



CHRISTMAS

DAY



**CHRISTMAS DAY
DECEMBER 25, 2023**

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

10:00 a.m.



THE ENTRANCE RITE

PRELUDE

Once in Royal David's City
Setting: Michael D. Costello

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN

Once in Royal David's City

LSB 376

- 1** **Once in royal David's city
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
 In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.**

- 2** **He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
 And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor and mean and lowly
Lived on earth our Savior holy.**

- 3** **For He is our childhood's pattern,
 Day by day like us He grew;
He was little, weak, and helpless,
 Tears and smiles like us He knew;
And He feels for all our sadness,
And He shares in all our gladness.**

- 4 **And our eyes at last shall see Him,
 Through His own redeeming love;
For that child so dear and gentle
 Is our Lord in heav'n above;
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.**
- 5 **Not in that poor, lowly stable
 With the oxen standing by
Shall we see Him, but in heaven,
 Set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars His children, crowned,
All in white, His praise will sound!**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

LSB 167

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.

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

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.

Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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.

HYMN OF PRAISE - "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. 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.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON *(Be seated)*

Isaiah 52:7-10

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

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light

LSB 378

- 1 Break forth, O beauteous heav'nly light,
And usher in the morning.
Ye shepherds, shrink not with affright,
The day of grace is dawning.
This Child, though weak in infancy,
Our confidence and joy shall be,
The pow'r of Satan breaking,
Our peace with God now making.**

- 2 **O dearest Child, whom I adore,
Whose grace surpasses measure,
My Brother, whom I cherish more
Than earth with all its treasure:
Haste from Thy manger to depart,
O come and dwell within my heart;
With joy will I receive Thee,
A cradle there will give Thee.**
- 3 **All blessing, thanks, and praise to Thee,
Lord Jesus Christ, be given:
Thou hast my Brother deigned to be,
Thou Lord of earth and heaven.
Help me throughout this day of grace
To praise Thy love and seek Thy face;
And when I stand before Thee
Forever to adore Thee.**

SECOND LESSON

Hebrews 1:1-6

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but 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. He 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For 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”?

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

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 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.
- 4 He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

GOSPEL

John 1:1-14

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 1st chapter
Glory to You, O Lord.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON (Be seated)

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

The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated with many wonderful traditions. One of these is a joyful Mexican tradition dating back to the sixteenth century called “Las Posadas.”

There are different adaptations of this celebration, but the central theme is Mary and Joseph’s search for lodging in Bethlehem. The word *posada* means “inn” or “place of dwelling” and comes from a root word meaning “rest.”

In the celebration, a group of pilgrims representing Mary and Joseph search for a place to stay. They go from door to door throughout their town or neighborhood and repeatedly find themselves being shut out by innkeepers who are too scared, or too tired, or too short on compassion to make room. Finally, after a time, they find an innkeeper who recognizes Mary as the mother of the divine child and welcomes them with open arms. The journey concludes with a joyous song, and then everyone enters the house to celebrate.

The Las Posadas tradition comes to mind as we consider the reading from John appointed for this day; especially verse 14, which says: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). With this verse, John captures the heart of

what we celebrate on Christmas morning. He tells how the eternal Word of God became a mortal human being – not in some far-off heavenly realm, but among us. He took up residence among us, he lodged with us, he found a place to stay with us, he made his home with us.

Mary and Joseph had a hard time finding welcome when they came to Bethlehem. And John tells us that Jesus has not found an easy welcome in the world either. John said of Jesus: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11).

Note the two sources of unwelcome in these verses. Jesus was rejected by both the world and his own people.

Regarding the first of these, John’s words here remind us how foreign Jesus is in this world. As much as the world speaks of God or gods, it rarely speaks rightly on this topic. “They did not know him,” says John. Jesus is the divine Word who has been with God – and is God – from the beginning. But most people don’t understand this. They didn’t understand it before Jesus came into the world – even though it was clearly prophesied. And even after his historic ministry among us, the majority of the world still doesn’t get it.

