



**St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)**

**8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254**

**309-949-2516**

**December 25, 2023**

**The Nativity of our Lord-  
Christmas Day (Dawn)**

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*Divine Service Three (Lutheran Service Book, p. 184)*

**Hymn of Invocation 379 O Come, All Ye Faithful**

**Invocation and Versicles (p. 184)**

**Entrance Hymn 380 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing**

**Kyrie (p. 186)**

**Gloria In Excelsis (p. 187)**

**Collect of the Day**

**P** Most merciful God, You gave Your eternal Word to become incarnate of the pure Virgin. Grant Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, that they may be ready for Your visitation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**G** **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 Nicene Creed (p. 191)**

**Hymn of the Day 375 Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising**

**Sermon**

**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.

## Service of the Sacrament (p. 194)

*(Please see the Communion statement in the pew pads for receiving the Sacrament at St. John's.)*

## Distribution Hymns

**368 Angels We Have Heard on High**  
**381 Let Our Gladness Have No End**  
**388 Go Tell It on the Mountain**

## Nunc Dimittis (p. 199)

## Hymn to Depart 387 Joy to the World

*Silent Prayer*

## Old Testament Reading:

### Isaiah 62:10-12

<sup>10</sup>Go through, go through the gates;  
prepare the way for the people;  
build up, build up the highway;  
clear it of stones; lift up a signal over  
the peoples.

<sup>11</sup>Behold, the LORD has proclaimed  
to the end of the earth: Say to the  
daughter of Zion,  
“Behold, your salvation comes;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.”

<sup>12</sup>And they shall be called The Holy  
People, The Redeemed of the LORD;  
and you shall be called Sought Out, A  
City Not Forsaken.

## Epistle: Titus 3:4-7

<sup>4</sup>When the goodness and loving  
kindness of God our Savior appeared,  
<sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works  
done by us in righteousness, but ac-  
cording to his own mercy, by the  
washing of regeneration and renewal  
of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured  
out on us richly through Jesus Christ  
our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by  
his grace we might become heirs ac-  
cording to the hope of eternal life.

## Holy Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out  
from Caesar Augustus that all the  
world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was  
the first registration when Quirinius  
was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went  
to be registered, each to his own town.  
<sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Gali-  
lee, from the town of Nazareth, to Ju-  
dea, to the city of David, which is  
called Bethlehem, because he was of  
the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be  
registered with Mary, his betrothed,  
who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they  
were there, the time came for her to  
give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her  
firstborn son and wrapped him in

swaddling cloths and laid him in a  
manger, because there was no place for  
them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup>And in the same region there were  
shepherds out in the field, keeping  
watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And  
an angel of the Lord appeared to them,  
and the glory of the Lord shone around  
them, and they were filled with fear.

<sup>10</sup>And the angel said to them, “Fear  
not, for behold, I bring you good news  
of a great joy that will be for all the  
people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day  
in the city of David a Savior, who is  
Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a  
sign for you: you will find a baby  
wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying  
in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there  
was with the angel a multitude of the  
heavenly host praising God and saying,  
<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among  
those with whom he is pleased!”

<sup>15</sup>When the angels went away from  
them into heaven, the shepherds said to  
one another, “Let us go over to Bethle-  
hem and see this thing that has hap-  
pened, which the Lord has made  
known to us.” <sup>16</sup>And they went with  
haste and found Mary and Joseph, and  
the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup>And  
when they saw it, they made known  
the saying that had been told them con-  
cerning this child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard  
it wondered at what the shepherds told  
them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these  
things, pondering them in her heart.  
<sup>20</sup>And the shepherds returned, glorify-  
ing and praising God for all they had  
heard and seen, as it had been told  
them.

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Day (Dawn)

December 25, 2023

Text: Luke 2:1-20 (Gospel Reading)

Other Texts: Isaiah 62:10-12 (Old Testament Reading); Titus 3:4-7 (Epistle Reading)

### **“The Answer: The Christ Child”**

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.

