

MIDWEEK ADVENT WORSHIP
Wednesday, November 30, 2022

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, WELCOME TO ST. PAUL'S!

7:00 p.m.



WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP (stand)

The Spirit and the Church cry out:
Come, Lord Jesus.

All those who await His appearance pray:
Come, Lord Jesus.

The whole creation pleads:
Come, Lord Jesus.

HYMN OF LIGHT LSB 891

O Light Whose Splendor

- 1 O Light whose splendor thrills and gladdens
 With radiance brighter than the sun,
 Pure gleam of God's unending glory,
 O Jesus, blest Anointed One;**
- 2 As twilight hovers near at sunset,
 And lamps are lit, and children nod,
 In evening hymns we lift our voices
 To Father, Spirit, Son: one God.**
- 3 In all life's brilliant timeless moments,
 Let faithful voices sing Your praise,
 O Son of God, our Life-bestower,
 Whose glory lightens endless days.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

As we light the first candle on the Advent wreath, we rejoice in the blessings that have come to us through the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. God told Abraham that through one of his descendants “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

Holy Child of Bethlehem, you were born among us to live and die and rise in fulfillment of God’s promise to bless all nations.

That promised descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ, is a blessing to all who trust in him. As St. Paul declared: “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Galatians 3:7-8).

Holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today. Through faith in your name we have the blessings of forgiveness and salvation!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Because Advent is a season of preparation, let us prepare our hearts by confessing our sins.

We kneel

Lord God,

we are blessed with your love and salvation. But we do not always live as your people. We turn away from your ways to follow our own selfish desires. We listen to the temptations of the world around us. We do not share with others the blessings we have received. Have mercy on us and forgive us.

God has had mercy on us. He sent his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessing for the nations, to atone for the sins of the world. I therefore announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered” (Romans 4:7).

- 1 Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of glory waits.
The King of kings is drawing near;
The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation He doth bring;
Therefore rejoice and gladly sing.
To God the Father raise
Your joyful songs of praise.**
- 2 A righteous Helper comes to thee;
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His scepter, pity in distress.
The end of all our woe He brings;
Therefore the earth is glad and sings.
To Christ the Savior raise
Your grateful hymns of praise.**
- 3 How blest the land, the city blest,
Where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless sun of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
To God the Spirit raise
Your happy shouts of praise.**
- 4 Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heav'n's employ,
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.
So shall your Sov'reign enter in
And new and nobler life begin.
To God alone be praise
For word and deed and grace!**

**5 Redeemer, come and open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
O enter with Thy grace divine;
Thy face of mercy on me shine.
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God and Father, through the gift of your Son Jesus you fulfilled your promise to Abraham that a descendant of his would be a blessing for all nations.

As we prepare to celebrate his birth, remind us that he was born to bring us the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation.

And may these blessings be born in us again today, that we may ever praise you, and serve you joyfully as your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

OLD TESTAMENT READING (Be seated)

Genesis 12:1-8

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to

him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Romans 4:1-8

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL VERSE (Stand)

LSB 361

**O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!**

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON (Be seated)

Dear friends in Christ:

Imagine that two friends of yours are attending a big football game being shown on TV. You're watching the game at home and wondering if by some chance you might spot them. What are the odds?

Then suddenly there they are! A camera pans across the crowd and settles on them long enough that you recognize them. It's an amazing moment! You shout out their names as if they can hear you. Among the many, you found the one. Or, in this case, the two.

People easily get lost in a crowd. And just like the old Where's Waldo? books, it can be hard to find the one among the many.

But in the holy history of God and humanity known as the Bible, God is more than pretty good at finding someone in a crowd. Four millennia ago God found a tribal chief named Abram from among all the nations and people groups on earth. God singled this leader out and promised to bless him. This blessing would be so great that it would extend to all nations – which is exactly what happened.

Some see this promise of Abraham blessing the nations fulfilled in his impact on the world's religions. The three great world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all called "Abrahamic religions" because each recognize Abraham as significant in their history and tradition.

But for Christians, Abraham's impact goes much farther. We believe that God blessed Abraham to establish the nation Israel, and that from that nation God blessed the world with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. With that first blessing of Abraham, God already had the blessing of the whole world in mind.

You can't miss this in the promise God gives Abraham. It is all very personal, this call of God. And, at the same time, it is all very universal – the one and the many. God says, "And I will make of

you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3).

Each of us lives among the many. We are defined – all of us – by the communities we cherish, the relationships we hold dear, the culture that shapes us. And more and more, we think globally. We care what happens, not only next door but on the other side of the world.

But we can also lose ourselves in our culture. Almost a century ago, Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* was prophetic in recognizing how the one can get lost in the many. Wilder has one of his characters, Rebecca, recall a letter her friend Jane had received. It was addressed to “Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.” You can picture Jane Crofit in that address becoming smaller and smaller; less and less significant.

Still, this strong sense of the many can be a blessing, especially when it leads us, as in the case of the *Our Town* letter, back to the One who has created it all – all of this community and culture of which we are a part. From the individual, we move to the universe and ultimately to the Creator God.

The challenge, though, is not to lose oneself along the way. The challenge is to know that as God is busy working the divine plan to save the world through Jesus Christ, God has not lost sight of you in the global crowd. “God so loved the world” is true. But just as true is “God so loved you.”

