

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”

~Isaiah 11:6

**St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
2nd Sunday of Advent – December 4, 2022**

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Rev. Katie McNeal, Presiding Minister

Maizy Fisher, Director of Music Ministries

*We are delighted to have you worship with us this morning!
Know that you are welcome here just as you are*

If you are looking for a church to call home, why not consider making this one your own? If this is your first time visiting us, please fill out the visitor information card stapled to your bulletin.

*Everything you need to follow worship can be found in this bulletin. As you are comfortable, please rise when there is an * and join in the congregational responses, noted in **bold**.*

All songs are marked with numbers. The red book in the pew has all the songs. Look for the large number in the upper corner of the page to find the correct song.

During the time of Peace, you are invited to turn to those around you and offer a word of peace. We suggest a handshake and saying, "Peace be with you." You are also welcomed to offer another gesture of peace (wave, fist-bump, smile, etc.). Hand sanitizer is available in each pew.

At the time of Offering, you are invited to share a gift as you are comfortable. You may also place any prayer requests for the pastor in the offering plates.

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to fill out the blue prayer request forms located in each pew. The cards will be collected during our hymn of the day, and prayers will be offered during the prayers of the people.

PRELUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

***GREETING**

Peace to you and welcome,
from the God who was there before the beginning,
the Savior who saved us before we recognized our trouble,
and the Spirit who completes our half-hearted prayers.

***LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH**

We join our voices together in song, waiting hopefully, expectantly for the fullness of Christ's presence in our lives and in our world. We light this candle, watching as the flame softly spreads from one candle to the next, taking comfort in its living light. Our second candle reminds us of the godly joy of life, which spreads as we share it, which can comfort us even when our surroundings remain a mystery.

Light the second candle during the singing of the hymn.

***ADVENT SONG *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* (ELW 240)**



1 Light one can-dle to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
2 Light two can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He shall bring sal - va - tion to Is - ra - el, God ful - fills the prom - ise.
He shall feed the flock like a shep - herd, gent - ly lead them home - ward.

Praise to you, O God, who gives us courage to start again.
You fasten righteousness around your waist and baptize with the Holy Spirit's fire.
Bless us as we mirror your mighty fire in these simple flames, and teach
us to mirror your justice in the paths we prepare. We ask that peace abound,
until none hurt of destroy over all the earth. **Amen.**

***KYRIE**



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from a - bove, and for our sal - va - tion, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace of the whole world, for the well - being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For this ho - ly house, and for all who of - fer here their wor - ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.



A - men.

***CONFESSION**

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be God's name forever.

Amen.

God is here, and God sees through every defense
that fools the world.

Since we cannot hide from God,
there is nothing left to do
but to be honest with each other
and humble before God.

So, in humility,
we confess our sins.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of new beginnings,
we confess that we have not welcomed your holy reign.
We have strayed from your paths.
We prepare for war instead of peace.
We dishonor one another and your creation.
Purify us with your refining fire
and set us again on your way of love and life,
that we may welcome your coming among us.
Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

People of God,
Before our first mistakes,
God perfected the plan for our salvation in Jesus Christ.
Receive now the gift we have in God the Holy Trinity,
the gift of grace and the total forgiveness of all sins. +
Be free to love and rejoice in the way of the Lord.
Amen.

***GATHERING SONG *Fling Wide the Door* (ELW 259)**



1 Fling wide the door, un - bar the gate; the King of glo - ry
 2 He is the rock of our be - lief, the heart of mer - cy's
 3 Oh, hap - py towns and bless - ed lands that live by their true
 4 Come, Lord, our Sav - ior, Je - sus Christ; our hearts are o - pen



comes in state; the Lord of lords and King of kings, the
 gen - tle self. His king - ly crown is ho - li - ness; his
 king's com - mands. And bless - ed be the hearts he rules, the
 wide in trust. Oh, show us now your love - ly grace, up -



Sav - ior of the world who brings his great sal - va - tion
 scep - ter is his love - li - ness; he brings our sor - rows
 hum - ble plac - es where he dwells. He is the right - ful
 on our sor - rows shine your face, and let your Ho - ly



to the earth. So raise a shout of ho - ly mirth and
 to an end. Now glad - ly praise our king and friend, and
 Son of bliss who fills our lives and makes us his, cre -
 Spir - it guide our jour - ney in your grace so wide. We



praise our God and Lord, Cre - a - tor, Spir - it, Word.
 wor - ship him with song for sav - ing us from wrong.
 a - tor of the world, our on - ly strength for good.
 praise your ho - ly name, from age to age the same!

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

A reading from the book of Isaiah.