Christmas has had its “bad guys.” Ebenezer Scrooge, from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," is a selfish, cold-hearted miser who despises Christmas because it is a time of unnecessary expense and frivolity, both of which interfere with his priorities of wealth and profit. Then there's Dr. Seuss's Grinch. While his full reasons are unknown, he's bitter and mean, bothered by others being happy, hating all the noise which comes from the Who's enjoying Christmas. Yet in both cases, by the end of the story both have come around, finding joy in Christmas as they embrace the spirit of generosity and compassion.

But now a new bad guy of Christmas is around, Krampus. To be fair, he has been around for centuries as a part of some European groups' folklore. He's kind of the bad cop to St. Nicholas's good cop. While St. Nick gave gifts to the good boys and girls, Krampus would dish out the punishment to the bad kids with birch rods. But according to a recent article in the Washington Post, Krampus is becoming increasingly popular in the United States now days.

Now why is it that this hairy, horned goat-like monster, with spindly, sharp fingernails and a long, creepy, tongue is gaining popularity in our culture? Apparently, more people, especially young ones, are looking for a counterbalance to all the holly jolly. To them reality is all negative: climate doom, ongoing war and violence, political turmoil, social injustice and unrest. All the institutions, whether church, government, even the nuclear family, are perceived as outdated, corrupt, and oppressive. So the foundations that provided social order and gave a sense of self and purpose are fading away, or being forcibly removed, leaving them wandering aimlessly, or finding purpose and meaning only in further attacking that which once provided purpose and meaning.

So as the Holiday stuff appears increasingly frivolous and empty to these people, so also Krampus just feels more authentic than Santa Clause. Especially since, unlike Scrooge or even the Grinch, Krampus doesn't get sucked back in, but stays bitter and jaded.

Interestingly, while the Gospel account of Christ's birth has been romanticized in some ways, such as with an ox and ass keeping time for a little drummer boy, the actual account recorded by St. Luke is anything but a happy story full of empty frivolity. It's not even a story of someone learning to let go of their selfishness and greed and embrace a spirit of generosity and compassion. Actually, it's rather plain in its features and more, imbedded in unpleasant reality.

Just consider the situation. The ruler in faraway conquering and oppressive Rome wants to take a census to get more tax money and poor Joseph can only comply. Living in Nazareth he now

needs to make an 80-some mile journey to Bethlehem on foot. Right from the get-go this was difficult as it required him to close up his shop, putting work and income on hold. How that money would have been handy with a baby on the way. Oh yeah, the baby! The trip would be even more difficult with Mary being in the late stages of her pregnancy.

While we don't know about the trip proper, whether things went well or were following Murphy's Law, we certainly do hope that their arrival in Bethlehem was not an indicator of the rest of their journey. With no room in the inn, no other place to stay, finally they find shelter, a place where some animals had been corralled for the night. It wasn't the cleanest place, but it was something. And something was desperately needed as soon Mary began labor.

No wonderful nursery with all the special touches here, not even for that time period. Mary in labor pains, her water breaking, Joseph lying down blankets and cloaks, whatever he could to make her as comfortable as possible in such a terrible situation. Perhaps he took a blanket and started tearing it up to make the strips of cloth. Did he empty out the manger, cleaning it as best he could so that it could be used as a cradle? No silly, empty, frivolity here? Just the harsh reality of living in the real world with its many difficulties and stresses.

Yet, we also see here the powerful truth that the Divine Majesty works in and through this harsh reality. But should this surprise us? For the first thing we should remember is that *He's the One who made it harsh*. He cursed the creation due to mankind's sin. He gave the holy judgment of death, and all that leads to it, upon sinners.

Which makes what happened in Bethlehem all the more incredible as the spirit of generosity and compassion goes far beyond what could ever be imagined. For though holiness hates sin and righteousness demands judgment, the Father gives the greatest gift imaginable, His Son to be our Savior, conceived by a true spirit of generosity, the Holy Spirit Himself.