God has some work to do, cutting through all that is between you and him—the stuff of families, nations and cultures. But God gets the divine mail delivered to Jane; and he gets it delivered to you.

That is the message of the call of Abraham. God is out to save the many – even the all. But God does it one by one, family by family, nation by nation. And when God gets through, and when the

saving work of Jesus Christ takes hold of an individual, true community is then born.

This new community is formed together with God, with the church, and with the neighbor... all objects of the individual Christian's love. In other words, from the many God finds the one, who in turn bless the many. That is your story of blessing, and it is mine.

Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel's *The Census of Bethlehem* was painted in 1566 and is a favorite of many this time of year. Bruegel places the story of Christmas Eve in his own contemporary setting, showing a taxing census, in a bustling peasant village, as it would appear in the Low Countries of the Netherlands. There is enough to see in the painting to keep one engaged for a long, long time— ice skaters, snowball fights, kids sledding across the ice, the draining of a slaughtered pig's blood for sausage, a makeshift pub, a crumbling castle, a well-kept church and a long line of taxpayers.

Among the bustling crowd of this Renaissance Christmas Eve, is Mary, the expectant mother

of our Lord. You have to look for her. She isn't immediately obvious. But there she is, in the foreground, riding a donkey led by Joseph into Bethlehem. A cow beside her looks to the viewer as if to say, "Please, take note: he has arrived."

There he is – Jesus – the one among the many, blessed to extend blessing to all!

And these blessings arrive through Mary, of whom – remember! – it was said: "Blessed among women are you" (Luke 1:42).

Today, you and I find ourselves in a season filled with wondrous sights and sounds. We mark the season's progress with a fresh candle each week and engage in extra devotion – both individually and in groups. These traditions help us celebrate the birth of the One who came to save the many.

In a sermon for Christmas Day, Martin Luther said, “The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?” (“Sermon for Christmas Day; Luke 2:1-14,” The Sermons of Martin Luther, Lutherans in All Lands Press, 1906).

Much of our Advent and Christmas season will be spent doing the lovely things that we love to do. It’s our routine. It’s our joy. And this season of lights and carols and greens and gifts will bring blessings to our lives and to our culture. It will be a lovelier time when the world takes on a yuletide glow and the message of peace on earth and goodwill toward all seems more than just a slogan. We will do these things together with millions of Christians across the world, and much good will abound.

That said, the good news of Christmas is also meant to be ours individually, one by one. God has always had a heart for the one. Through the one, many can be blessed. So it was with Abraham. So it was with Mary. So it was with Jesus of Nazareth. And so it is with you.

Christ was born for us, and Christ was born for you. This Christmas, may God find and bless you among the many and make you a blessing to many in return.

The last stanza of Phillips Brooks’ carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” closes with a prayer. We sang it earlier in the service. As I read it now, may it be our prayer to both one and to all.

“O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- 1 My soul rejoices,
My spirit voices—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
For God my Savior
Has shown me favor—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
With praise and blessing,
Join in confessing
God, who is solely
Mighty and holy—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!
His mercy surely
Shall rest securely
On all who fear Him,
Love and revere Him—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!**
- 2 His arm now baring,
His strength declaring—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
The proud He scatters,
Their rule He shatters—
Sing the greatness of the Lord!
Oppression halted;
The meek exalted.
Full are the hungry;
Empty, the wealthy—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!
Here is the token
All that was spoken
To Abr'ham's offspring
God is fulfilling—
O sing the greatness of God the Lord!**

In peace let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

COLLECT FOR PEACE

O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

LSB 251

Taught by our Lord and trusting His promises, we are bold 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.**

BENEDICAMUS

LSB 252

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠Son, and
the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.
Amen.

ADVENT HYMN (Stand) LSB350 Come, Thou Precious Ransom

- 1** **Come, Thou precious Ransom, come,
 Only hope for sinful mortals!
Come, O Savior of the world!
 Open are to Thee all portals.
Come, Thy beauty let us see;
Anxiously we wait for Thee.**

- 2** **Enter now my waiting heart,
 Glorious King and Lord most holy.
Dwell in me and ne'er depart,
 Though I am but poor and lowly.
Ah, what riches will be mine
When Thou art my guest divine!**

- 3** **My hosannas and my palms
 Graciously receive, I pray Thee;
Evermore, as best I can,
 Savior, I will homage pay Thee,
And in faith I will embrace,
Lord, Thy merit through Thy grace.**

- 4** **Hail! Hosanna, David's Son!
 Jesus, hear our supplication!
Let Thy kingdom, scepter, crown,
 Bring us blessing and salvation,
That forever we may sing:
Hail! Hosanna to our King.**

THOSE SERVING:

Greeter: Steve Berg

Lay Reader: Dede Dixon

MIDWEEK ADVENT SERVICES

November 30, December 7, 14, 21 at 7:00 p.m.



Christmas Eve Worship - Saturday December 24

5:00 p.m. Candlelight service for families

8:00 p.m. Candlelight service with Holy Communion

Christmas Day Worship - Sunday, December 25

10:00 a.m. Celebration of Christ's Birth
with Holy Communion

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