



St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)
8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254
309-949-2516

December 24, 2022

**The Nativity of our Lord-
Christmas Eve (Midnight)**

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

The Sunday School Program-*This Is My Son*

The Promised Son

Readers-Nicole Werling

Of the Father's Love Begotten LSB 384: 1, 3 (Children sing)

The Son in the Manger

Readers- Alex Wolfe, Cooper Freeman, Matthew Werling

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel LSB 357: 1 (Children sing)

The Son and the Cross

Readers- Katrina Nerud, Gannon Marckese,
Matthew Werling, Nicole Werling

Away in the Manger LSB 364 (Children sing)

The Son in Our Hearts

Readers- Katrina Nerud, Bobby Wolfe

In This Precious Baby Boy (Children sing)

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

Entrance Hymn 361 O Little Town of Bethlehem

Kyrie (p. 186)

Gloria In Excelsis (p. 187)

Collect of the Day

☐ O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that Light on earth we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; 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.** (*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 1st German stanza will be sung as v. 4)

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For 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. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town

of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And 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.

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among
those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

List of Classes

2nd -6th grade: Cooper Freeman, Griffin Marckese, Matthew Werling, and Alex Wolfe.

Confirmation class: Gannon Marckese, Katrina Nerud, Nicole Werling, and Bobby Wolfe.

A very special "Thank you" to our Sunday School students, teachers, and Sunday School Board for their dedication in preparing and presenting this year's Christmas program!

A Blessed Christmas!



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Given by:

Linda Aper
Janet Bertson
Dawn Daebilliehn
Mike & Jan Dahl

Carl Freeman
Brad & Mary Jo Gehn
Sandra Kane
Gayla Kroll
Fred & Sheila Magerkurth,
John & Liz Neumann
Bev Peterson

Gary & Kathy Post
Wanda Rahn
Joel & Jamie Werling
Dan & Carolyn Werner
Carolyn Wildermuth
Denise Winchell

In Memory of:

Loved Ones
Parents
Shirley Dahl
Dale/Mary Buysee, Carol Leaneagh
Christmas Past
Our Parents
Grandparents & Parents
Donald/Cleone Loenser, Jim Lundquist
Parents
Loved ones
Bob Peterson,
Roland & Louise Holke
Lee & Florence Holke
Our Parents
Edwin Rahn
Family
Family
John Wildermuth
Dennie & Cherri Brown

The Nativity of our Lord—Christmas Eve (Midnight)

December 24, 2022

Text: Luke 2:14 (Gospel Reading¹)

Other Texts: Isaiah 9:2-7 (Old Testament Reading); Titus 2:11-14 (Epistle)

“Songs of the Season: The *Gloria in Excelsis*”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and Jesus Christ, born as our Savior.

This Advent, for our midweek series entitled *Songs of the Season*, we have studied Scriptural proclamations connected to Jesus’ birth that early Christians included as canticles in the Church’s liturgy. The songs we considered so far were Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, Zechariah’s song, the *Benedictus*, and Simeon’s song, the *Nunc Dimittis*. Now on this holy evening, to complete our series, we shall reflect on the song of the angels, the *Gloria in Excelsis* which, as with the other ancient canticles, is the first words in Latin, meaning “Glory in the highest.” Historically this song, also known as the Greater Gloria or the Greater Doxology,² was used at least as early as the late fourth century as a canticle in the morning daily service in the Eastern Church and a little later in the Western Church. By the sixth century, in the Western Church the song was brought into the Divine Service as we are familiar with today.

The Gloria in Excelsis is based upon the angels’ praise, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”³ As the heavenly host (literally “armies”) proclaimed this to the shepherds to declare the birth of Christ, it seems appropriate that we sing this on Christmas. But why has it been included in the Church’s liturgy so that it is sung not only on Christmas, but throughout the year as well? This evening, we will take the time to study these few words which have become a standard part of our worship service.⁴

“Glory to God in the highest” or, more literally, “Glory in the highest to God.” While neither of these is wrong, the second follows the Greek more accurately and, not surprisingly then, is a bit clearer. While both declare the truth that all the company of the highest heaven is praising God, “Glory to God in the highest” can give the wrong impression; that God is far away on His throne and distant from the earth. Yet while God is always in heaven, the idea of His distance from the earth, from us, contradicts the basic and most glorious truth of Christmas.