Yes, there is great joy here, but it is anything but frivolous. As Isaiah foretold, God's people are called The Holy People and the Redeemed of the Lord as the Christ Child will make them holy by redeeming them by His sacrifice which pays for their sins. While it is easy to feel alone and abandoned in this world, God assures us that we are called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken, for He has given us His Son to be our Good Shepherd who has sought us, who promises that He will never forsake us, but will be with us always to the very end of the age.<sup>1</sup>

Just imagine the scene, and then see God's works. Mary and Joseph holding a little baby in their arms. The baby who is the only-begotten Son of God, the eternal Word by whom all things were made. Joseph cutting Jesus' umbilical cord, who will cut the cords of sin and death, the chains of Satan's rule that entangle him and us. Joseph washing the newborn child, who would wash away his sin, and yours and mine as well. Mary wrapping her little baby boy in those strips of cloth, who would wrap her and us in the perfect white robe of His righteousness. Mary and Joseph placing the baby Jesus in the manger to rest. The baby who, after His death and resurrection, will ascend to heaven to prepare a place for them and all believers in heaven.

People are drawn to Krampus, or at least what he symbolizes to them, because there is no real understanding of personal sin and debt before the Holy God, yet their emptiness remains because

they are shackled to sin and Satan and doomed to die. So they despise the holly jolly, but then spiral into deeper depression, despair, and darkness even as they light torches to burn down all that they consider stopping utopia from happening. Their condemnation is just. But it is also sad. For they need not be judged. They need not be lost in a darkness that sees Krampus as the answer; for the devil is never the answer, but ever and only the problem.

But neither is the answer holly jolly. A surface level emotional high that, like a drug, gives a false high as is shown by the post-season blues (and sometimes even during the season). Nor is the answer developing a spirit of compassion and generosity. While these are valuable here on earth, without the proper source even these qualities will leave one empty, already in this life, but certainly in the next since the judgment cuts much deeper. That is why St. Paul wrote to Titus that we need the baptismal washing of regeneration and renewal, which changes us from the inside out, as holy virtues flow from holy faith in the Holy Child.

Dear Christians, the answer is neither negativity nor empty joy; it is not even in becoming a better, kinder person. The answer is that which was announced by the heavenly messenger,

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”<sup>2</sup>

God fill you with deep joy and the peace that surpasses all understanding as you receive His gift of His Son as your Savior, the forgiveness of sins He has won for you, the new life His Spirit gives to you, and the certain hope of that life lasting forever in the glorious world to come. Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20b.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:10-12. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

**The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Day)**  
**25 December 2023**

**Collect of the Day**

Most merciful God, You gave Your eternal Word to become incarnate of the pure Virgin. Grant Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, that they may be ready for Your visitation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Presentation of the Offering**

Gracious Father, receive these gifts which we here offer in gratitude and praise for Your giving to us Your Son, born of the Virgin Mary, as our Savior. We pray that You would use them to the glory of Your name, the good of the Church, and the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ near and far and throughout the world. 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, all the ends of the earth will see Your salvation. Lift our hearts to hope and joy in the celebration of our Savior's birth, that we would manifest this joy in witness to the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless churches, schools and every place where the good news of God-in-our-flesh is taught. Guide our hearts to discern the voice of truth from error. Lead us to know and confess with all joy the good news of our Savior, that those who hear may rejoice with us and the holy angels to worship Christ, the newborn King. 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. Grant courage, comfort and peace to those who 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 conflicts would cease, and so reveal through the birth of Jesus Your great 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. Enable us to help them with compassion. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mercifully grant healing, relief, comfort and peace to all 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. Let all rejoice in the good news of Christ, our light and salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, the great love that laid Your Son in a manger also lays His body and blood before us in bread and wine. Grant us grace to bow our hearts before Him with all those in heaven and on earth who adore Him, that we may receive His forgiveness and life with 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 went before us, especially who were with us in Christmases past and who now live with You. Grant us sure confidence in Your promise of resurrection and eternal life, and bring us with them at last into Your 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.**