

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT  
**SERVICE OF LESSONS & CAROLS**  
December 18th, 2022



# CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

140 Russell Avenue  
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 1W1  
Church: 905-685-8294  
[www.christlutheransc.ca](http://www.christlutheransc.ca)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Office Hours:** Tuesday to Friday—9 a.m. – 12 noon  
**Bulletin Announcements:** Please send to [secretary@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:secretary@christlutheransc.ca).  
Deadline for submission is Thursday at 9 a.m.

**Pastor:** Pastor Todd Hoeffs (289-362-0113) [pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com](mailto:pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com)  
**Parish Assistant:** Louise Gondosch (905-329-8579) [parish.assistant@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:parish.assistant@christlutheransc.ca)  
**Business Manager:** Karen McCumber [business.manager@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:business.manager@christlutheransc.ca)  
**Secretary:** Pat Kimpel [secretary@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:secretary@christlutheransc.ca)  
**Facebook:** Lisa Gall [www.facebook.com/ChristLutheranChurchSC](http://www.facebook.com/ChristLutheranChurchSC)  
**Bulletin by email:** Judy Mason [chairman.outreach@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:chairman.outreach@christlutheransc.ca)

A recording of Sunday's service will be uploaded to YouTube at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpING\\_TKTi9c\\_OIBbMqGwLw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpING_TKTi9c_OIBbMqGwLw)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Prayer:** Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come among us with great might; and because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let Your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS:**

Monday: Isa. 45: 1-8      Wednesday: Mark 3: 31-35      Friday: John 19: 25b-27  
Tuesday: 1 Cor. 2: 6-10      Thursday: Rom. 1: 1-7      Saturday: Rom. 5: 12-21

**Musicians:** 10 a.m. – Louise Gondosch  
**Reader:** 10 a.m. – Tom Kuhl  
**Greeter:** 10 a.m. –

**SUNDAY SCHOOL:** Please note we will **not** meet during the Christmas holidays, however, we will meet for **Sunday School Sunday January 15th at 9:00 a.m.** and then in February resume our schedule of the first 2 Sundays of each month.

**PRECIOUS MOMENTS:** We look forward to seeing each of you this Tuesday between 9:30 & 11 a.m. for our special Christmas story, songs and craft. We will take a break during the Christmas Holidays and resume Tuesday, January 10th.

**CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE:**



Dec. 18, 10 am: Special Lessons & Carols Service  
Dec. 24, 7 pm & 10 pm: Christmas Eve Carol Candlelight Service  
Dec. 25, 10 am: Christmas Carol Holy Communion Service

**January 2023 Worship Schedule**

January 1: Christmas 1/New Years Day – Carol Service of the Word  
January 8: Epiphany/Jesus Baptism – Creative Communion  
January 15: Epiphany 2 – Divine Service Setting Three  
January 21: Epiphany 3 – Divine Service Setting One – Communion  
January 29: Epiphany 4 – Morning Praise

**SOUL CHRISTMAS/HOLIDAY SCHEDULE:**

Thursday, December 22: SOUL Christmas party  
Thursday, December 29 & January 5: NO SOUL  
Thursday, January 12, 2023: SOUL resumes

## **EVENTS THIS WEEK:**

Today: 9:10—9:45 a.m. – Confirmation Class  
*(Please note: Youth Catechism class will take a break for the Christmas season. We meet again Sunday, January 15th. Please check the Pastor Todd Youth Catechism Google Classroom for any and all communications.)*  
10:00 a.m. – Worship

Monday: 10:00 a.m. – Luther Manor Bible Study  
7:30 p.m. - Choir

Tuesday: 9:30—11:00 a.m. – Precious Moments  
5:30 p.m. – Mary Martha Advent/Christmas Dinner

Thursday: 10:00 a.m. – SOUL Christmas Party

Saturday: 7:00 and 10:00 p.m. - Christmas Eve-Carol Service with Candlelight

Next Sunday: 10:00 a.m. – Christmas Carol Holy Communion Service

### **YOUTH LOCK IN: Monday, January 2, 7:00 p.m. - Tuesday, January 3, 9:00 a.m.**

Be sure to speak with Louise if you are interested. Friends are welcome!

