



Grace Lutheran Church
Sunday, July 21, 2024
Christmas in July Service
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

**Please stand as you are able.*

Prelude

Announcements

The Incarnation has no time constraints, is not bound by a calendar,
and is cause for wonder every day.

The wonder of Christmas is the joy of promises fulfilled: the awe at light bursting on darkness, the sweetness and the demand of a baby's cry and a mother's tender love, the glory of angels singing glorias to shepherds, the amazingness of God coming to earth to dwell among us. It is important to keep hold of this sense of wonder as we hear and tell the old familiar story from passages we know by heart. Something special, something incredible happens -every where and every time. Rejoice, for our salvation has come!

INVITATION AND GATHERING

Call to Worship

A light shining in the darkness . . .

What could it be?

The sound of angels' wings . . .

What could it mean?

A baby born in a stable . . .

Who could it be?

Come to Bethlehem and see.

Opening Prayer

O wondrous God of the stars, we hear about the babe who will change our lives.

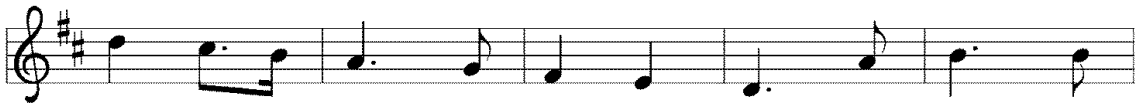
We hear the names "Wonderful Counselor," "Mighty God," "Prince of Peace,"
and we are in awe. You have touched the earth with your unconditional love.

Touch us— touch our hearts and minds and souls. May we never tire of this story.

May we never take it for granted. **Amen.**

Joy to the World

ELW 267 vs. 1 & 4



1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re -
 2 Joy to the earth, the Sav - ior reigns! Let all their
 3 No more let sin and sor - row grow nor thorns in -
 4 He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the



ceive her king; let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare him
 songs em - ploy, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
 fest the ground; he comes to make his bless - ings
 na - tions prove the glo - ries of his righ - teous -



room and heav'n and na - ture sing, and heav'n and na - ture
 plains re - peat the sound - ing joy, re - peat the sound - ing
 flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is
 ness and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his



sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and na - ture sing.
 joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 found, far as, far as the curse is found.
 love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.

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Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹Break forth together into singing, you ruins 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.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

ELW 270



1 Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born king;
2 Christ, by high - est heav'n a - dored, Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord,
3 Hail the heav'n - born Prince of peace! Hail the Sun of righ - teous - ness!



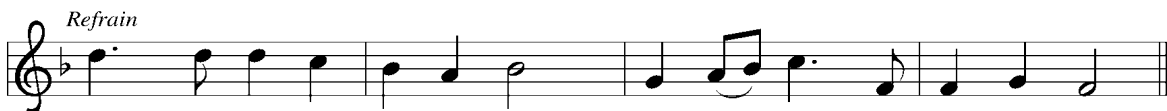
peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled."
late in time be - hold him come, off - spring of a vir - gin's womb.
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with heal - ing in his wings.



Joy - ful, all you na - tions, rise; join the tri - umph of the skies;
Veiled in flesh the God - head see! Hail, in - car - nate de - i - ty!
Mild he lays his glo - ry by, born that we no more may die,



with an - gel - ic hosts pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
Pleased as man with us to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el!
born to raise each child of earth, born to give us sec - ond birth.



Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born king!"

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Titus 3:4-7

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

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

THE CHRISTMAS STORY FROM LUKE AND MATTHEW.

Luke

²⁶⁻²⁸ God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David's line. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary.

Gabriel greeted her: Good morning! God loves you and has a special favor to ask.

²⁹⁻³³ She was scared but the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "But how? I'm not with Joseph yet."

³⁵ The angel answered,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the son you bring to birth
will be called Holy, Son of God.

³⁶⁻³⁸ "And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth, old as she is, is going to have a baby soon? Nothing is impossible with God."

And Mary said,

Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's servant. Let be with me just as you say. Then the angel left her.

Matthew

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Now Joseph found out that Mary was going to have a baby, and he knew he wasn't the father. He was upset but decided to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

²⁰⁻²³ While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. God's Holy Spirit has given Mary this baby. She will have a son and you, Joseph, will name him Jesus— 'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." ²⁴⁻²⁵ Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary and he named the baby Jesus.

Luke

2 ¹⁻⁵ About this time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for.

So, Joseph went from Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary and while they were there, she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him up in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no other place in town to stay but a stable.

8-12 There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a cloth and lying in a manger."

13-14 At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women of good will.

15-18 As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.

19-20 Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Matthew

1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay honor to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on our way to worship him."

