

Peace Came to Earth

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St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

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December 24, 2023

**The Nativity of our Lord-
Christmas Eve**

The order of worship is based upon Divine Service Setting Three, Lutheran Service Book p. 184.

Invocation, Versicles, and Confession and Absolution (p. 184)

The Sunday School Program-*Peace Came to Earth*

The Promise of Peace

Speakers: Nicole Werling, Alex Wolfe, Katrina Nerud, Matthew Werling

God Loves Me Deeply LSB 392: 1, 3

Peace Is Proclaimed

Speakers: Matthew Werling, Katrina Nerud, Nicole Werling

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel LSB 357: 1, 4

The Prince of Peace

Speakers: Katrina Nerud, Matthew Werling, Nicole Werling, Alex Wolfe

Away in a Manger LSB 364

Peace for All People

Speakers: Alex Wolfe, Katrina Nerud, Matthew Werling,

Nicole Werling, Bobby Wolfe

To Us a Child Is Born

Entrance Hymn 361 O Little Town of Bethlehem

Kyrie (p. 186)

Gloria In Excelsis (p. 187)

Collect of the Day

- [P]** O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

[C] Amen. *(sung)*

Readings (on back of bulletin)

Gradual

Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 98:1a

To us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!**

The Apostles' Creed (p. 192)

Hymn of the Day 370 What Child Is This

Sermon

Hymn of Praise 366 It Came upon the Midnight Clear

Offertory (p. 192)

Presentation of the Offering

Prayer of the Church

After each petition:

[P] Lord, in Your mercy,

[C] hear our prayer.

The prayer concludes:

[P] ...one God, now and forever.

[C] Amen.

Lord's Prayer (p. 196, spoken)

Collect for the Church

[P] Let us pray.

Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

[C] Amen.

Benediction (p. 202)

The hymn begins after the candles have been lit.

Hymn to Depart 363 Silent Night, Holy Night

The Offering this evening will be given to The Lutheran Heritage Foundation to support their “Set Free by Jesus” project.

Sunday School

Matthew Werling, Alex Wolfe

Teacher: Sandy Rahn

Katrina Nerud, Nicole Werling

Teacher: Joel Werling

Special Guest– Bobby Wolfe

A very special “Thank you” to our Sunday School students and teachers for their dedication in preparing and presenting this year’s Christmas program!

Old Testament Reading:

Isaiah 7:10–14

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,
¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

Epistle: 1 John 4:7-16

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶So we have

come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us).

²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve

December 24, 2023

Text: Matthew 1:18-25 (Gospel Reading)

Other Texts: Isaiah 7:10-14 (Old Testament Reading); 1 John 4:7-16 (Epistle Reading)

“The Precious, Yet Practical Gift”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and His Eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem to save us from our sins.

It has been noted:

If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent an entertainer.
But our greatest need is forgiveness of our sins, so God sent a Savior.

I wonder how many people out there would have preferred God sending a scientist, an economist, an entertainer, or something, anything else than a Savior. I wonder how many of us, at least at times in our lives, would have preferred the same thing.

We see the diseases that afflict people, energy concerns, the balance of maintaining civilization and preserving the environment, and we wish the divine scientist had been conceived in Mary's womb. We see economic turmoil, we feel it in our retirement accounts, the unemployment rate rises, and we wish that the divine economist had been born in the stable. We hear about so much tragedy, war and violence. We see those who are caught in depression and despair. Deep inside, many of us may confess to feeling down more often than up. And we wish the divine entertainer had been laid in the manger. But instead of those things, we get a Savior from our sins. It's as if Santa wasn't listening to what we really wanted for Christmas.

We have practical minds. And using those practical minds of ours, we can't help but think that we would have been better off if God gave us something that we *really* needed, something that would have helped us in our everyday life. We can't help but think that baby Jesus is like that cute, but pretty much useless knick-knack that somebody gives us for Christmas. Oh sure He's adorable, but He just isn't a very practical gift for real people in the real world, especially with all the real problems that fill it. Thus saith Satan, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful nature. For honestly, what easily hinders us from a deep and profound appreciation for the birth of a Savior from our sins is that we too often lack a deep and profound appreciation of the *seriousness* of our sins. We just don't think that they're that big of a deal.

No doubt, we've all heard those stories where someone was blatantly doing something wrong, even caught red-handed, and yet they deny their wrongdoing, downplay what they've done, justify it by blaming others, parents, peer group, society, even the one they harmed. I would bet that most of us would like to have a moment or two behind closed doors with such a person. Nevertheless, *we* too can have that attitude towards our own breaking of God's Law.

We don't get overly worked up over *our* breaking of the commandments, and so we're rather surprised to find out that *God* is. We deny any real wrongdoing, giving one excuse after another. We downplay it, pointing at everyone else "who is so much worse than we are." We blame the current situation and other people for *our* breaking of God's Law, twisting reality by saying their failures or shortcomings justify our sins.

We get angry with parents, pastors and fellow Christians who try to correct us. We even get angry with God Himself for holding us accountable. Angry that He actually expects us to keep His Commandments and has the audacity to condemn us for our failure to do so. In such cases, we prove ourselves to be no better than those that we hear about on the news and have a heyday ripping apart. And we thought we needed a divine scientist, economist, or entertainer!