Baking help: We are looking for a few people to bake...a banana bread, cinnamon coffee cake, soft pretzel bites or other for our Youth lock in. If you can help please speak with Louise.

### **Last Sunday Attendance: December 11th, 2022 Attn: 10 a.m. – 94**

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Weekly Need</u>	<u>Last Sunday</u>	<u>Year To Date</u>	<u>+ or – (--)</u>
Current:	283,291.00	5,554.73	5,055.00	202,452.26	(64,495.03)
LCC Missions	20,000.00	392.16	343.00	14,622.50	( 4,223.65)
Property Improvement:			87.00	6,170.50	

**MEMORIAL DONATIONS** have been given to SOUL in memory of Rev. Frank Silver by Steve Duga and in memory of Steven Gall Sr. by Twila Gall.



## OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHEER

To share the joy of Christmas with those in our community who are less fortunate than we are, the “Outreach Committee” is planning to distribute, complete Christmas turkey dinner packages. We are asking

for confidential referrals from our members. Last year we helped 25 families by making up 25 baskets.

### **We need your help by:**

- Providing us with confidential referrals which can be placed into a box located in our church narthex
- Donating the funds required for the purchase of perishable and non-perishable food items which will be purchased just before the packages are distributed
- Letting the Outreach Committee,  
Judy Mason—905-641-7546  
Howard Bogusat—905-468-3566  
know if you would be willing to help package baskets
- Praying that this project is a success and that those who receive these gifts are touched by the joy and wonder of our Saviour’s birth and by His love for each one of us.

*(PLEASE NOTE THAT WE ARE COLLECTING “MONETARY DONATIONS” ONLY FOR THIS PROJECT)*

THANK YOU!

**FLOWERS** have been placed on the altar this morning to the Glory of God by Naomi Hohnberg in loving memory of her mother, Doris Hohnberg.

**NOTE FROM JUDY MASON**: After several years of emailing the bulletin I would like to find a replacement. Please contact Judy if you would like to take over emailing her list of weekly bulletins to: [chairman.outreach@christlutheransc.ca](mailto:chairman.outreach@christlutheransc.ca) or 905-641-7546

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent  
**SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS**  
December 18, 2023 - 10 AM Worship

**OPENING HYMN:**

*"Once In Royal David's City"*

*Latin & English Carol*

**1**Once in royal David's city, stood a lowly cattle shed,  
where a mother laid her baby, in a manger for his bed:  
Mary was that mother mild; Jesus Christ, her little child.

**He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all;  
and his shelter was a stable and his cradle was a stall:  
with the poor and mean and low-ly--lived on earth our Saviour ho-ly.**

**And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love,  
for that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above;  
and he leads his children on, to the place where he is gone.**

**INVOCATION**

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

**RESPONSIVES, PRAYER & LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH**

O Lord our God,

**we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:**

he is Emmanuel, God with us,

**the hope of all peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us,**

he is the Savior of every nation.

**Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light all four candles of this wreath.**

May the wreath and its light remind us of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

**May he come quickly and not delay. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**ADVENT VERSE:**

**O come Desire of Na—tions, bind, in one the hearts of hu—mankind,  
Please bid our sad div—isions cease, and be Yourself the King—of Peace;  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emm-an-uel, shall come to You O Is—rael.**

**Scripture Lesson One:                    *Genesis 3: 8-15***

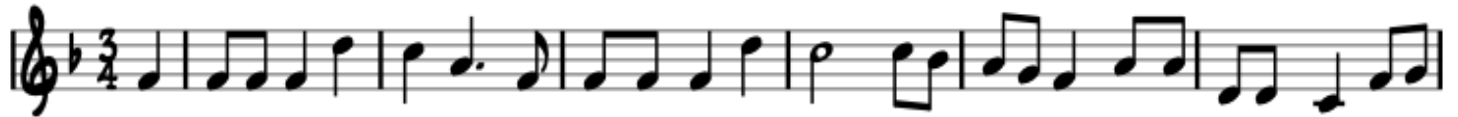
They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.' This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**



CAROL:

*"The Holly & The Ivy"*



1. The hol-ly and the i - vy, when they are both full grown, Of\_ all\_ trees that are in the wood, the\_

Refrain



hol - ly bears the crown. Oh the ris - ing of the sun, and the run - ning of the



deer. The\_ play - ing of the mer - ry or - gan, Sweet sing - ing in the choir.

bethsnotes.com

2. The holly bears a blossom as white as lily flower,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to be our sweet Savior *Refrain*

3. The holly bears a berry as red as any blood,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to do poor sinners good. *Refrain*

Scripture Lesson Two

*Genesis 22: 15-18*

-The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CAROL:

*"I Wonder As I Wander"*

*Appalachian Carol*



I won - der as I wan - der out un - der the sky, How



Je - sus the Sav - ior did come for to die. For poor on - 'ry peo - ple like



you and like I. I won - der as I wan - der out un - der the sky.

[www.abcnotation.com/tunes](http://www.abcnotation.com/tunes)

**When Mary birthed Jesus, all in a cow's stall,  
Came wise men and farmers and shepherds and all,  
And high from the heavens a star's light did fall;  
The promise of the ages it then did recall.**

**If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,  
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing,  
Or all of God's angels in heaven for to sing,  
He surely could have had it, 'cause he was the king.**

**I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,  
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die  
For poor ordinary people like you and like I.  
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.**

**Scripture Lesson Three:***Isaiah 9: 2-7*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**CHOIR ANTHEM:***“Promises Of Isaiah”*

*Song # 215463 Onelicense.net Copyright 2011 Hal Leonard Corporation and Hal Leonard – Milwin Music Corp.  
International Copyright Secured. All rights reserved Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-741085  
All rights reserved*

**Scripture Lesson Four***Micah 5:2-4*

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. This is the Word of the Lord.     **Thanks be to God.**

**CAROL:**

*“It Came Upon The Midnight Clear”*

*American Carol*

**It came upon the midnight clear, That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth To touch their harps of gold:  
“Peace on the earth, goodwill to all, From heav’n’s all-gracious king.”  
The world in solemn stillness lay To hear the angels sing.**

**For lo, the days have come to pass By prophets seen of old,  
When down into the circling years Came Christ as was foretold.  
His word of peace shall to the earth God’s ancient promise bring,  
And all who take this gift will hear The song the angels sing.**

**Scripture Lesson Five:**     *St. Luke 1: 26-38*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her. This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God**

**CAROL:**

*"The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came"*

*French Carol*

**The angel Gabriel from heaven came,  
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame: "  
All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,  
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!**

**"For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,  
All generations laud and honor thee;  
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,  
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!**

**Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;  
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.  
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."  
Most highly favored lady, Gloria!**

**Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born  
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,  
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:  
"Most highly favored lady." Gloria!**

**Scripture Lesson Six**   *St. Matthew 1: 18-21*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

**CHOIR ANTHEM:**     *"Jesus, Name Of Salvation"*

*Copyright 2010 Concordia Publishing House All rights reserved. Used by permission. LSBHymnLicense.net #000010240  
All rights reserved*



**Scripture Lesson Seven:***St. Luke 2:1-10**KJV*

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ([And] this taxing was first made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

**CAROL:***"There's A Star In The East"**African American Spiritual*

1 There's a star in the east on Christ-mas morn. Rise up, shep-herd, and  
2 If you take good heed to the an - gel's words, rise up, shep-herd, and



fol - low. It will lead to the place where the Christ was born.  
fol - low. You'll for - get your flocks; you'll for - get your herds.



Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low. Fol - low, fol - low;



rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low. Fol - low the star of



Beth - le - hem. Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low.

This African American spiritual, cast in a characteristic call-and-response style, provides a reminder that the good news of the Incarnation should lead Christians not only to awe and adoration but also to living and acting in ways that make God's purposes known to others.

