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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.”

~John 1:1-2

**St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
Second Sunday of Christmas – January 4, 2026**
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Mars, PA 16046-0411
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Phone: 724-625-1830 email: office@stjohnchurchmars.org
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 worshiping at St. John, 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. Envelopes are available in the pews if you prefer. Online gifts may be made using the QR code below:*



*You may also offer updates to our ongoing prayer list using the yellow cards in the pews and placing them in the offering plates. **Visitor information cards** and member attendance cards (attached to the front of the bulletin) may also be placed in the offering plates.*

*As Lutherans, we believe Christ is truly present in the elements of the Lord's Supper. At the time of **Holy Communion**, all baptized individuals are welcome to come forward via the center aisle, receive the elements, and return via the side aisles. We begin at the front of the right side, commune all on the right side, then we will invite the left side forward. When you come forward, you may receive the bread from the pastor (gluten free wafers are available), then pre-filled cups with wine or grape juice from the assisting minister. You may consume the elements after receiving them then place the empty cup in the tray held by the acolyte. Those who do not receive Holy Communion are welcome to come forward for a blessing.*

*If you need a **restroom**, restrooms are located on the bottom floor at the far side of the building from the elevator. Restrooms may be accessed either via the stairs in the rear of the sanctuary, the stairs by the Greeting Area, or the elevator.*

*A **playroom** is available downstairs for children who need a break from the worship service. This room is by the elevator on the lower level. An adult must remain with the child. Children are also welcome to utilize the books and puzzles available in the Greeting Area on the top level by the elevator.*

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 intercession.

PRELUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING

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

***CONFESSiON AND FORGIVENESS**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, **✚** one God,
who forgives all our sin,
whose mercy endures forever.

Amen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Silence for reflection

Most merciful God,
we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the **✚** Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING INTRODUCTION

*GOSPEL READING: John 1:1-18

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

***GATHERING SONG *O Come All Ye Faithful* (ELW 283)**

1. O come, all ye faithful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant! O
 2. The high - est, most ho - ly, light of light e - ter - nal,
 3. Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,
 4. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing;

come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem;
 born of a vir - gin, a mor - tal he comes;
 sing, all ye cit - i - zens of heav - en a - bove!
 Je - sus, to thee be . . . glo - ry giv'n!

come and be - hold him, born the king of an - gels:
 Son of the Fa - ther now in flesh ap - pear - ing!
 Glo - ry to God . . . in . . . the . . . high - est:
 Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing;

Refrain

Ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus, ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus,
 O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him,

ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus Do - mi - num.
 O come, let us a - dore him, Christ the Lord!

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SCRITURE READING: Ephesians 3:1-12

A reading from Ephesians.

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles,² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:⁶ that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING

HYMN OF THE DAY *What Child Is This* (ELW 296)

(Blue prayer cards are collected)



1 What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mar - y's lap is sleep - ing?
2 Why lies he in such mean es - tate where ox and ass are feed - ing?
3 So bring him in - cense, gold, and myrrh; come, peas - ant, king, to own him.



Whom an - gels greet with an-thems sweet while shep-herds watch are keep - ing?
Good Chris-tian, fear; for sin-ners here the si - lent Word is plead - ing.
The King of kings sal - va - tion brings; let lov - ing hearts en-throne him.



This, this is Christ the king, whom shep-herds guard and an - gels sing;
Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;
Raise, raise the song on high, the vir - gin sings her lul - la - by;



haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mar - y!
hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mar - y!
joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mar - y!

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING

*DIALOGUE

The star shone bright in the Bethlehem sky.

We too have a star to guide us.

The shepherds ran to see the babe.

We too have a star to guide us.

The magi knelt at the child's feet.

We too have a star to guide us.

Christ shines with god's own truth and light.

We too have a star to guide us.

*NICENE CREED

Let us confess our faith through the words of the 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,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**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,*
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who 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.**



*Or, “who proceeds from the Father.” The phrase “and the Son” is a later addition to the creed.

*PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Guided by the star, together with the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of creation. *A brief silence*

O Splendor of God's glory, you reveal yourself in this assembly. In water, wine, and bread, show us again and again your grace upon grace, that your church boldly testifies to your love. Shine your radiance within our world. Remove the barriers that divide us, and teach us to love with all our might. Lead us, O God:

lead us by your light.

True Dawn from on high, you reveal yourself in every land and in the farthest parts of the earth. Deliver peoples who suffer under oppressive regimes. Thwart the foolish plans of unjust leaders. Give wisdom to our elected officials. set us free from the power of guilt and grave. Shine your light in our lives and grant us your grace. Lead us, O God:

lead us by your light.

O living Spring of light from light, you reveal yourself in every human being. Help us recognize your image in our siblings in Christ who are in the strong grip of addiction, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, or other illness. Renew the strength of all who suffer especially Geneva, Cherry, Winnie, Henry, Harry, Sally, Debi, Anne, Karen, Nan, Beverly, those on our prayer list, and all whom we remember aloud or in our hearts. Grant us compassion in our care for your people. You reveal yourself in the lives of your holy ones. We give you thanks for those who set their hope on you, trusting the inheritance we receive in you. Lead us, O God:

lead us by your light.

God of light, you reveal yourself anew every day. In this new year, renew this congregation and its ministries in our witness to the good news of the incarnation. Transform the way we have always done things into your new future for us Lead us, O God:

lead us by your light.

God our strength, look upon us with your everlasting mercy, and receive the prayers gathered before you now with the prayers on the hearts of this congregation today (*blue prayer cards are read*). We commend these prayers to you, O God, trusting your grace made known to all, through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

*PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

Let us share Christ's peace with one another.

MEAL
God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ

OFFERING COLLECTION

OFFERTORY HYMN *The Bells of Christmas* (ELW 298) Rise on 6th verse



1 Det ki - mer nu til ju - le - fest, det ki - mer
2 The bells of Christ - mas chime once more; the heav'n - ly
2 This world, though wide and far out - spread, could scarce - ly
3 Now let us go with qui - et mind, the swad - dled
4 Oh, join with me, in glad - ness sing, to keep our



for den høj - e gæst, som steg til la - ve
guest is at the door. He comes to earth - ly
find for you a bed. Your cra - dle was a
babe with shep - herds find, to gaze on him who
Christ - mas with our king, un - til our song, from



hyt - ter ned med nyt - års - ga - ver: fryd og fred.
dwell - ings still with new year gifts of peace, good will.
man - ger stall, no pearl nor silk nor king - ly hall.
glad - dens them, the love - liest flow'r of Jes - se's stem.
lov - ing souls, like rush - ing might - y wa - ter rolls!

5 O patriarchs' Joy, O prophets' Song,
O Dayspring bright, awaited long,
O Son of Man, incarnate Word,
great David's Son, great David's Lord:

6 Come, Jesus, glorious heav'nly guest,
and keep your Christmas in our breast;
then David's harpstrings, hushed so long,
shall swell our jubilee of song.

***OFFERING PRAYER**

Let us pray.

Good and loving God, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with your gifts, let them be blessing for others. With the trees of the field, with all earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