The world has taken the miracle of Jesus Christ's birth and turned into a time of warm and fuzzy feelings about roasting chestnuts and falling snow. But what was truly warm and fuzzy were the animals that filled the stable with all the stink that they and their waste could share. But that was actually a rather fitting delivery room for God's Son. After all, He purposefully came into this stable of a world which is filled with the filthy stink of the refuse of our sins. He came to save us from their pollution before we die forever in them.

But why doesn't God just do the "God thing" and take our sins away by just *saying* that they're gone? Why does He go through this whole "Incarnation thing," that is, becoming a true man in Mary's womb, and being born to live and die as one of us? It just isn't very practical; it's just way more work than was needed. Or so we like to think.

But let us remember something that our "practical" minds sometimes lose sight of. A cheap gift is held in low esteem by those to whom it has been given. But God is no cheapskate. The Heavenly Father gave His most precious treasure in order to buy us back from sin, death, and the devil. He gave His Son who became a true man so that He could live as one of us and die as one of us. Live as one of us so that His perfect obedience to the Law could be given to us. Die as one of us so that He could take our sins upon Himself, pay for them on the cross, and win for us forgiveness and eternal life. A just and holy God cannot ignore sin, but must punish it in full. (We are rightly angered when our government doesn't punish criminality; could a holy God then not punish sin?) But a just and holy God who is also gracious and merciful punishes the sin in Himself, the person of His incarnate Son, so that sinners may be saved from the earthly and eternal punishments their sins deserve!

Fellow believers, we who have been baptized into His death and resurrection see with new eyes, those of faith. We see, or at least begin to see, the immensity of our sins, their filth, and God's right to be angry with us and punish us because of them. Yet we see more, seeing God's love for us in Christ Jesus. We recognize and appreciate from the depths of our soul the reality that our gift of forgiveness and salvation was anything but cheap, for it cost the Father's Son His very life. So in thankful response to the gift and in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, we will not treat this most precious gift as cheap, impractical junk by continuing on in a life that is contrary to His Commandments and not focused on serving Him and others in love!

Dear Christians, this Christmas, and always, let's keep *our* practicality to things here on earth, as there it does have some value. But in spiritual matters, our practicality is worse than worthless, making us look like fools before God in heaven, as it fails to recognize that the seeming impractical gift of a Savior from our sins is actually the most valuable and, spiritually speaking with eternity in the equation, *the most practical gift* that we have ever and will ever receive. For the Christ Child is the only gift that gives life now and forever in heavenly glory!

In the name of Jesus, the child in the manger, the man on the cross, the glorious King of Heaven who will take us home to Himself, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor, glory and worship, on this Christmas Eve, and forevermore. Amen!

Christmas Eve (Christmas Eve Propers)
24 December 2023

Collect of the Day

O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Presentation of the Offering

As we gather to celebrate the greatest gift of Your grace, Your Son to be our Savior from sin, death, the devil, and hell, grant us dear Father Your Holy Spirit that we would generously give of ourselves and all that we have to support the proclamation of the birth of a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form

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

Lord God Almighty, on this most holy night we come before You in awe at the wonder and majesty of the incarnation. The Savior of the nations has come, and with joy we greet our newborn King. Let the proclamation of His birth sound forth throughout the world. Give to Your Church faithful pastors to proclaim the good tidings of His birth, and give to Your people willing ears to hear, hearts to believe, and tongues to confess the Good News of the Savior's birth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You sent an angel to reveal to Joseph that the Child in Mary's womb was Your own, preserving their marriage and family. Preserve our homes also by Your Holy Word. Fill them with Your grace, that husbands and wives, parents and children may live in peace and love with one another. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, the One born in Bethlehem is the Son of David and the Lord of David, to whom every knee shall bow. Look upon those You have placed in authority, and grant that they would govern in wisdom and justice in light of this reality. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to be the Prince of Peace. While we know that the fullness of that peace will only be manifested at His return on the Last Day in the new heavens and earth, yet we pray for an increase of peace among the nations now, that lives would be saved, homes and property spared, and the Gospel be allowed free course to the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You love us and sent Your Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Strengthen us to love one another. As You have mercy upon all who are poor and troubled, so perfect Your love in us, that we would gladly be Your instruments of help in time of need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Giver and Preserver of life, Your Son came to save us from sin and its curse. Hear the pleas of all who call to You for mercy. Deliver them from affliction according to Your will, and work in them steadfast faith to cling to the life they have in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, guard in safety all military personnel, emergency workers, and all whose vocations keep them from their families for our well-being this evening. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, You promised the virgin-born Son to reluctant King Ahaz, and in the fullness of time the Word became flesh. Open our hearts and strengthen our faith gladly to receive Your Son in the signs where He is present: not in signs of our own choosing, but in the Holy Word and Sacraments. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have given Your Son, born of Mary, to be the Savior of the world. Send Your Spirit and abide with us, that we may confess Him and remain in Your love until He comes again in glory; for He lives and reigns with You and the same Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Prayer for the Church

Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.