

4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 24, 2023



CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH -- ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO

140 Russell Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 1W1
Church: 905-685-8294
www.christlutheransc.ca

Office Hours: Thursday to Friday—9 a.m. – 12 noon
Bulletin Announcements: Please send to secretary@christlutheransc.ca.
Deadline for submission is Thursday at 9 a.m.

Pastor: Pastor Todd Hoeffs (289-362-0113) sr.pastor@christlutheransc.ca
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A recording of Sunday’s service will be uploaded to YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpING_TKT19c_OIBbMqGwLw

Prayer: O Lord, heavenly Father, who, through Thine angels, didst bid poor shepherds of the field not to fear but rejoice that Christ the Saviour was born. Drive away, we beseech Thee, all fear from our hearts and stir up in us this true and rightful joy, that, though here on earth we may be despised, miserable, poor, and forlorn, we may nevertheless be comforted and rejoice that we have Thy dear Son, Christ our Lord as our Saviour, who for our sake became man, that He might defend us from death and evil and save us for ever. Amen.

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS:

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

Musicians: 10 am—Mayumi Munoz; 7 pm –Gloria Meyer; 10 pm - Carole Pink
Dec. 25 - 10 am - Louise Gondosch

Readers: 10 am—Lorraine Kaija; 7 pm—Tom Kuhl; 10 pm – Howard Bogusat
Dec. 25, 10 am – Fran Porteous

EVENTS THIS WEEK:

Today: 10:00 a.m. – Worship with Communion
7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. – Christmas Eve Lessons & Carols Services

Monday: 10:00 a.m. – CHRISTMAS DAY Worship with Communion

Next Sunday: 10:00 a.m. – New Year’s Eve Carole Service

COFFEE HOUR: Please note that there will be **no** coffee hour this morning or until Sunday School resumes in January.

CONFIRMAND/YOUTH NIGHT: Thursday, January 4, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Come enjoy a fun evening together. Friends are welcome to join us!

CONFIRMAND & YOUTH CHAT will resume in January on the second & fourth Sundays with youth leader Dan Figueroa. We will meet in the youth room during Sunday School from 9 - 9:50 a.m.

PRECIOUS MOMENTS will resume Tuesday, January 9, 9:30-11:00am.

MARY MARTHA LWML-C:

Tuesday, January 16th – 7- 8 p.m. – “Staying Safe Presentation” Please join us for a presentation by Constable Michael Matwijow and his partner Constable Daryl Landry of the Niagara Regional Police, Community Oriented Response and Engagement unity (CORE). They will be speaking about what they do and the services they provide as well as providing us with information regarding current crime trends in our area and the preventative measures that we can take to reduce the chances of us being victimized. Everyone is welcome to attend!!

VOTERS MEETING: Save the Date! Our next congregational voters meeting will be Sunday, February 4, 2024, immediately following Worship Service. Main item for discussion/approval will be the 2024 budget.

<u>Last Sunday Attendance:</u>		<u>Dec. 17th, 2023</u>	<u>Attn: 10 a.m. – 112</u>	<u>NO SOUL:</u>	
	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Weekly Need</u>	<u>Last Sunday</u>	<u>Year To Date</u>	<u>+ or – (--)</u>
Current	297,841.00	5,840.02	4,971.00	279,476.91	(12,636.38)
LCC Missions	17,000.00	333.33	212.00	17,099.00	425.92
Property Improvement:			142.00	6,900.00	

FLOWERS have been placed on the altar this morning to the Glory of God by Wendy & Gary Kuenzel to celebrate the occasion of their 40th Wedding Anniversary. Congratulations!!

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHEER: We made 39 (the most ever) Christmas Cheer Baskets this year and we'd like to thank everyone who contributed/donated in some way. Many people will have Christmas dinner now because of your generosity.

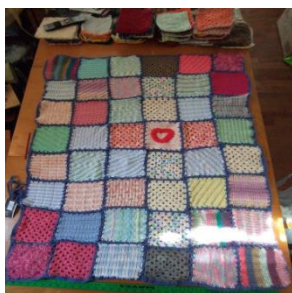
CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

We thank the following people for donating poinsettias to beautify our church for our Christmas Services:

	<u>In Honour of:</u>	<u>In Memory of:</u>
The Gondosch Family		Loved ones
The Gondosch Family	Our Family at Christ	
Kurt & Gloria Meyer		May & Edna Bogusat
James & Wendy Hyatt	Family & Loved ones	
The Kuhl Family	Family & Loved ones	
Sam & Pearl Backus		Family
Lia Fraccaroli	Family	Family
Irene Motz	Family & Mom	Family & Mom Katie Klern
Naomi Hohnberg		Doris Hohnberg (mother)
Tim & Elly Reck	God's Blessings	

2024 DONATION ENVELOPES: Your 2024 donation envelopes are in your mailbox for pick-up! If you do not have a mailbox, please check the table in the Narthex. If you don't have a mailbox, and you would like one, please contact our secretary Pat at secretary@christlutheransc.ca.