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

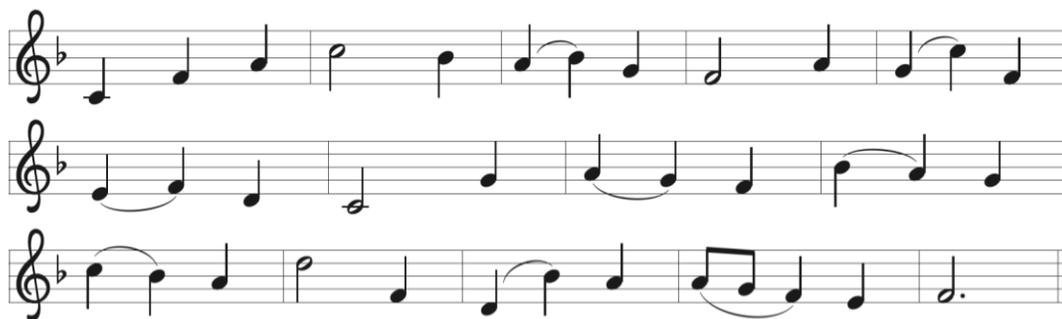
⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 72



**1. Send us, O God, the One whose reign
Will make your justice known,
Who will deal fairly with your land,
The poor, and all your own,**

**2. Who will defend the needy poor
And make oppression cease;
Let every mountain, every hill,
Bring righteousness and peace.**

**3. God's Chosen One shall save the poor
Who cry out in distress
And bring deliverance to all
Of those who are oppressed.**

**4. God's Chosen One shall pity those
Who have no wealth or might;
The blood of those oppressed and
wronged
Is precious in God's sight.**

SECOND READING: Romans 15:4-13

A reading from the book of Romans.

⁴Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹²and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Al-le-lu - ia, al - le-lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of e - ter - nal life.

*GOSPEL READING: Matthew 3:1-12

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

CHILDREN’S SERMON

SERMON

***HYMN OF THE DAY *There's a Voice in the Wilderness* (ELW 255)**

(Blue prayer cards are collected during the song.)



1 There's a voice in the wil - der - ness cry - ing, a
 2 O Je - ru - sa - lem, her - ald good tid - ings, as -
 3 But the word of our Sav - ior is faith - ful, the



call from the ways un - trod: Pre - pare in the des - ert a
 cend to the heights and sing! Pro - claim to a des - o - late
 arm of our God is strong, who stands in the midst of the



high - way, a high - way for our God!
 peo - ple the com - ing of their king.
 na - tions and soon will right the wrong.



The val - leys shall be ex - alt - ed, the
 Like flow'rs of the field we per - ish, like
 Lord, feed your flock like a shep - herd, the



loft - y hills brought low; make straight all the crook - ed
 grass our works de - cay; the pow'r and the pomp of
 lambs so gent - ly hold; in pas - tures of peace now



plac - es where God, our God, may go!
 na - tions shall pass like a dream a - way.
 lead them, and bring them to your fold.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS

We now welcome these persons who wish to join with this body of Christ, the people of St. John Lutheran Church. I introduce to you David Dreher and Beth Fitzgerald.

David and Beth, is it your wish to make this community of faith the people with whom you will share your journey of faith?

Is this the community with whom you wish to seek to make sense of your faith, the issues of your life, and who God calls you to be?

Is this the community where you wish to continue listening to the story of God's salvation and the Good News of Jesus Christ, and being nourished at the table of new life?

Response: It is.

The presiding minister continues with prayer.

Let us pray.

Merciful God, we thank you for these people whom you have made your own by water and the Word in baptism, you have called them to yourself, enlightened them with the gifts of your Spirit, and nourished them in the community of faith.

Uphold your servants in the gifts and promises of baptism, and unite the hearts of all whom you have brought to new birth.

We ask this in the name of Christ.

Amen.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism.

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?

Response: We renounce them.

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?

Response: We renounce them.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: We renounce them.

**The congregation is invited to stand as they are able.
The presiding minister addresses the candidates and the assembly.*

Do you believe in God the Father?
**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

***AFFIRMATION**

The presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism.

You have made public profession of your faith.

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,

to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,

to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,

to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,

and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Response: I do and I ask God to help and guide me.

The minister addresses the assembly.

Will you who are witnessing these promises, share the joys and sorrows, and do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ: Will you welcome David and Beth into this faith family, embrace their gifts, their needs, and their dreams? Will you recognize that their presence and participation will change the shape of the body and help it grow in new ways? Will you support them in their journeys, and assist them in their ministries?

We will and we ask God to help and guide us.