The world’s rejection of Christ is directly tied to it’s rejection of God. God is the great light-giver in this world, and yet people often reject his light, preferring darkness instead.

John speaks to this in his earliest verses, telling how: “The light shines in the darkness” (1:4). And then, two chapters later, John adds: “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (3:19–20).

The world is a very dark place when it pushes God to the side. And as we know, men have a long history of doing just that. They choose sinful paths and ignore the God who calls them to repentance.

Thankfully, “the darkness has not overcome” the light. John makes this clear as well. However, the light is not always so popular. We see this in our day, and we know this has been the case at many other times in history as well.

In addition to the unwelcome by the world, John tells us that Jesus was not welcomed by his own people either.

The immediate focus here is on the people of Israel. Jesus would live among them, teach them, do miracles to help them and proclaim the fulfillment of God’s promises to them. But in the end, it wouldn’t matter. Most of them would reject him. In fact, a great and vocal crowd would make sure that he went to his death. Like the innkeepers in Bethlehem who were too scared or too sleepy, Jesus’ own people – in general – were unwilling to welcome him in their midst.

And yet, many of them did receive him. John makes this clear as well, telling of “all who did receive him, and who believed in his name.”

The scriptural record and the history to follow shows us that a good number of both Jews and Gentiles did indeed embrace Christ’s message and make him their Lord. That number has now grown into the great church which exists today.

John’s message, however, is about more than just looking back at history or counting the numbers. Rather, it’s a call for us to examine our own hearts in this regard. We must ask ourselves: Do we have room for Jesus? Have we received and embraced his message and made it our confession? Or have we refused him welcome – either through indifference or rejection?

Most of us who gather at the church on this day are not those who reject him. We, instead, have flung wide the portals of our hearts and welcomed Jesus into our lives through faith.

But still, might there be an aspect or two of our lives where the welcome runs out? For instance, might we embrace the light but still love the darkness too? Or might we embrace Christ’s grace but not his truth?

Or how about this: maybe there is a reluctance on our part to do the kind of welcoming Christ bids us do. Maybe that part of his message is a bridge too far.

Let's face it, we may believe, teach, and confess that his Gospel is for all people, but the reality is that most of us have a limit to how much we will welcome those outside our circles.

Perhaps we do this because we are limited by fear. Or perhaps we are worn out. Or perhaps we simply lack compassion. Like the innkeepers in Las Posadas, there are many excuses. But a Christian must always be as welcoming as God has been to them.

Dina Donohoue's modern classic Christmas story "Trouble at the Inn" tells the story of a boy named Wally Purling. Wally was one of those boys who wasn't exactly the most popular kid in class. He had repeated a couple of years, so he was older than his classmates, and bigger, and clumsier, and a bit slow. When the time came for the Sunday School Christmas pageant, Miss Lumbard decided to cast him as the innkeeper – mostly because he could just stand in one place and because he only had a couple of lines to learn.

When the time came for the play and the boy playing Joseph knocked on the door, Wally the innkeeper was ready. "What do you want?" he gruffly demanded. "We seek lodging," Joseph replied. "Seek it elsewhere, the inn is full," Wally growled. "There is no place for you."

"Please," said Joseph, "my wife is heavy with child, and she needs a place to rest." Wally paused. The prompter fed him his line, which he obediently repeated: "No! Begone! There's no room." Joseph and Mary wearily turned away.

Wally stood there staring after them, his little part in the play now completed. And all eyes were now on the weary couple. But if anyone had been watching Wally, they would have seen that his eyes were filling with tears. And even if they weren't watching, they couldn't miss what happened next. "Wait, Joseph!" he called out. "Don't go! You can have my room."

And so it was that a clumsy and awkward nine-year-old boy taught his town something about making room in the heart – both for others and for Jesus.

When bringing his son into the world, our heavenly Father was content with a lowly stable, a lowly manger, and a lowly family. The son's beginnings may have been humble, but his entrance was no small thing. John captures the majesty and awe of the birth by declaring that “the word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Awesome!

