those who are sick or hurting, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Love sings through the sound of a new baby’s cry. Bless new parents and expectant parents. Comfort those who long for children, especially those running out of hope or options. Surround families of every shape and size with your love and care.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

The heavenly chorus sings, “Glory to God in the highest!” We give you thanks for all the saints who have proclaimed your glory in word and deed. Let us join them this night in joyful praise around your eternal throne. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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.**

Candle Lighting

You are invited to light a candle or a flashlight and recall that Jesus is the Light of the World during the next hymn.

Hymn ELW #281 / LBW # 65

Silent Night

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Blessing

Almighty God,
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,
proclaimed joy through the angels,
sent the shepherds with good news,
and led the magi by a star,
bless us this day ✠ through the Word made flesh.
Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 267 / LBW # 39

Joy to the World

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.