Heaven’s warriors are praising God for His glory, that is, His divine attributes, which in this case is especially His *faithfulness*. For that night in Bethlehem is the keeping His promises to Israel, to David, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. Truly, it is keeping His promise that goes back even further, to Noah and to Adam, thus to all mankind. His promise of sending a Savior. His promise that His very glory would be manifested *on earth*, as He comes in the person of His Son, born in a stable and laid in a manger. The eternal, only-begotten Son of God who is the glory of the Father as St. John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”⁵ The Christ of God who is called *Immanuel* because He is *God with us*, and not God somewhere up in heaven far away from us!

So we sing the Gloria in Excelsis to praise God for not only coming with His blessings of daily bread, not only for His being with us in His general omnipresence and providence, but especially

for His coming and being with us in the very special and intimate sense of becoming a true man here amongst us. Yet, God becoming incarnate in the person of Jesus brings our joining our voices to the angels not only because of its amazingness (though it amazing!), but far more, because of the amazing *gift* His faithfulness brings to us through this special coming.

The angels proclaim that gift, “And on earth *peace*.” Heaven and earth have been joined as God came in the person of Jesus, a helpless baby who was cradled and nurtured at Mary’s breast. Yet it is that humble coming of God that brings peace on earth, for Jesus is the child of whom Isaiah prophesied, the child who is called “Prince of Peace.”⁶ And peace is certainly what we need, though not often in the way we think.

It is true that God is glorious in His heavenly realms and is worthy of our honor, adoration, and obedience. It is true that His very perfection and holiness demands that we whom He made reflect His perfection and holiness as mirrors reflect the bright light of the sun shining upon them. Unfortunately, it is also true that we are rather poor mirrors.

By nature we are cracked and broken, unable to reflect anything. Like an expensive China vase laying in pieces on the floor, man’s natural state only shows that at one time there was a beautiful creation, but no more. Worse, in twisted sinfulness, mankind refuses to see the depths of our own brokenness within and so acknowledge that we are the cause. Thus instead of crying out to God for help, by nature we despise God and His holiness, seeing Him and His Law as the problem instead of us. And so there is no true peace, since mankind is at war with God, which then also bears the rotten fruit of war, violence, and hate towards one another.

But while we were at war with God, God went to war *with our sin*. Despite the pollution of our sins making us His enemies, we are still His creation, and He still loves us. So in His grace and mercy, *He* made peace between us and Him in the only that would still uphold His holiness and justice. *He* came as our substitute.

God in human flesh; *that* is what baby Jesus is all about.⁷ God born in a stable so that God *as man* could obey the Law of God in our place. God laid in a manger so that God *as man* could be denied, betrayed, deserted, spit on, beaten, whipped and crucified to pay for the sins of His creation. *That* is the truth of Christmas, the true gift of the Incarnation. God becoming man so that sinful mankind could be forgiven and thereby freed from the Law’s condemnation and the eternal death penalty that such condemnation brings. The eternal living God was born as a man to die, so that we, sinful mankind, who are born to die might instead live with Him eternally. True peace with God since, as the hymn says, in Christ Jesus “God and sinners reconciled.”⁸

Something that might catch our attention when we hear this Gospel is the words “peace among those with whom he is pleased” which differs from what most of us are traditionally used to, “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”⁹ To keep this simple, but also to address this issue since it does cause some people trouble, the difference comes from textual manuscript evidence and corresponding decisions of scholars and translators. The vast majority of modern scholars and translations follow what we heard this morning, “peace among those with whom he is pleased” as more manuscripts have been found since the day of the King James Version.