And Christ Jesus is here to stay. He may have ascended into heaven, but he is among us still. Christ Jesus is dwelling in his church, dwelling in his word, and dwelling in his people. And we are all the better for it.

He has come, says John, to bring us “grace and truth.”

Christ's grace is seen in many ways, but especially in making us God's children. John says: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:12,13).

Jesus brought us into God's family by paying the price of our sin. When he died on the cross, he reconciled us to the Father and made us God's children. In Christ we have been born again – born to life eternal.

This amazing grace of Christ teaches us to show grace to others. We practice it in our faith family, and then extend it to the world.

And then there is the truth that Christ brings. Christ brings the truth of God's identity and nature. He also brings the truth of God's mission to save people.

These truths allow us to face the truth of our own shortcomings and failings. We don't have to hide. We don't have to deny our need. Jesus assures us that God is dealing with us through his ministry of grace.

The truth Christ brings shows us that God is pursuing us in love. It was this pursuit of his that drove him to be born into the world and dwell among us. His taking on of human flesh is clear evidence of his desire to help us.

We may not always make room for him, but he always makes room for us. His door is always open; his pursuit of us will not end.

When we know of his great love for us it sets us free and inspires us to extend welcome to others. We no longer need to be afraid. Instead, we can be confident of God's blessing.

Let us then continually open the doors of our heart to God's grace and truth. For in doing so, our hearts will be open to others as well.

In the name of Jesus our newborn king! Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY (Stand)

O Savior of Our Fallen Race

LSB 403

- 1 O Savior of our fallen race,
O Brightness of the Father's face,
O Son who shared the Father's might
Before the world knew day or night,
Alleluia!**
- 2 O Jesus, very Light of Light,
Our constant star in sin's deep night:
Now hear the prayers Your people pray
Throughout the world this holy day.
Alleluia!**
- 3 Remember, Lord of life and grace,
How once, to save our fallen race,
You put our human vesture on
And came to us as Mary's son.
Alleluia!**
- 4 Today, as year by year its light
Bathes all the world in radiance bright,
One precious truth outshines the sun:
Salvation comes from You alone.
Alleluia!**

- 5 For from the Father's throne You came,
His banished children to reclaim;
And earth and sea and sky revere
The love of Him who sent You here.
Alleluia!
- 6 And we are jubilant today,
For You have washed our guilt away.
O hear the glad new song we sing
On this, the birthday of our King!
Alleluia!
- 7 O Christ, Redeemer virgin-born,
Let songs of praise Your name adorn,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore.
Alleluia!

NICENE CREED

Hymnal, back cover

**I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures**

and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the
dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life ✝ of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

Offerings support the church's mission work – both here and through our many partners. Offerings may be placed in the box at the sanctuary entrance or sent to the church through our website or the mail. Fellowship Cards help us welcome new people and track participation. Please fill one out and place it in the offering box following the service.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Lord, all the ends of the earth will see Your salvation. Through the celebration of our Savior's birth, lift our hearts to hope and joy and lead us to manifest these in witness to the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless churches, schools and all places where the good news of God-in-flesh is taught. Guide our hearts to discern the voice of truth from error and lead us to know and confess with all joy the dwelling of our Savior among us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You have comforted Your people and bared Your holy arm for our salvation. Preserve those threatened by persecution for the sake of Christ, and grant courage, comfort and peace to them when they suffer danger or violence. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of peace, look on the nations of this world. Give them a spirit of peace so that they would work through their conflicts and live together in harmony. Reveal to them the birth of Jesus as a light for their paths and the way of salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Give peace to the troubled in mind and heart. Deliver them from the taunts and temptations of the evil one and enable us to help them with compassion. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mercifully grant healing, relief, comfort and peace to the sick, to those who suffer, to the dying, and to those who grieve. Bless doctors, nurses, all medical professionals and caregivers in their service of aid and comfort. And lead all people to rejoice in the good news of life in Christ, our light and salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You graciously give us everything we need. Teach us generosity for the work of Your kingdom. Accept the tithes and offerings we return to You this day and use them to the glory of your name and the good of your people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, the great love that placed Your Son in a manger also places His flesh and blood before us today in bread and wine. Grant us grace to bow our hearts before Him, that we may receive His forgiveness with true repentance and joy. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, in the birth of Your Son You have called people from every time and place into His Body, the Church. We give You thanks for the believers who have gone before us, especially those who were with us in Christmases past and who now live with You. Grant us a sure confidence in Your promise of resurrection and eternal life, and bring us with them at last into Your holy presence; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**



SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

PREFACE

LSB 177

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

It is truly good right and salutary...evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

LSB 178

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:
Heav'n and earth are full of Your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

LSB 178

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

LSB 179

PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST

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.

PAX DOMINI

LSB 180

The peace of the Lord be with you always.
Amen.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us peace.

DISTRIBUTION (Be seated)

COMMUNION HYMN

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

LSB 359

- 1 Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As prophets long have sung,
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half-spent was the night.**
- 2 Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to us a Savior,
When half-spent was the night.**
- 3 This flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor
The darkness ev'rywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death He saves us
And lightens ev'ry load.**
- 4 O Savior, child of Mary,
Who felt our human woe;**

O Savior, King of glory,
Who dost our weakness know:
Bring us at length we pray
To the bright courts of heaven,
And to the endless day.

PRAYER (Stand)

BENEDICTION

SENDING HYMN

Now Sing We, Now Rejoice

LSB 386

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Now sing we, now rejoice,
Now raise to heav'n our voice;
He from whom joy streameth
Poor in a manger lies;
Not so brightly beameth
The sun in yonder skies.
Thou my Savior art!
Thou my Savior art!</p> <p>3 Now through His Son doth shine
The Father's grace divine.
Death was reigning o'er us
Through sin and vanity
Till He opened for us
A bright eternity.
May we praise Him there!
May we praise Him there!</p> | <p>2 Come from on high to me;
I cannot rise to Thee.
Cheer my wearied spirit,
O pure and holy Child;
Through Thy grace and merit,
Blest Jesus, Lord most mild,
Draw me unto Thee!
Draw me unto Thee!</p> <p>4 Oh, where shall joy be found?
Where but on heav'nly ground?
Where the angels singing
With all His saints unite,
Sweetest praises bringing
In heav'nly joy and light.
Oh, that we were there!
Oh, that we were there!</p> |
|--|--|

DISMISSAL

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

POSTLUDE

Those serving:

Sunday, December 25 10:00 a.m.:

In Dulci Jubilo
Setting: Stephen Weber

Greeter: Aaron Siebrass
Comm. assist: Judy Koucky
Reader: Anne Kauzlarich

Acknowledgments

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Gentle Mary Laid Her Child Text: Joseph Simpson Cook, 1859–1933

Tune: Piae Cantiones Ecclesiasticae, 1582, Griefswald Text & Tune: Public domain

From East to West Text: Coelius Sedulius, 5th cent.; tr. John Ellerton, 1826–93, alt. Tune: Geistliche lieder, 1539, Leipzig, ed. Valten Schumann Text & Tune: Public domain

Joy to the World Text: Isaac Watts, 1674–1748 Tune: George Frideric Handel, 1685–1759, adapt. Text & Tune: Public domain

See amid the Winter's Snow Text: Edward Caswall, 1814–78, alt.

Tune: John Goss, 1800–80 Text & Tune: Public domain

Of the Father's Love Begotten Text: Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, 348–c. 413

Tune: Plainsong, 13th cent., mode V Text and tune: Public domain

Now Sing We, Now Rejoice Text: Latin and German, 14th cent.; tr. Arthur T. Russell, 1806–74, alt. Tune: German, 14th cent. Text and tune: Public domain