**HOMILY**

**OFFERINGS are gathered.**

### **PRAYERS**

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the many blessings you have given us, although we have not deserved them. Especially we thank you for your saving Word and Sacraments. Keep the teaching of the Gospel pure in your church throughout the world, and give us faithful pastors to preach your word with boldness and power. Help your church to invest its time and resources in building the true temple- your holy people. Protect your church in all trouble, and defend it against all danger; hear us, we pray,

**As we await Your coming.**

Show your mercy to all the nations of the world. Bless our land and the people who live in it. Help those in government and positions of responsibility to maintain honesty and truth, justice and peace. Direct all schools and places of learning, so that students everywhere may learn truth and wisdom; hear us, we pray,

**As we await Your coming.**

Watch over and protect all mothers and fathers, parents and guardians. Comfort those parents who have lost children and those couples beginning the journey of parenting. Bring hope to those involved in foster care and family services. Bless the work of adoption agencies who help place children into loving homes; hear us, we pray,

**As we await Your coming.**

Graciously protect us from war and disease, famine, political instability and natural disasters. Watch over those who travel, especially those visiting family and friends at this time. Support all people in their proper vocation, and help all those who are unemployed or underemployed. Bless our arts and culture, our science and technology. Help those who are sick and in need. And comfort those who are lonely and in trouble – we now remember before you....[names added here]: hear us, we pray,

**As we await Your coming.**

Just as Mary heard the Word from the angel, trusted in the ancient promise of salvation and bore a wondrous child from the Spirit's seed, lead us to hear your word and trust you, so that we may live fruitful lives, filled with the joy of your Holy Spirit. For you live and rule with the Father and Spirit, O Lord Jesus Christ, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**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.**

### **CLOSING BLESSING:**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

**Praise God, all creatures here below!**

You are the shepherds telling the story.

**We tell it in the streets and across the land.**

You are the wise ones worshiping with thanksgiving.

**We worship with gifts of song and service, talents and treasures.**

You are the angels announcing peace.

**We live with joy and go now in peace.**

The blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son + and the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always:

**Amen.**

### **CHOIR ANTHEM:**

*"Chill Of The Nightfall"*

**Chill of the nightfall, lamps in the windows  
Letting their light fall clear on the snow  
Bitter December bids us remember  
Christ in the stable long long ago  
Silence of midnight, voices of angels  
Singing to bid night yield to the dawn;  
Darkness is ended, sinners befriended  
Where in the stable Jesus is born**

**Splendour of starlight, high on the hillside,  
Faint is the far light burning below;  
Kneeling before Him, shepherds adore Him  
Christ in the stable long long ago  
Glory of daybreak, sorrows and shadows,  
Suddenly they break forth into morn.  
Sing out and tell now, All shall be well now  
For in the stable, Jesus is born  
-----Jesus is born.**

*CCLI Song # 3271429 Timothy Dudley-Smith © Hope Publishing Company For use solely with the SongSelect® Terms of Use. All rights reserved. [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com) CCLI License # 775293 Music by Richard Jeffrey & Arr: Mark Kellner as "CAROL OF THE STABLE" Copyright 1997 Concordia Publishing House All rights reserved Used by permission. LSBHymnLicense.net #000010240*

## ADVENT 4

### Lessons & Carols

December 18, 2022

### The Hopes and fears of all the years are met in JESUS this day!

The service of lessons and carols dates back to 1880 in Drury, England with the popularity of carol singing. The 1<sup>st</sup> hymn we sang, Once in Royal David's City, a poem written by a pastor's daughter in Ireland in 1848, had been meant for children. The author based it on the Apostles Creed.

Since 1918 this song has remained an opening hymn for this special service. A service where we join the journey of humanity's creation, their fall into rebellion against God and restoration with the promised Christ child. That restoration is the pinnacle of God's Glory. That He would come to us to save us. This story begins with a moment of glory. But it is only a moment. In the cool of early evening, God went walking in the garden. It is a tantalizing picture of a time we have never known.

A time of perfect communion with the God who made us. A time of freedom, beauty and glory. God went walking in the garden seeking his people. But they were nowhere to be found.

They were hiding: naked, ashamed and afraid. For the one thing they had been warned of –

the one fruit they had been told not to eat – had proven too great a temptation. They had eaten. And in that moment of choosing their will over God's they chose exile over communion.

They chose to take rather than to receive. They chose instant gratification over eternal glory.

