



CHRISTMAS EVE



Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church

800 N. East Avenue, York NE

To rejoice in the truth of free forgiveness in Jesus and to share this good news with everyone.

Welcome! Thank you for joining us for worship this evening. In our service we gather before our almighty God to offer him our worship and praise. We also gather to strengthen ourselves through the study of God's holy and powerful Word.

Large print hymnals and hearing assist devices are available upon request. Restrooms are located on the north side of the main level and in the lower level. If you have any questions or need assistance with anything please ask one of our ushers.

SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

Our worship this evening is an adaptation of the *Lessons and Carols* service traditionally held at King's College, Cambridge, England, on December 24th every year. *Lessons and Carols* was first held on Christmas Eve, 1918. It was planned by Eric Milner-White, who at the age of thirty-four had just been appointed Dean of King's College after experience as an army chaplain.

OUR THEME FOR THIS NIGHT

We trust that God will bless you in this service of lessons and carols/hymns. Our focus, "God so loved the world," is found in every lesson and song. Christmas is not about a sentimental, warm, and fuzzy kind of love—although these ways that we show love to each other, especially in families, are certainly important. But the heart of Christmas is about God's redeeming love—God's rescue plan for a humanity alienated from him despite all claims of reform, goodness, or morality. The human condition of sin separates us from God, and only his action could have solved that problem. The life, death, and resurrection of his Son has solved the problem. By trusting what Jesus has done for us, heaven awaits us and we live life this side of heaven in loyal thanks for rescue.

A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

HYMN

On Christmas Night All Christians Sing | 52

1 On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring;
On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring,
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

2 When sin departs before your grace,
Then life and health come in its place.
When sin departs before your grace,
Then life and health come in its place.
Angels and saints with joy may sing
All for to see the newborn King.

3 From out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night.
From out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night:
"Glory to God and peace to men
Now and forevermore, Amen."

Stand

EXHORTATION AND PRAYER

[M] Beloved in the Lord: In this Christmas season it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us, the Christ-child, lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the history of the loving purposes of God from the first days after our fall to the birth and glorious redemption brought to us by this Holy Child. Let us hear how peace was lost, and how peace is restored.

But first, let us pray, for this is good and right.

Heavenly Father, we pray for ourselves and all people who worship you and your Son this holy night. By your holy Word, lead us to say with the angels,

C Glory to God in the highest!

M We pray for your blessing upon the people of our city, our state, our nation, and our world.

C Glory to God in the highest!

M We pray for the poor and helpless, the cold and hungry, the sick and sad, that you would give them the joy of your salvation and the comfort of your presence.

C Glory to God in the highest!

M We pray for unbelievers and enemies of the Church, that through your Law and Gospel you would lead them to recognize your Son as their only hope for eternal life.

C Glory to God in the highest!

M Finally, we remember before you all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light and beauty than we, that multitude which no one can number, who died in faith, and now praise you in your heavenly temple. We confess that we are united with them and with one another.

C Glory to God in the highest!

M We humbly offer up these prayers and praises in the words of Christ himself.

C **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**

THE NEED FOR GOD'S LOVE

FIRST LESSON

GENESIS 3:8-15

Humanity's separation from God dates to the beginning of time, to the fall into sin by the first humans, Adam and Eve. As tragic as this was, the account ends with God's promise of rescue—that the woman's offspring, Christ, would ultimately defeat Satan, and the rule of sin and death.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

M The Word of the Lord

C **Thanks be to God.**

Old Testament believers from the centuries before Jesus was born and 21st century believers looking forward to his second coming have something in common. We plead for his presence, rescue, and redemption.

HYMN

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel | 23

1 Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

2 Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free Your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, And bring them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

3 Oh, come, O Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

4 Oh, come, O Key of David, come, And open wide our heav'nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!

LOVE PROMISES A RESCUE

SECOND LESSON

Isaiah 9:2,6,7

In love God promised a rescue already to Adam and Eve. Through the prophets he repeated that promise many times over centuries before the birth of Jesus.

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

M The Word of the Lord

C **Thanks be to God.**

Both Isaiah's prophecy and this hymn speak of Christ's eternal power and rule, but the last stanza of the hymn emphasizes the wonders of his love.

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 all 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.

LOVE REVEALS UNEXPECTED DETAILS

THIRD LESSON

Micah 5:2-4

Old Testament prophecies included unexpected details, such as the exact tiny village where Jesus would be born—and the expansion of his impact “to the ends of the earth.” This wonder of fulfilled prophecy continues to validate the story of God’s love even today.

² “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,

though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

M The Word of the Lord

C **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem | **66**

- 1 O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep And dreamless sleep The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears Of all the years Are met in thee tonight.
- 2 For Christ is born of Mary, And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, The angels keep Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing To God the King And peace to all the earth.
- 3 How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts To human hearts The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will Receive him still, The dear Christ enters in.
- 4 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;
Oh, come to us, Abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!