Honestly, this is one of the rare situations where the textual evidence is pretty balanced and so the determination comes down to other factors. But the critical thing is that, while the two variations do not mean the exact same thing, both convey a biblical truth. The traditional “goodwill toward men” conveys the truth of “It is finished;”¹⁰ that in Christ God is reconciling the whole world to Himself, not counting peoples’ sins against them.¹¹ However, the other translation, “among those with whom he is pleased,” conveys the equally true fact that while Christ Jesus came for all, died for all, paid the sins for all, only those who repent and believe in Him as their God and Savior will be saved.¹² So the older translation has a seemingly greater joy proclaimed. But the more recent one has the benefit of stopping the view of Christmas in terms of earthly peace, and reminds us that only true believers have peace with God on earth and in heaven as those who reject the Prince of Peace now also reject His peace with God in eternity.

Dear Christians, by His grace you are those with whom God is pleased, for through Baptism and by faith you are connected to God’s glory in Christ Jesus. Receiving forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, you are also the beneficiaries of His care and protection even now, especially His protection against the wiles of the devil and the lies of this world which lead you away from your Savior. And as recipients of His Holy Spirit, we also can begin to be the mirrors that reflect God’s glory as we heard in tonight’s Epistle, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”¹³ Yes, our reflection is imperfect, smudged and dirty, but it is there and the Holy Spirit keeps “fixing us more and more” that we might keep reflecting His holiness and love a little brighter and clearer than before.

Dear believers, on that first Christmas the angels declared that the heavens were glorifying God for His bringing peace to earth and shining His goodwill upon sinful people like you and me. Every time that we sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* in the Divine Service, we are joining with the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven in celebrating that first Christmas, and its ongoing result for each of us. Every time we receive the Holy Communion, we are reminded that heaven has come to earth in Christ Jesus, for there He gives us the very body and blood that were laid in that manger a little over 2,000 years ago.¹⁴

Truly, every time we sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, we join the heavenly armies praising God. Every time we sing it we thank Him for coming to the earth in the man Jesus of Nazareth to be Immanuel, *God with us*, our Savior, Christ the Lord. Every time we sing it we praise and thank Him for His continuing presence with us in His Word and Sacraments, through which He continues to be God with us, nurturing and protecting us until that Day when He brings us, His people, into the eternal peace of the new creation. As we await the fullness of glory, may we sing it here on earth in joyful faith and certain hope of our salvation. Amen!

¹ Full Gospel Reading was Luke 2:1-20.

² This is contrast to the *Gloria Patri* (Glory be to the Father) which is the Lesser Gloria or the Lesser Doxology.

³ Luke 2:14. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

⁴ The *Gloria in Excelsis* is part of the liturgy called the Ordinary because it is an ordinary part of the service throughout the church year. Only during Advent and Lent is it not sung, since these are times of repentance so the joy of the *Gloria* is not expressed, even as we eagerly await its return at Christmas or Easter respectively.

⁵ John 1:14.

⁶ Isaiah 9:6

⁷ See also Colossians 2:9

⁸ "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," *Lutheran Service Book* 380:1.

⁹ Quoted from the New King James Version which follows the King James Version.

¹⁰ John 19:30.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

¹² John 3:16.

¹³ Titus 2:11-12.

¹⁴ Likely about 2 BC.

**Christmas Eve
24 December 2022**

Collect of the Day

O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that Light on earth we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, 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

Almighty God, by the incarnation of Your eternal Son, You revealed that You are love. Give us true faith in Christ and His promise that by His conception, virgin birth, holy life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, our sins are forgiven and we are Yours. Fill us with joy, and lead us to proclaim Your glad tidings to all people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, by His birth in human flesh, Your dear Son took His place in the family of Mary and Joseph. Bless the families of our church and our country, that men and women would live faithfully as husbands and wives, loving and caring for their children and nurturing them in the grace of Baptism and all the truth of Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son 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. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, 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.**

Holy Lord, in the birth of Your Son, You have visited and redeemed Your people. Continue to visit those who are lonely, sick, recovering or near death. Let Your presence be a comfort to them, and give them perseverance until the time You grant healing, relief, deliverance and peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank You, dear Lord, for the saints who received Your blessing of righteousness in Christ and now stand in the most holy place before Your throne. Preserve us by Your grace in the holiness of Christ, that we, too, may dwell in Your light and life for eternity; 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.**