ATTENTION DONORS: If you are using envelope #62 from the 2022 calendar year, please contact Karen McCumber at: business.manager@christlutheransc.ca. This envelope was not assigned which makes it impossible to provide a charitable receipt at the end of the year. We would love to correct our records to make sure that the donor receives an accurate charitable receipt.



Granny Squares still needed: This is an ongoing project we will gratefully accept more completed 6 inch knitted or crocheted Granny Squares in any pattern or colour. We would also appreciate any yarn that you may have, leftover yarn or full balls of yarn. In the narthex there is a white cube with yarn and hooks that you are welcome to take (or donate). There is another basket for completed squares. It has been about 6 months that we have been able to show Christ's love in our Caring Squares blankets. (22 blankets to date!) Thank you for donating yarn or completed squares as we continue with this project! Praise God!

If you have any questions, call Lorraine at 905 964 5837)

USED STAMPS: Start saving and collecting your used stamps now! They will be gathered at the LWML-C Convention and donated to a charity who will in turn use them to purchase spiritual resources like Bibles.



HOLY COMMUNION
LSB DIVINE SERVICE SETTING FOUR
The 4th Sunday in Advent
December 24, 2023 + 10 AM Worship

OPENING HYMN: "Hark The Glad Sound"

1 Hark, the glad sound! The Sav - ior comes, The Sav - ior
 2 He comes the pris - 'ners to re - lease, In Sa - tan's
 3 He comes the bro - ken heart to bind, The bleed - ing
 4 Our glad ho - san - nas, Prince of Peace, Your wel - come

prom - ised long; Let ev - 'ry heart pre -
 bond - age held. The gates of brass be -
 soul - to cure, And with the trea - sures
 shall pro - claim, And heav'n's e - ter - nal

pare a throne And ev - 'ry voice a song,
 fore him burst, The i - ron fet - ters yield.
 of his grace To en - rich the hum - ble poor.
 arch - es ring With your be - lov - ed name.

Text: Philip Doddridge, 1702-1751
 Tune: attr. Thomas Haweis, 1734-1820

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:

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

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord;

Who made heaven and earth.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with You there is forgiveness;

therefore You are worshipped.

Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

Jesus said, 'Anyone who does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother or sister or mother.'

I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to his word.

Let your light so shine before all others,

That they see your good work and give glory to your Father in Heaven.

[All 4 Advent candles are lit]

We pray: **God of love, you sent your Son, Jesus, to shine bright like the sun, lighting the way for all who walk in darkness. May the light of Christ's hope, peace, joy and love shine bright in us as we approach his coming, that we may be ready to welcome him on Christmas day and every day. Amen.**

ADVENT WREATH HYMN VERSE

Mary's gift, beyond all telling, is to give the Christ child room.

She gave God a human dwelling in her blessed mother's womb.

Who could guess the final story? - cross and glory; empty tomb!

Words: Mark Earey Copyright © 2002 Mark Earey; All the texts may be reproduced for local use without further permission. From Sunday by Sunday (Royal School of Church Music UK) : Music: "Angels From The Realms Of Glory"

THE WORD

The Old Testament: *Samuel 7:1-11, 16* *[International Children Version]*

King David was living in his palace. And the Lord gave him peace from all his enemies around him. David said to Nathan the prophet, "Look, I am living in a palace made of cedar wood. But the Ark of the Covenant of God is still kept in a tent!" Nathan said to the king, "Go and do what you really want to do. The Lord is with you." But that night the Lord spoke his word to Nathan. The Lord said, "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: You are not the person to build a house for me to live in. I did not live in a house when I brought the Israelites out of Egypt. I have been moving around all this time with a tent as my home. I have continued to move with the tribes of Israel. But I have never asked their leaders who take care of them to build me a house of cedar wood.' "You must tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord of heaven's armies says: I took you from the pasture when you were following the sheep. I took you to become leader of my people, the Israelites. I have been with you everywhere you have gone. I have defeated your enemies for you. I will make you as famous as any of the great men on the earth. Also I will choose a place for my people, the Israelites. I will plant them so they can live in their own home. They will not be bothered anymore. Wicked people will no longer make them suffer as they have in the past. Wicked people continued to do this even when I appointed judges. But I will give you peace from all your enemies. I also tell you that I will make your descendants kings of Israel after you.... But your family and your kingdom will continue forever before me. Your rule will last forever.'"