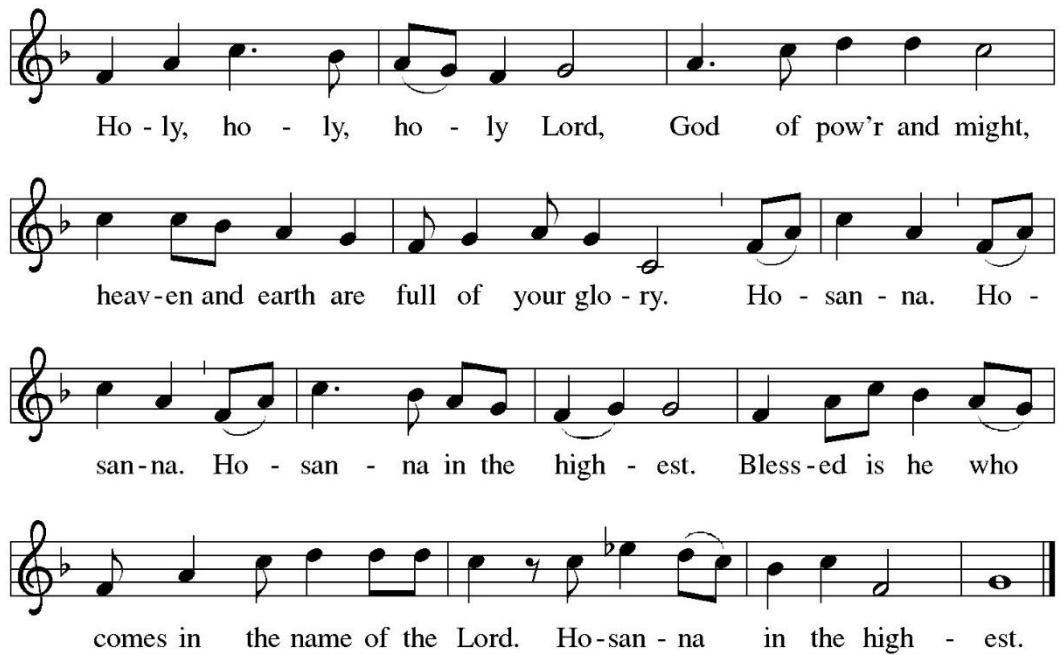
Lift up your hearts.

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. In the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh you have opened the eyes of faith to a new and radiant vision of your glory, that, beholding the God made visible, we may be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see. 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:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might,

heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na. Ho -

san - na. Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless-ed is he who

comes in the name of the Lord. Ho-san - na in the high - est.

Holy God, Creator of all and Source of life,
at the birth of time your Word brought light into the world.
In the fullness of time, you sent your Word, born of Mary,
to shine in our shadows and to make us your beloved children.

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 birth and life among us, his death and resurrection,
we await his coming again when all things will be restored in him.

By your Spirit bless us and this bread and cup, that, held and nourished by you,
we may live as your children, shining with the light of your Son.
Through him all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
in your holy Church, both now and forever.

Amen.

***THE LORD'S PRAYER**

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

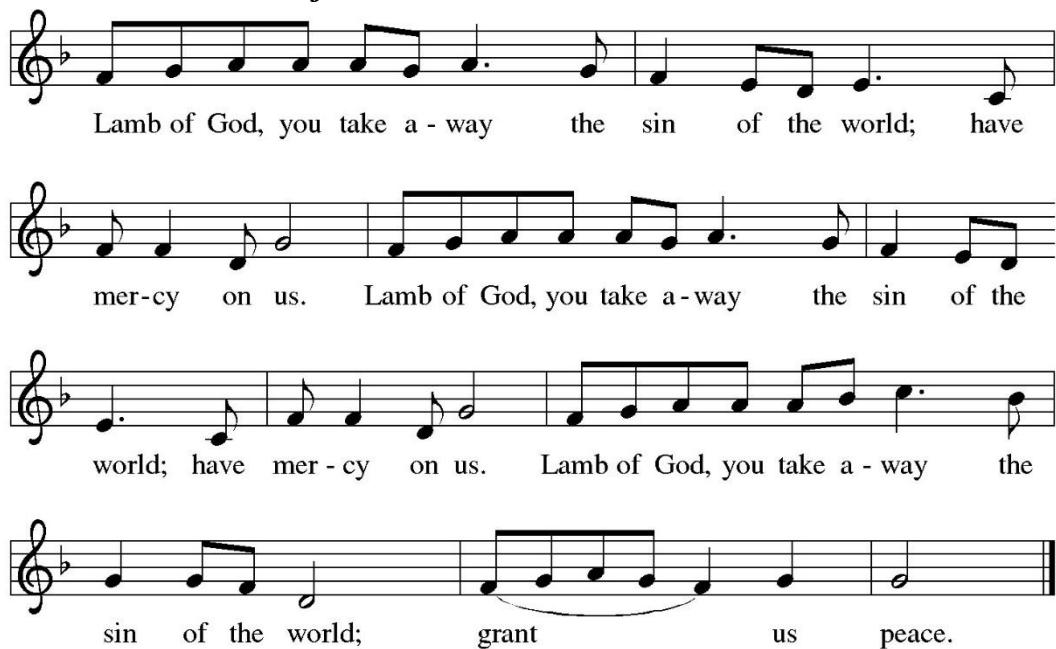
The light of Christ came into our world
and shines in the darkness.