LOVE'S PLAN REVEALED TO MARY

FOURTH LESSON

Luke 1:26-38

God could have initiated the climax of his plan in some stunning manner. But he chooses a humble virgin. Along with Mary we might say, "Why?" And along with Mary we humbly accept God's plan and marvel at it.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

M The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

HYMN

All Praise to You, Eternal God (tune CW 38)

This less familiar hymn with stanzas by Martin Luther is sung to the tune of a well-known Luther hymn, "From Heaven Above." The Christmas story is full of paradoxes. For example, the king of the universe is born of a humble virgin. Note the many paradoxes in this hymn.



1 All praise to you, e - ter - nal God! Now clothed in
 2 Once did the skies be - fore you bow; a vir - gin's
 3 O lit - tle Child, you were our guest that wear - y
 4 You came to us in dark - est night to make us
 5 All this your love for us has done; by this our



hu - man flesh and blood, you took a man - ger
 arms con - tain you now while an - gels, who in
 ones in you might rest; for - lorn and low - ly
 chil - dren of the light; like an - gels in the
 love for you is won; for this our joy - ful



for your throne while worlds on worlds are yours a - lone.
 you re - jice, now lis - ten for your in - fant voice.
 was your birth that we might rise to heav'n from earth.
 realms di - vine a - round your throne we, too, will shine.
 songs we raise and shout our thanks in cease - less praise.

LOVE'S PLAN REVEALED TO JOSEPH

FIFTH LESSON

Matthew 1:18-25

The wonder of fulfilled prophecy is valuable for Joseph . . . and for us. The many fulfilled prophecies are one way that God demonstrates the truth of his Word.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:²³ "The virgin will conceive and give

birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

M The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising | 42

Imagine Joseph's confusion! And yet God's love for him—and angelic intervention—enabled him to believe this hymn's bold claim: "See how God . . . gave his Son!"—the same transforming assertion found in the next lesson. We too, in spite of our confusions and doubts, pray that Jesus will "gently lead us and be near us."

1 Come, your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising;
Loudly sing his love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom.

2 See how God, for us providing,
Gave his Son and life abiding;
He our weary steps is guiding
From earth's woe to heav'nly joy.

3 Christ, from heav'n to us descending
And in love our race befriending,
In our need his help extending,
Saved us from the wily foe.

4 Jacob's Star in all its splendor
Beams with comfort sweet and tender,
Forcing Satan to surrender,
Breaking all the pow'rs of hell.

5 Gracious Child, we pray you, hear us;
From your lowly manger cheer us.
Gently lead us and be near us
Till we join th' angelic choir.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

SIXTH LESSON

John 3:16-18

We become God's children through faith—that is, by trusting in God's rescue plan which cancels the alienation caused by our rebellion. This lesson is also the basis for tonight's more extended meditation on God's love.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

M The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Love Caused Your Incarnation (tune 105)

The closing chorus of J.S. Bach's Christmas Oratorio uses the tune for a Good Friday hymn, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"—but in a major key with blazing trumpets. It's a way of saying that Jesus was born for a mission: to die and rise, to rescue "our lost and fallen race" (stanza 1).



1 Love caused your in - car - na - tion; love brought you down to me.
2 Re - joice, then, you sad-heart - ed, who sit in deep - est gloom,
3 Sin's debt, that fear - ful bur - den, let not your souls dis - tress;



Your thirst for my sal - va - tion pro - cured my lib - er - ty.
who mourn o'er joys de - part - ed and trem - ble at your doom.
your guilt the Lord will par - don and cov - er by his grace.



Oh, love be - yond all tell - ing that led you to em - brace
De - spair not; he is near you, he's stand - ing at the door
He comes, for you pro - cur - ing the peace of sin for - giv'n,



in love, all love ex - cel - ling, our lost and fall - en race!
who best can help and cheer you and bids you weep no more.
his chil - dren thus se - cur - ing e - ter - nal life in heav'n.

LOVE'S BIRTH

SEVENTH LESSON

Luke 2:1-20

With John 3:16 and the thoughts from tonight's message as context, we now hear the familiar and beloved Christmas account.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

CANDLE LIGHTING

During the Hymn, acolytes will come to your pew and light the candle nearest the center aisle. Please then light the candle next to you until all the candles are lit in the pew. When all the candles are lit, the lights will be dimmed. Remember to tip the unlit candle and leave the lit candle vertical.

HYMN

Gentle Mary Laid Her Child | 56

- 1 Gentle Mary laid her child Lowly in a manger;
There he lay, the undefiled, 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 them.
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 undefiled, 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!

Stand

CLOSING PRAYER

- ☒ O God, who makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ; grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, so may we also behold him with sure confidence when he shall come to be our judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

BLESSING

M May he who by his incarnation
gathered things earthly and heavenly into one,
fill us with such joy that comes with the knowledge
of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

And the blessing of God Almighty
— the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit —
be upon you and remain with you always.

C Amen.

HYMN

Silent Night

**Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!**

**Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Organist: Mr. Timothy Richert

Instrumentalist: Isaiah Richert

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HOLIDAY WORSHIP

Christmas Day 10:30 AM

New Year's Eve 6:30 PM (Joint Bethel/Grace service at Bethel)