Let us pray.

We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life.

Stir up in David and Beth the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.

Amen.

A representative of the congregation addresses the assembly.

Let us rejoice with our siblings in Christ.

We rejoice with you in the life of baptism.

**Together we will give thanks and praise to God
and proclaim the good news to all the world.**

*PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we dwell in this season of preparation and attentiveness, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

A brief silence.

God, you renew the church in every age. Inspire teachers, writers, and musicians to delight and instruct your people. You give us a vision of creation in harmony, when hurting and destruction will be no more. Teach us to be stewards of the earth and companions to its creatures. Restore to balance and wholeness what human greed has harmed. Hear us, O God.

Sung Response:

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart!

You defend the cause of all who are oppressed. You deliver those in need from suffering and fear. Raise up leaders who will govern with equity and serve the common good. Guide judges, lawmakers, and public officials to protect the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves. Come to the aid of any who are exploited or abused. Provide safety and help to our neighbors without shelter, refugees, and those fleeing violence. Hear us, O God.

Sung Response:

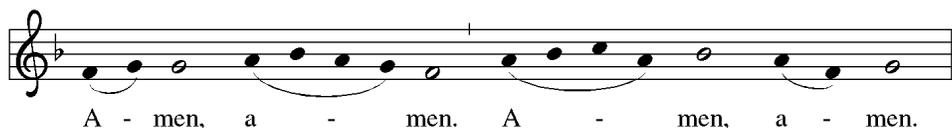
Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart!

You urge your people to welcome one another as you have welcomed us. Nurture ministries of hospitality and care in this and every congregation. We pray for people who are suffering in mind, body, or spirit, especially Jeff, Bob, Katie, Marcia, Geneva, Cherry, Winnie, Chuck, Henry, Harry, Roy, Pastor Storm, Ellen, Ruth, Sally, Beverly those on our prayer list, and all whom we remember aloud or in our hearts. You embrace all who have died trusting in your promises, and we give thanks for their faithful witness. Sustain us in hope until we are united with them in the joy of your eternal presence. God, in your mercy,

Sung Response:

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart!

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. You hear the prayers on our hearts that do not yet have words. We trust you to hear the prayers on the hearts of this congregation this day, especially (*received prayer cards are read*). In Jesus' name we pray.



*SHARING THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

OFFERING

OFFERTORY HYMN *Savior of the Nations, Come* (ELW 263)

**Rise on 4th verse*



- 1 Sav - ior of the na - tions, come; vir - gin's son, make here your home.
- 2 Not by hu - man flesh and blood, but the mys - tic Breath of God,
- 3 Won - drous birth—oh, won - drous child—from his throne, a vir - gin mild!
- 4 From God's heart the Sav - ior speeds, back to God his path-way leads;



Mar - vel now, O heav'n and earth: God has cho - sen such a birth.
was the Word of God made flesh, fruit of wom - an, blos - som fresh.
Ver - y God, and Mar - y's son, ea - ger now his race to run!
out to van - quish death's com - mand, back to reign at God's right hand.

***OFFERING PRAYER**

Eternal God,
you make the desert bloom
and send springs of water to thirsty ground.
Receive these simple gifts of bread, wine, and money,
and make us messengers of your mercy and love
for all in need of your healing and justice.
We ask this through Christ our Savior.
Amen.

*GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

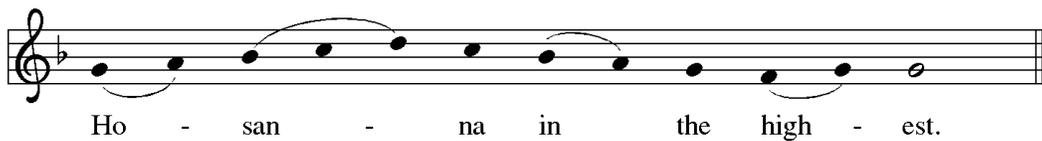
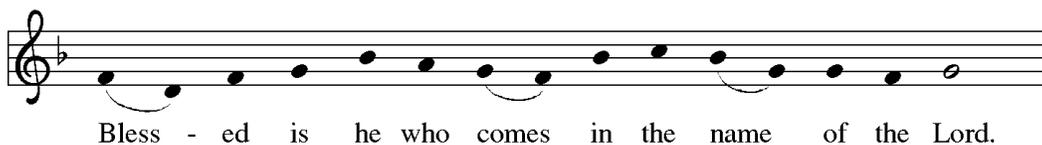
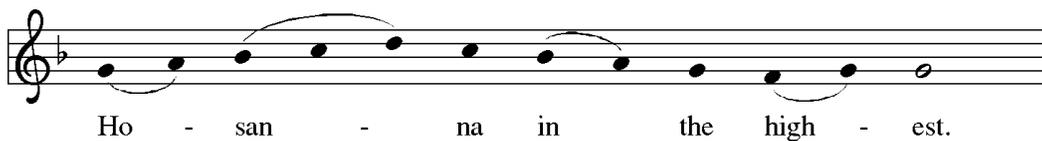
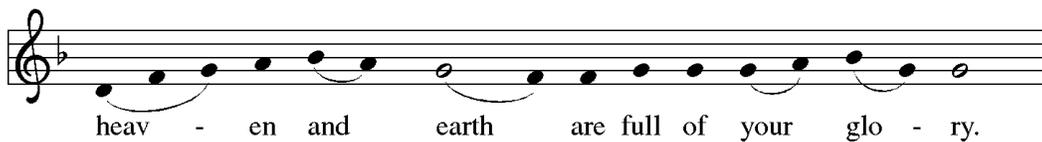
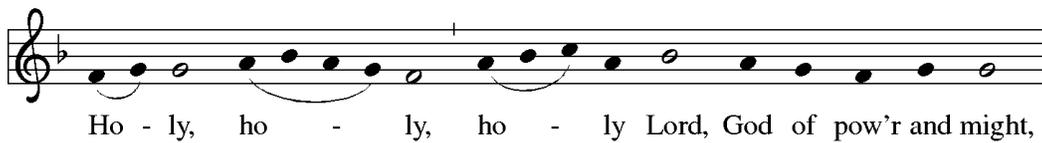
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.

You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer,
through whom you will also make all things new
in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



You are indeed holy, almighty and merciful God.
In great love you send to us Jesus, your Son,
who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
who preached good news to the poor,
and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

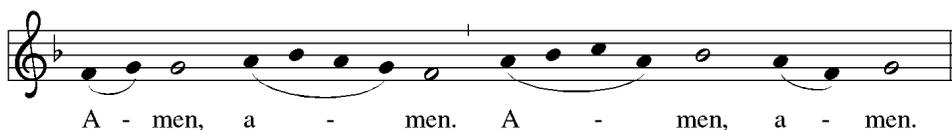
We give you thanks for his coming into the world
to fulfill for us your holy will and to accomplish all things for our salvation.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his salutary command,
his life-giving death, resurrection and ascension,
and the promise of his coming again,
we give thanks to you, O Lord God,
not as we ought but as we are able.
For you allowed yourself to die
the same way you were born:
as a fragile person.
We ask you to bless in the meal we are about to receive,
that through your gifts of bread and wine,
we may be filled with heavenly blessing and grace,
and, receiving the forgiveness of sin,
may be formed to live as your holy people
in love and service to you and your people.

To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory in your holy church, now and forever.



Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray.

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,

forever and ever. Amen

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

The gifts of God for the people of God. Come and encounter the God who waits to love you.

Through this meal, we know forgiveness, life, and salvation as the blessings of God's sacramental grace. In response to Jesus' invitation, all are welcome to come forward and experience the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Those who do not receive the bread and wine are invited to come forward for a blessing.

Grape juice and gluten free wafers are available upon request. Communion may also be brought back to the pews for those who are unable to come forward.

COMMUNION SONG *Lamb of God*

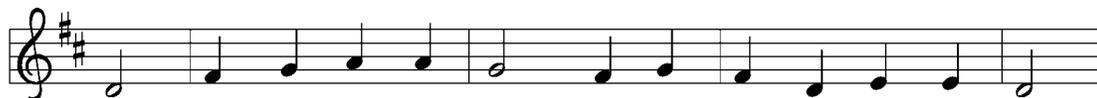
Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you
take a - way the sin of the world; have mer - cy
on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us peace. A - men.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN *O Lord, How Shall I Meet You* (ELW 241)



1 O Lord, how shall I meet you, how wel - come you a - right?
2 I lay in fet - ters, groan - ing; you came to set me free.
3 Love caused your in - car - na - tion; love brought you down to me.
4 Re - joice, then, you sad - heart - ed, who sit in deep - est gloom,



Your peo - ple long to greet you, my hope, my heart's de - light!
I stood, my shame be - moan - ing; you came to hon - or me.
Your thirst for my sal - va - tion pro - cured my lib - er - ty.
who mourn your joys de - part - ed and trem - ble at your doom.



