

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS  
DECEMBER 27, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Gentle Mary Laid Her Child* Setting: Donald Rotermund

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #374 *Gentle Mary Laid Her Child*

- 1 Gentle Mary laid her child  
Lowly in a manger;  
There He lay, the Undefined,  
To the world a stranger.  
Such a babe in such a place,  
Can He be the Savior?  
Ask the saved of all the race  
Who have found His favor.
- 2 Angels sang about His birth,  
Wise Men sought and found Him;  
Heaven's star shone brightly forth  
Glory all around Him.  
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight,  
Heard the angels singing;  
All the plains were lit that night,  
All the hills were ringing.
- 3 Gentle Mary laid her child  
Lowly in a manger;  
He is still the Undefined  
But no more a stranger.  
Son of God of humble birth,  
Beautiful the story;  
Praise His name in all the earth;  
Hail the King of glory!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

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

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

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

**Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We**

**have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

*KYRIE*

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

**Amen.**

*GLORIA IN EXCELSIS*

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

**Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:**

**We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:**

**You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.**

**You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.**

**For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,**

**You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,**

**in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

*THE PRAYER OF THE DAY*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. O God, our Maker and Redeemer,

**You wonderfully created us, and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.**

**Amen.**



*FIRST LESSON*    Isaiah 61:10—62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to sprout up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.  
The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 111*

Praise the LORD!  
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.  
Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.  
Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.  
He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.  
He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.  
He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.  
The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;  
they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.  
He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.  
Holy and awesome is his name!  
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever!

**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.**

*SECOND LESSON Galatians 4:4–7*

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. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*CHILDREN’S SERMON*

*ALLELUIA VERSE*

**Alleluia.**

**Lord, to whom shall we go?**

**You have the words of eternal life.**

**Alleluia, alleluia.**

*GOSPEL Luke 2:22–40*

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

**Glory to You, O Lord.**

When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to You, O Christ**

### *SERMON*

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.  
Dear friends in Christ:

The Gospel lesson on this first Sunday after Christmas tells of the infant Jesus being presented in the Temple. The presentation took place forty days after his birth – a time chosen so that Mary could also fulfill her purification requirement as stipulated by the Law.

When Jesus and his parents arrive in the Temple area, they meet two very interesting people – Simeon and Anna. The two people are similar in a number of ways—among them being that they are both well advanced in years. Anna’s age is given. She’s 84. Simeon’s age is not given. But his situation and reaction imply an older man.

I point this out for a couple of reasons. First, it provides a nice connection to another observance of the church which occurs on this day. Today, Dec. 27, is the annual Festival of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist. John, you may recall, is the only apostle of Jesus that lived a long life and died a natural death. In fact, the reading assigned for his feast day speaks to his long life.

In that reading, Jesus has just told Peter – in so many words – that Peter would die at the hands of others. Peter then asks what will happen to John – possibly because he is concerned about young John, but seemingly also because he thinks the others should have to suffer the same fate. We get this sense because Jesus rebukes Peter, saying of John: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”

Those words of Jesus to Peter then caused the saying to spread that John was not to die. In response, the Gospel writer – who is John (!) – points out that Jesus did not say that he (John) was not to die, but only: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

We may wonder why this conversation is included in the scriptures. It seems rather beside the point. And yet there are good reasons for it. For one thing, such talk mirrors what is common among us. We, too, wonder about the length of people’s lives and form judgments about what is fair. Jesus tells us through these scriptures not to worry about the number of our days. We are to simply follow him. And trust him.

God has plans for all of us. No matter how long we live. In John’s case, his life was long so that in his later years he could be given a vision – one that spoke to its time with the authority of one who was entrusted by Jesus himself. That vision was the great Revelation given to conclude our scriptures.

Sometimes age matters. Earlier in the sermon I said that there were two reasons for bringing up the subject of old age today. Here’s the second:

If a person has lived a long time, that person has seen many things. And because they’ve seen so much, they’re not moved by just anything. It takes something truly special to impress them.

That's what's going on with Simeon and Anna. Simeon and Anna had seen plenty of babies in their days. And as much as each new child is wonderful and beautiful, they wouldn't necessarily be moved by just any child.

But Jesus was no ordinary child. Simeon could tell. And so could Anna.

Moreover, Simeon and Anna had also seen plenty of so-called saviors in their days. They had heard zealots call the people to action and teachers offer new explanations. They had even seen the rebuilding of the Temple.

But none of these fulfilled God's salvation plan. Simeon and Anna had been around – and they knew.

It wasn't just their age, however, that gave them such wisdom. It was, rather, their years of faithfulness.

Simeon, we are told, was righteous and devout – full of God's Spirit and waiting for the consolation of Israel. Anna was a prophetess – one who was always in the Temple and not afraid to speak of God to others.

Simeon and Anna had a mature faith – one that expressed itself in actions and one that was continuously being renewed through the Spirit. And once they recognized the child whom God had sent their faith was confirmed. And enhanced.

Simeon now knew that he was ready for death – as are all of us who know the salvation given in the Christ child.

Anna now knew there was good news to proclaim. As do we.

One of the refrains of this telling of Christ's early days is the phrase "according to the Law." The text begins by describing what was done "for their purification according to the Law," goes on to mention two more times that their actions were done "according to the Law," and ends by telling us, once again, that they had performed everything "according to the Law."

Simeon, in his great song, uses similar language, telling how he can depart peacefully "according to [God's] word."

These phrases of the text impress upon us just how much attention was being paid to God's words. Joseph and Mary took all the steps needed to be faithful and obedient. Simeon forthrightly acknowledged what God had told him. Everything was being done according to God's leading and directing.

