

**PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT**  
Reverend John R. Hanson  
December 24, 2021, 11:00 p.m.

**INTRODUCTION**

*We gather in the darkness of this night to proclaim the coming of the light. The Gospel announces the reign of God, which shines through the Christmas readings. It is tempting to avoid the struggles and injustices of the world and opt for a message of happiness and beauty. But, unless we take the transforming nature of God's Reign seriously, we miss the point. We miss an opportunity to be witnesses to, and to be agents of, God's Reign. Isaiah announces that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light! Paul reminds us that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all! Amid our broken world, we proclaim that our God comes to us in human flesh so that we may be strengthened and also bear his divine light to all.*

**PRELUDE**

J. Hanson

**THEME AND VERSE**

**Who will come to save us? Who will the Lord send to heal our wounds?  
Will God send the mighty angelic host? Will God send a great warrior?**

***The Lord said to me: you are my son; this day have I begotten you. (Psalm 2:7)***

A child has no voice, no power, no influence. Why would God send a child? How can a child change the world? A child needs attention, love, and care. Our time and energy will be consumed in caring for a child.

**We reach out in love--after all, we are all God's beloved ones! The child is the blessed gift that God sends, teaching us how to love and care.**

**HYMN**

*"From Heaven Above"*

Green # 51

**LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE**

This night we light Advent candles, reminding us of God's promised peace on earth. That we are to live in hope as we dispel the darkness around us. That we are to be constant in our relationships and in the way we live our lives. That following Jesus is a way of living in righteousness, trust, and faithfulness.

**Lord, we have watched for your coming with longing and with expectation, patience, and hope. You come as a tiny, fragile baby, yet we know that you are God, and you are with us. May the flame of this candle remind us that you are the light of the world and that we can follow you and never walk in darkness but will have the true light of life.**

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

We gather in the name

**of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

In the stillness of the night, in the midst of the shadows and of our fears, we make our needs known to the one who can bring us light, life, and salvation!

**Everlasting Father, darkness floods our hearts, not the darkness of longer and colder nights but the darkness of doubt and despair. Inside we cry for peace and hope, but our outer actions proclaim fear and faithlessness. It is as though we are bound in grief waiting for the inevitable death of our spirits. The gloom is far too real! During this time, Lord, send your light to us. Disperse and destroy this gloom that has invaded our hearts. Bring us hope. Help us prepare our hearts for love and peace. Amen.**

May the gift of the God of all ages and of all creation be made known to you in this most holy of nights. "Peace on earth, good will to all," the angels proclaim. The Lord does not abandon, instead he comes to us, abides with us, Emmanuel, God with us! Receive this gift of peace and ever-present support.

**Glory to God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen**

#### SHARING OF THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you all.

**And also with all those we greet in this season.**

#### THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

HYMN

*"O Little Town of Bethlehem"*

Green # 41

*A Story of Mary and Joseph: Matthew 1:18-21*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

HYMN

*"Away in a Manger"*

Green # 67

*Jesus' Birth: St. Luke 2:1-7*

In those days, a decree went out from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

HYMN

*"Hark the Herald Angels Sing"*

Green # 60

*Shepherds and Angels: St. Luke 2:8-14*

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of a great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

HYMN

*"The First Noel"*

Green # 56

*A Star was Their Sign: St. Matthew 2:1-2,7-10*

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him." Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

HYMN

*"Joy to the World"*

Green # 39

SERMON

*"Where meek souls will receive him still..." In the celebration of the Christ Child, we retell the story. It is not one of oppression, of psychological abuse, of holding a people ransom but of a release of everything we hold as "true" to allow us to live in the true nature of the Creator. "The dear Christ enters in!"*

HYMN

*"I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve"*

COC # 26

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.**

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST FILLS OUR HEARTS

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD'S PRAYER

BLESSING AND PRAYER FOR COMMUNION

**Lord of Christmas, we humbly offer our gifts of service and of these possessions in joyful thanksgiving for the love you have shown us. Accept these gifts to empower the work of your people as we bring light and life to our troubled world. Lord of all, you have given us your gift of salvation. You fill us with your goodness and peace. Use us that all might come to know the abundance of your love. This we ask through your only son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

WE SHARE THE LIGHT OF THE CHRIST CHILD

CANDLE CEREMONY

*As the light is passed to members of the congregation,  
pass it to the person next to you. DO NOT TIP a lighted candle.*

HYMN

*"It Came upon the Midnight Clear"*

Green # 54

*Lesson of Light: St. John 1:1-14*

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

HYMN

*"Silent Night"*

Green # 65

*(Please extinguish your candle as we sing the final verse of the hymn.  
Hold candle upright until you place it in the basket.)*

BENEDICTION - SONG OF SIMEON:

*Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to lighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Glory 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.*

The Almighty and Incarnate God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit bless us now and forever.

**Amen.**

POSTLUDE