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

CHOIR ANTHEM: "Celebrate the Promise"

Celebrate the promise of the King (celebrate, celebrate the promise)
Celebrate the promise of the King (sing and celebrate)
Cast out your ev'ry fear; the Lord will soon appear.
Celebrate the promise of the King
Celebrate the promise of God's love (celebrate, celebrate the promise)
Celebrate the promise of God's love (sing and celebrate)
Let music start to ring, rejoice, give thanks and sing!
Celebrate the promise of God's love

Gentle Mary, chosen one, you are highly favoured.
God will bless you with a son, He will be our Saviour.
Call his name Emmanuel: God with us together.
He will be the King of Kings!
He will rule forever and ever.
Celebrate the promise of the King (celebrate, celebrate the promise)
Celebrate the promise of the King (sing and celebrate)
Cast out your ev'ry fear; the Lord will soon appear.
Celebrate the promise of the King
Celebrate the promise of the King!
Celebrate the promise of the King!

One License Song # 1014964

Words and Music: Joseph Simpson Cook, Joseph M Martin

Tune: © 1998 Timespann Music, Inc., assigned to Lorenz Publishing Company (Admin. by Music Services) Text: © 1998

Timespann Music, Inc., assigned to Lorenz Publishing Company (Admin. by Music Services)

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The Epistle: *Romans 16:25-27*

[New Revised Standard Version]

[St. Paul writes:] Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.^[c] This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

ADVENT GOSPEL VERSE:

**O come, O Key of Da-vid, come, and op-en wide our heav-'n-ly home;
Make safe the way that leads our God on high, and close the path to mi-se-ry.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emman—uel. Shall come to You, O Israel.**

The Holy Gospel: *Luke 1: 26-38*

[New King James Version]

The Holy Gospel, according to St. Luke, the 1st chapter: **Glory to You, O Lord.**

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But ^[c]when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I ^[c]do not know a man? And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the female servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

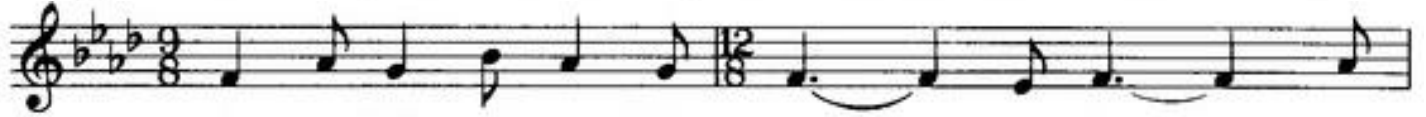
Praise to You, O Christ.

THE NICENE CREED:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, Whose kingdom will have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life + of the world to come. Amen.

GOSPEL SONG:**“The Angel Gabriel”**

1. The an - gel Ga - bri - el from heav - en came, His
2. “For know a bless - ed Moth - er you shall be, All
3. Then gen - tle Mar - y meek - ly bowed her head, “To
4. Of her, Em-man - u - el, the Christ was born In



wings as drift - ed snow, his eyes as flame; “All
 gen - er - a - tions praise con - tin - ual - ly, Your
 me be as it pleas - es God,” she said, “My
 Beth - le - hem, all on a Christ - mas morn, And



hail,” said he, “O low - ly maid - en Mar - y, Most
 Son shall be Em - man - u - el, by seers fore - told.” Most
 soul shall laud and mag - ni - fy his ho - ly name.” Most
 Chris-tian folk through-out the world will ev - er say Most



high - ly fa - vored la - dy,” Glo - ri - a!

Text: Sabine Baring-Gould, 1834-1924

Tune: GABRIEL'S MESSAGE, 10 10 12 10; Basque Carol; Harm. by Charles E. Pettman, 1865-1943

© 1961, H. Freeman and Co.

<https://hymnary.org/hymn/WHSB1986/page/537>

MESSAGE**OFFERING SONG:****“What Child Is This”**

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh, come, peasant – king to own, Him.

The King of kings salvation brings let loving hearts enthrone Him.

Raise, Raise, the song on high, the Virgin sings her lullaby.

Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the Son of Mary.

William Dix, 1868, public domain

THE OFFERINGS *are gathered*

PRAYERS

Lord of love, as we near the close of this Advent season, prepare our hearts that we would be made ready to receive Your Son as He is born in the Flesh as a baby, but also in His body and blood. Make us ever ready for His final coming on the Last Day.

Lord, in Your mercy, **lovingly hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, draw us together in unity, that our praise and worship might echo in these walls and also beyond through our daily lives.

Lord, in Your mercy, **lovingly hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, draw us together in mission, that the hope within might be the song we sing, and the melody of our lives.