Come now to feast at Christ's table.

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*

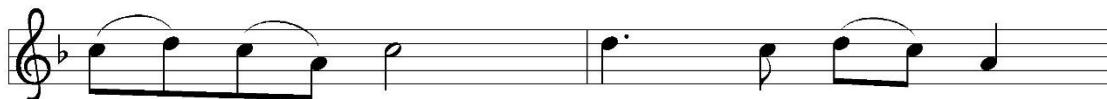


Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us peace.

COMMUNION HYMN *Midnight Stars Make Bright the Skies* (ELW 280)



1 Ming - xing can - lan ye wei yang, Bo - li - heng cheng
 2 Ming - xing can - lan ye wei yang, gu - deng ying - ying
 1 Mid - night stars make bright the skies, Beth - le - hem in
 2 Mid - night slum - ber lies o'er all, one lone bright lamp



zai shui - xiang; ye - wai mu - ren
 zhao ke - chuang; qu lai jiu - bu
 slum - ber lies: glis - t'ning heav'n sends
 lights the stall. Choose old cloth - ing,



jian yi - xiang, tian - shang jiao - ran fa da - guang;
 zuo qiang - pao, ma - cao quan dang yu - er - chuang;
 forth a great light, shep - herds see a won - drous sight!
 wrap him warm - ly, man - ger shall his cra - dle be.



tian - shi lie - dui tong ge - chang, mu - ren jian zhi xian jing - huang;
 wei yu jiu - shi zheng xian - ni, dao cheng ren - shen zhen - li zhang;
 An - gel ranks in cho - rus sing. Silk - en sounds from heav - en ring.
 Born to save us from our sin, Word made flesh, our lives to win,



hu - wen lun - yin ban jiu - xiao, xuan - yan Sheng - zi jiang xia - fang:
 cai li di - zuo lin xia - jie, ren - shih jian - xin yi bei - chang.
 Fright - ened shep - herds hear them say: "Christ is born on earth to - day!"
 came to earth from heav - en's throne, mor - tals' sin to bear a - lone.



Refrain
 Zhi - gao rong - yao gui Shang - zhu, quan - di ren - min fu wu - jiang.
 Glo - ry be to God on high, blest are all be - neath the sky.

COMMUNION HYMN *In the Bleak Midwinter* (ELW 294)

1 In the bleak mid - win - ter, frost - y wind made moan,
 2 Heav - en can - not hold him, nor . . . earth sus - tain;
 3 What . . . can I give him, poor . . . as I am?

earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;
 heav'n and earth shall flee a - way when he comes to reign;
 If I were a shep - herd I would bring a lamb;

snow had fall - en, snow on snow, snow on snow,
 in the bleak mid - win - ter a sta - ble place suf - ficed
 if I were a wise . . . man I would do my part;

the in the bleak mid - win - ter, long a - go.
 yet what I can I give him— Je - sus Christ.
 the Lord . . . God al - might - y, give my heart.

*POST-COMMUNION BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and preserve you in grace.
Amen.

*POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

O Lord, you look upon us in love and refresh our souls through the gifts of bread and wine.
 Send us out, reflecting the light of your grace, to tell the story of Jesus Christ, our bright
 morning star.

Amen.

*BLESSING

Beloved children of God, what came into being in Christ was life, and the life was the light of
 all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. May the light
 of Christ shine on you with grace and mercy and fill you with joy and peace. (*John 1:1, 3-5*)
Amen.