Oh, kin - dle, Lord most ho - ly, your lamp with - in my breast
A glo - rious crown you give me, a trea - sure safe on high
Oh, love be - yond all tell - ing, that led you to em - brace
All hail the Lord's ap - pear - ing! O glo - rious Sun, now come,



to do in spir - it low - ly all that may please you best.
that will not fail or leave me as earth - ly rich - es fly.
in love, all love ex - cel - ling, our lost and fall - en race.
send forth your beams so cheer - ing and guide us safe - ly home.

*BLESSING OF COMMUNION OUTREACH

Gracious God, loving all your family with a mother's tender care: As you sent the angel to feed Elijah with heavenly bread, assist us in this ministry on which we are sent forth. Bless those who carry your heavenly food to those unable to be with us this day. In your love and care, nourish and strengthen those to whom we bring this sacrament, that through the body and blood of your Son we all may know the comfort of your abiding presence. **Amen.**

*POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Faithful God, in this meal you have remembered your mercy, bringing heaven to earth in the body and blood of Christ.
As we wait for the day when all your promises will be fulfilled, sustain us and strengthen us by this holy mystery.
Guide us toward your promised future, coming to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

*BLESSING

God the eternal Word,
who dwells with us in Jesus,
and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit,
✠ bless you now and forever.

Amen.

*SENDING SONG *Prepare the Royal Highway* (ELW 264)



1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; the King of kings is near!
2 God's peo - ple, see him com - ing: your own e - ter - nal king!
3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen to greet your prom - ised king!
4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; it comes from heav'n a - bove.



Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley a lev - el road ap - pear!
Palm branch - es strew be - fore him! Spread gar - ments! Shout and sing!
Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion its trib - ute too may bring.
His rule is peace and free - dom and jus - tice, truth, and love.



Then greet the King of glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry:
God's prom - ise will not fail you! No more shall doubt as - sail you!
All lands will bow be - fore him; their voic - es join your sing - ing:
So let your praise be sound - ing for kind - ness so a - bound - ing:



Ho - san - na to the Lord, for he ful - fills God's word!

*DISMISSAL

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Go in peace. Christ is near.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

The flowers on the altar today are in honor of Dominic Cardinal's 16th Birthday.

Assisting in worship today:

Assisting Minister: Denise Hager

Acolyte: Nathan Kramer

Ushers:

Offering: Jules Knauff and Emma Niklewicz

Attendance last week: 58 + 7 zoom

Notes for the day's texts:

John the Baptist is a fitting messenger for the season of Advent, a time for the church to prepare for both the nativity of the Christ and for his second coming. John's call to repentance in preparation of Jesus' arrival carries a challenge for us to rid ourselves of everything that obstructs our view. His proclamation is filled with images of cleansing: straightening paths, cutting down useless trees, and burning away chaff. John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins means cleansing as well as a changing of the mind, a turning toward Jesus, so that one's whole self is pointed toward the Lord.

Undistracted even by thoughts of our own worthiness, the church's focus year-round is turned toward the coming of Christ. John points to Jesus, never to himself, and in so doing becomes a model for discipleship. Having heard John's cry, we join the chorus, becoming messengers in turn. All our efforts in worship and evangelism, education and social ministry point, not to ourselves, our programs, our skill or our saintliness, but only to Jesus. Preparing the way of the Lord is very much about pointing others to his real presence in and among us.

Today's Music

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah. Text: Wayne L. Wold, b. 1954, Music: Yiddish folk tune. Augsburg Fortress.

Fling Wide the Door. Text: Georg Weissel, 1590-1635; tr. Garcia Grindal, b. 1943, Music: J. A. Freylinghausen, Geistreiches Gesangbuch, 1704; arr. hymnal version. Augsburg Fortress.

There's a Voice in the Wilderness. Text: James Lewis Milligan, 1876-1961, alt., Music: Henry Hugh Bancroft, 1904-1988. Public Domain / Estate of Henry Hugh Bancroft

Psalms 72. Text: *The New Metrical Psalter*, Christopher L. Webber, © 2008. Music: CHESTERFIELD, Thomas Haweis, 1734-1820, Public Domain.

Savior of the Nations, Come. Text: attr. Ambrose of Milan, 340-397; Martin Luther, 1483-1546; tr. hymnal version, Music: J. Walter, Geistliche Gesangbüchlein, 1524. Augsburg Fortress.

Wait for the Lord, Text and Tune: Taizé Community, Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994. © GIA Publications, Inc.

O Lord, How Shall I Meet You. Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676; tr. Composite, Music: Johann Crüger, 1598-1662. Public Domain.

Prepare the Royal Highway. Text: Frans Mikael Franzén, 1772-1847; tr. Lutheran Book of Worship, Music: Swedish folk tune, 17th cent. Augsburg Fortress.

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