3-4 When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

5-6 They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land, no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

7-8 Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star

appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

⁹⁻¹⁰ Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

¹² In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

As With Gladness Men of Old

ELW 302 vs. 1-3



1 As with glad - ness men of old did the guid - ing star be - hold;
2 As with joy - ful steps they sped, Sav - ior, to thy low - ly bed,
3 As they of - fered gifts most rare at thy cra - dle, rude and bare,
4 Ho - ly Je - sus, ev - 'ry day keep us in the nar - row way;
5 In the heav'n - ly coun - try bright need they no cre - a - ted light;



as with joy they hailed its light, lead - ing on - ward, beam - ing bright;
there to bend the knee be - fore thee, whom heav'n and earth a - dore;
so may we with ho - ly joy, pure and free from sin's al - loy,
and when earth - ly things are past, bring our ran - somed souls at last
thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down;



so, most gra - cious Lord, may we ev - er - more be led by thee.
so may we with will - ing feet ev - er seek thy mer - cy seat.
all our cost - liest trea - sures bring, Christ, to thee, our heav'n - ly king,
where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glo - ry hide.
there for - ev - er may we sing al - le - lu - ias to our king.

Reflection –

Christmas is the celebration of the glorious impossibility of God taken on flesh and living among us. How have others brought Christ into your life, by their love, friendship, care, witness?

Prayer of Confession

Jesus, you come to us every day.

We're barely ready and sometimes blind to your presence.

In the midst of the busyness

we sometimes miss what is central—

you coming to earth—Emmanuel—God-with-us.

Help us hear anew

your promises of hope and salvation and love

as we sing our familiar carols.

Forgive us for forgetting the true meaning of the Incarnation,

for focusing on ourselves instead of you.

Rock us out of our complacency.

Let us hear angel voices,

see shepherds hurrying to a stable,

feel the baby's soft breath on our cheeks,

and ponder in our hearts what all this means

for the world, for us.

Words of Assurance

God's love knows no bounds.

Love comes down at Christmas—

a love so deep and so profound

that nothing will ever be the same again.

Know that this love is come for you—

to touch you, to heal you, to forgive you,

to make you whole. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Passing the Peace of Christ

No one is a stranger. All are joined together as one family through the miracle of the birth of one small baby. Let us share our joy and excitement at being present when God reaches down to touch the earth. Let us share a sign of the peace of Christ with one another.

Offering



1 In the bleak mid - win - ter, frost - y wind made moan,
 2 Heav - en can - not hold him, nor . . . earth sus - tain;
 3 What . . . can I give him, poor . . . as I am?



earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;
 heav'n and earth shall flee a - way when he comes to reign;
 If I were a shep - herd I would bring a lamb;



snow had fall - en, snow on snow, snow on snow,
 in the bleak mid - win - ter a sta - ble place suf - ficed
 if I were a wise . . . man I would do my part;



in the bleak mid - win - ter, long a - go.
 the Lord . . . God al - might - y, Je - sus Christ.
 yet what I can I give him— give my heart.

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Offering Prayer

Generous God, you have given us life, this community, and all good gifts of the earth that become signs of your love. Move in our hearts, that we might use your gifts to bring hope and blessing wherever we go, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers of Petition

One in the communion of saints and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we join our voices in prayer.

A brief silence.

For the church of Jesus Christ in this and every land: Through the One who is the cornerstone of a firm foundation, join us together and build us up as a temple of mercy and peace. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For the creation: Cause new trees to be planted. Restrain the melting of polar ice caps. Save land from destruction. Like a shepherd tends her sheep, raise up from among us caretakers of all you have made. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For the leaders of nations and heads of tribes: Where peace seems far off, bring it near. Where justice seems fleeting, bring it to light. Where discord seems relentless, bring harmony. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For the health and well-being of family, friends, and neighbors: Heal those who are sick. Give courage to all who struggle with addiction. Touch with your tender care all who reach out to you in pain. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For this assembly and for the faith communities represented this week at the ELCA Youth Gathering: Nurture the faith of young people as they encounter new experiences and people. Break down dividing walls and inspire collaboration among people of every age. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In thanksgiving for those who have died: Make us certain that in Christ we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints in the household of God. In your mercy,

hear our prayer.

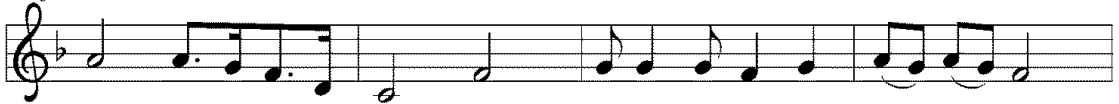
Holy God, holy and merciful: into your outstretched arms we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in the one who is the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Benediction

Go now in wonder. Go to bring light to those in darkness, joy to those who can find no joy, hope to a world steeped in realism. Go with the songs of angels in your ears, and the love of God in your hearts. Go and spread the word— the babe of Bethlehem is born for all + in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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.

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Go in peace, serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude

The Liturgy comes from two sources: Adapted by Rev. Dr. Joanne Carlson Brown and Pr. Hukki from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009*, © 2008 Abingdon Press.

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