***SENDING SONG *The First Noel* (ELW 300)**



1 The first No - el the an - gel did say was to
 2 They look - ed up and saw . . . a star shin - ing
 3 And by the light of that . . . same star three . . .
 4 This star drew near to the . . . north - west, o'er . . .
 5 Then en - tered in those wise . . . men three, full . . .



cer - tain poor shep - herds in fields as they lay; in fields where
 in . . . the east . . . be - yond . . . them far; and to the
 wise . . . men came . . . from coun - try far; to seek for a
 Beth - le - hem . . . it took . . . its rest; and there it
 rev - 'rent - ly . . . up - on . . . their knee, and of - fered



they lay, keep - ing their sheep, on a cold win - ter's
 earth it gave . . . great light, and . . . so it con -
 king was their . . . in - tent, and to fol - low the
 did both stop . . . and stay right . . . o - ver the
 there in his . . . pres - ence their . . . gold, . . . and

Refrain



night that was so deep.
 tin - ued both day and night.
 star wher - ev - er it went. No - el, No - el, No -
 place where Je - sus lay.
 myrrh, and frank - in - cense.



el, No - el! Born is the King of Is - ra - el.

***DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, guided by the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Assisting in worship today:

Assisting Minister: David D

Acolyte: Lydia M

Ushers: Volunteer

Offering: Anna K and Nathan K

Attendance last week: 46 + 2 zoom

Notes for the day's texts:

A newborn baby often elicits “oohs” and “ahs” from its admirers and yet developmentally, may be doing nothing incredibly remarkable—only able to focus on objects only about 18 inches in front of its face and prone to stare at any shiny object. Nevertheless, a newborn is a miracle to behold, filled with wonder for the world around it and desiring nothing more than to be fed, held, rocked, nurtured, and loved.

The gifts of the magi direct us away from the cute, cuddly, cooing baby Jesus by pointing us to who Jesus really has come to be. The magi offer gold, a possession of kings; frankincense, used in ritual to indicate the presence of the deity; and myrrh, an oil used at the time of death as well as for anointing priests. By their gifts, the wise men reveal the identity of this child: the king before whom nations will bow, the anointed high priest of God, and the suffering servant who will die for the ones he has come to serve.

The “oohs” and “ahs” we offer as we celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord are not simply for a cooing and cuddly baby Jesus but for a God who chooses to reveal God’s love and mercy by taking human form. On this day, we celebrate that God’s mercy is wider and deeper than we imagined and includes all people and all nations. All people—rich or poor, Gentile or Jew, straight or gay, male or female—are God’s treasure, the precious ones for whom God is willing to die. What do we bring to honor our Lord before whom we bow? We bring the treasure of our lives poured out in praise of God and in service to others, and we are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.

Today's Music

The Bells of Christmas. Text: Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, 1783-1872; tr. Charles Porterfield Krauth, 1823-1883, alt., Music: Carl C. N. Balle, 1806-1855. Public Domain.

O Come All Ye Faithful. Text: attr. John Francis Wade, 1711-1786; tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1802-1880, sts. 1, 3-4; tr. unknown, st. 2 Music: attr. John Francis Wade. Public Domain.

Midnight Stars Make Bright the Skies. Text: Jing-qiu Yang, 1897-1984; tr. Mildred A. Wiant, 1898-2001, Music: Qi-fang Liang. Augsburg Fortress /Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd. .

What Child Is This. Text: William C. Dix, 1837-1898, Music: English ballad, 16th cent. Public Domain

In the Bleak Midwinter. Text: Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1830-1894, Music: Gustav Holst, 1874-1934t. Public Domain.

The First Noel. Text: English traditional, Music: English traditional; arr. John Stainer, 1840-1901. Public Domain.

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Next Week's Readings:

Isaiah 42:1-9 *The servant of the Lord brings justice*

Psalm 29 *The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. (Ps. 29:3)*

Acts 10:34-43 *Jesus' ministry after his baptism*

Matthew 3:13-17 *Revelation of Christ as God's servant*