And they chose for all of us. From the moment God set foot in the garden that day He sensed their shame. He smelled their fear. He was pained by their rebellion. And he hung his head in sadness, for the necessary consequence of their actions was exile, death, and the labor of field and child. Out of the dust he had made them, filling them with the breath of his very own mouth.

Now to dust they would return. Their exile is ours. And their sin we have made our own.

Shame and sadness, fear and death: these are the ways of the world when we hide from our creator. What begins in glory descends swiftly into tragedy. And we are left to wonder, "What can God do?"

When God finally spoke it was not a word of condemnation or anger. It was a word of promise and hope spoken to a man living in the land of exile and walking in the way of sin.

Abraham was a child of Ur, the city of idols. And yet God came to him. He came and called and Abraham answered. Unlike his father, Adam, he did not hide in shame; he listened and obeyed.

God made Abraham a promise: From you will come blessing, blessing for your people and blessing for the world. You will father a great nation and through that nation all nations will find their hope in me. Abraham believed and grew impatient. Hasty. Waiting too long, he had a child with a "sister wife", Named Ishmael. But not the child God intended. Sarah his wife DID give birth in old age and after laughing got Isaac. Isaac fathered Jacob. And Jacob fathered twelve men who would become twelve tribes – a people of prophets and kings – carrying God's blessing to a world shrouded in darkness.

And yet these people, God's people, did not follow Abraham's faith. They faltered. They fell. Moments of faithful obedience were followed by centuries of arrogance and idolatry. The people could not keep their promises. But God was keeping his. The prophet spoke.

And in the heart of darkness there glimmered a distant light. A child would be born.

A Son of David would sit on the throne. He would be the peace-bringer, counselor of wonders, God almighty. Could it be that once again God would walk his garden path and call his people home?

The words of the prophets were glimmers of hope in the gathered darkness. Like streaks of lightning across a night-time sky they illuminated the landscape for a glorious moment before all went dark again. When they spoke God's word they spoke of judgment but also grace, and above all hope.

Then there was silence: four-hundred years without a prophet, four centuries without a godly king, generations who wondered if God would ever walk with his people again. AT last, out of the silence, he spoke. The angel of the Lord came down from on high to greet a woman, barely more than a child. "Greetings," he said, "the Lord is with you, favored one."

In the pause that followed did the angel wonder what she might say? Did the angel doubt her willingness or her faith? How could she possibly be the bearer of all God's promises? How could she ever carry the weight of the world's longing in her womb? Like Abraham on the heights of Mt. Moriah, so Mary in the stillness of her room received the promise of God. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." In faith, she received and by faith she obeyed. Overpowered by the Spirit of God she received the living Word.

The Son of David was coming to claim his throne. The heir of Abraham was coming to receive his blessing. The child for whom a whole nation had longed and prayed was coming – not to conquer but through his death and resurrection to serve and to save. Augustus was the greatest of all the Caesars. During his reign all the power of the world seemed to settle in and then emanate from Rome. At a single word from his lips the peoples of the empire could be thrown into chaos.

One such word gave birth to such a chaos, and caught up in the streaming tide of misplaced people were Joseph, Mary and the baby she carried. Caesar's command sent them out, but God's promise carried them safely. And in a makeshift nursery, the child of promise was finally born. Here was Abraham's distant star. Here was Jesse's branch. Here was David's Son.

In the darkness of the fields, the sky erupted with cries of glory from an army of angels.

They were sent to shepherds – the poor and meek – to tell them that the king had been born, that their savior had come. And in the great dark orb of space, a single star stood sentinel that night.

Those who watched such things and knew their meaning set out with gifts to find the king of whom the star had spoken. Abraham's promise was fulfilled. His descendants had their king and received their blessing. So too did the world. Those wise men from the east were the first of us not born of Abraham to worship the one, true king who reigns over all the world. We follow them to Bethlehem and there we find our joy. In that child, born in weakness, came all the power of God.

The might of Caesar, so far-reaching so extraordinary, was made pathetic at the sound of his first cry. God was back among his people, soon to walk with them again.

The king has come.

The promises have been kept.

The curse is lifted.

The world is blessed.

How will we respond?

The invitation is clear: receive this king as Savior and trust in him as Lord.

Amen.