But then, Simeon declares that the child Jesus is "appointed for a sign that is opposed" – meaning that he will point people to God, as a true sign, but he will face opposition in doing so. How can this happen when all of God's commands are being followed and valued?

The reason, of course, is that Jesus will bring change. Jesus will add his own teachings, which will clarify – and at points even contradict – the current understanding of God's law. And Jesus will proclaim that the promised age of God's Messiah had arrived.

Simeon's song points to these changes. He says that in Jesus he has seen God's salvation, and that others will see it too, for it is prepared "in the presence of all peoples."

Furthermore, Simeon points to the scope of that salvation, declaring – as did the prophets before – that this salvation is not just for Israel but for all people. The Savior, Jesus, is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles *and* for glory to [God’s] people Israel.”

Since we are remembering the Apostle John on this day, we recall that John also speaks to the changes which come through the birth of Jesus. John says in his first chapter that “the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The grace and truth that Jesus brought exceed that which is found in Moses. The grace is seen clearly and powerfully in Christ’s death on the cross for the sure and certain forgiveness of our sins. The truth is seen plainly and convincingly in Christ’s revealing of God’s deep and abiding love for all people.

In these accounts of Jesus’ infancy, we are given important signs about his life and ministry. We see that as much as Jesus brings a continuity with the Old Testament scriptures, in him God is also doing a new thing. We see as well that the message of Jesus is about more than just observing the Law. While the Law is necessary and important, it cannot convey God’s grace and truth as Jesus can. The Law’s commands can only frustrate us. The Law’s revelation does not teach us all that we need.

Jesus came into our world as a message of Gospel – good news. He came to be our light – as proclaimed by both Simeon and John. He came to *fulfill* God’s Law, as he will later explain. St. Paul, in our second reading today, says it this way: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4–5).

In Jesus, we belong to God. As family. Enjoying his favor. Assured of his care. In our Christmas celebration, that message has once again shone brightly. It has brought great light to each of us and to our whole world.

As the days go forward, may that light not dim in our hearts but continue to lead us, inspire us, teach us and encourage us. May it do so powerfully... and for as many days as the Lord gives.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #389 sts. 1, 2, 5-7 Let All Together Praise Our God*

- 1 Let all together praise our God  
Before His glorious throne;  
Today He opens heav’n again  
To give us His own Son,  
To give us His own Son.**
- 2 He leaves His heav’nly Father’s throne,  
Is born an infant small,  
And in a manger, poor and lone,  
Lies in a humble stall,  
Lies in a humble stall.**
- 5 He is a servant, I a lord:  
How great a mystery!  
How strong the tender Christ Child’s love!  
No truer friend than He,  
No truer friend than He.**

- 6 He is the key and He the door  
To blessed paradise;  
The angel bars the way no more.  
To God our praises rise,  
To God our praises rise.
- 7 Your grace in lowliness revealed,  
Lord Jesus, we adore  
And praise to God the Father yield  
And Spirit evermore;  
We praise You evermore.

*NICENE CREED*

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; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. 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. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He 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.

*OFFERING*    *Let All Together Praise Our God*    Setting: Brad Hall

*PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH*

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

*Brief silence*

Eternal Lord God, in the fullness of time, You sent forth Your Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem us and give us the adoption as Your sons and heirs. Hear us, Father, as we call to You in His name. Give us grace to rejoice in Christ's blessed incarnation, and grant us a glad new year. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, from whom all fatherhood on earth is named, bless the families of all Christians with Your promises. Give parents diligence and delight in their work, and grant Your favor on all children, that they may grow in strength and wisdom. Give your special care to widows, orphans and those who struggle with the pain of separation, showing them Your mercy and giving them joy in the redemption You have won for us in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O worthy Judge, from You proceeds the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Give wisdom to those who make, administer and judge our laws,

that they may serve faithfully in their tasks according to Your good pleasure and for the benefit of all people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, receive our prayers for those who suffer from loneliness. Comfort them with the sure and certain knowledge that they will never be forsaken by You. Give them family and friends within the household of faith with whom they can find loving companionship. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, help the sick and suffering, especially those who desire our prayers [\_\_\_\_\_]. Surround them with Your love in Christ and, according to Your gracious will, heal them. And comfort all those who mourn, that their hearts would be filled with the certain hope of the resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father of lasting peace, show Your mercy to those who receive the Lord's Supper this day, that they would behold their salvation in the very body and blood of Christ given for them and, with St. Simeon, be well-prepared to depart in peace according to Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, on this day we give thanks to You for St. John, Your holy evangelist, who has given to Your Church true testimony concerning Christ our Lord. Send also to the Church in our times faithful witnesses to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Preserve Your Church, loved and freed from all sins by Christ's blood, steadfast as a kingdom, priests to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our 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*

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord make His face shine on us  
and be gracious to us.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

- 1 **In peace and joy I now depart**  
Since God so wills it.  
Serene and confident my heart;  
Stillness fills it.  
For the Lord has promised me  
That death is but a slumber.
- 2 **Christ Jesus brought this gift to me,**  
My faithful Savior,  
Whom You have made my eyes to see  
By Your favor.  
Now I know He is my life,  
My friend when I am dying.
- 3 **You sent the people of the earth**  
Their great salvation;  
Your invitation summons forth  
Ev'ry nation  
By Your holy, precious Word,  
In ev'ry place resounding.
- 4 **Christ is the hope and saving light**  
Of those in blindness;  
He guides and comforts those in night  
By His kindness.  
For Your people Israel  
In Him find joy and glory.

*ANNOUNCEMENTS*

*DISMISSAL*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

*POSTLUDE* *In Peace and Joy I Now Depart* Setting: Kenneth T. Kosche

Poinsettias by the Congregation of St. Paul's

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