Lord, in Your mercy, **lovingly hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, You are the creator and sustainer of all things. According to Your will, bring healing to those who suffer in body, heart and mind. Look with favour upon Your people, (*especially*), and if it is Your will, restore them to health, or give them grace to live trusting your will.

Lord, in Your mercy, **lovingly hear our prayer.**

Advent God, Lord of Love, we journey with you, to Bethlehem's manger and a new-born King, ears attuned to the song of angels, eyes alert for Your guiding star. Forgive our disinterest and keep our hearts aflame with the hope of Christmas, the promise of a Saviour and the hope in the life to come. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God who is with us. **Amen.**

THE SACRAMENT

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 Him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good, right, and joyful that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. And so with the church on earth and all the hosts of Heaven, we praise Your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

The musical score is written on four staves of a single treble clef. The melody is simple and hymn-like, using quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes. The first staff begins with a square symbol in a circle, likely indicating a starting point or a specific tempo. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of Sab - a - oth a - dored;
Heav'n and earth with full ac-claim shout the glo-ry of Your name.
Sing ho - san-na in the high-est, sing ho - san - na to the Lord;
Tru - ly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name....*

WORDS OF OUR LORD

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying: "Take, eat; This is My + Body which is given for you, this do, in remembrance of Me. In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying "Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament in My + Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

LAMB OF GOD



1 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
2 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,



You take the sin of the world a - way;
You take the sin of the world a - way;



O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus Christ,



Have mer - cy on us, Lord, we pray.
And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray.

HOLY COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

For those who have need, please feel free to stand at the rail if kneeling is difficult. The common cup and trays of individual glasses are available. Gluten free wafers are also available. Light purple glasses of Communion wine mixed with water are in the center ring of the silver trays.

COMMUNION HYMNS:

"Oh, How Joyfully"

Oh, how joyfully, Oh, how merrily,
Christmas comes with its grace divine!
Grace again is beaming, Christ the world redeeming,
Hail, all Christians, hail the joyous Christmas time.

Oh, how joyfully, oh, how wonderf'ly—
Christmas comes with its love divine!
Darkness disappearing, God's own Light know nearing,
Hail, all Christians, hail this glorious Christmas time!

Oh, how joyfully, oh, how hopefully,
Christmas comes with its peace divine!
Peace on earth is reigning, Christ our peace regaining,
Hail, all Christians, hail the joyous Christmas time!

Words: O Sanctissima, Latin Carol, German Translator Johannes Falk, 1816; English Translator Unknown

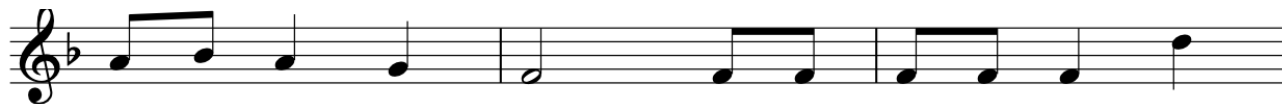
"The Holly & The Ivy"



The hol - ly and the i - vy, When they are both full
The hol - ly bears a blos - som, As white as lil - y
The hol - ly bears a ber - ry, As red as an - y
The hol - ly bears a pri - ckle, As sharp as an - y
The hol - ly bears a bark, As bit - ter as the



grown, Of all trees that are in the wood, The
flow'r, And Mar - y bore sweet Je - sus Christ, To
blood, And Mar - y bore sweet Je - sus Christ, To
thorn, And Mar - y bore sweet Je - sus Christ, On
gall, And Mar - y bore sweet Je - sus Chrst, For



hol - ly bears the crown: O, the ris - ing of the
be our dear Sav - ior:
do poor sin - ners good:
Christ-mas Day in the morn:
to re - deem us all:



sun, And the run-ning of the deer, The play-ing of the



mer - ry or - gan, Sweet sing - ing in the choir.

Traditional English Carol, © 1823 Cecil Sharp
“Behold A Branch Is Growing”

1 Be - hold, a branch is grow - ing of love - liest form and
 2 I - sa - iah had fore - told it in words of prom - ise
 3 This flow'r, whose fra - grance ten - der with sweet - ness fills the
 4 O Sav - ior, child of Mar - y, who felt our hu - man

grace! As proph - ets sang, fore - know - ing, it springs from Jes - se's
 sure, and Mar - y's arms en - fold it, a vir - gin meek and
 air, dis - pels with glo - rious splen - dor the dark - ness ev - 'ry
 woes, O Sav - ior, King of glo - ry, who con - quered all our

race and now be - gins to flow'r in midst of
 pure. Through God's e - ter - nal will this child to
 where. True man, and yet true God, from sin and
 foes, bring us at last, we pray, to the bright

cold - est win - ter, at deep - est mid - night hour.
 her is giv - en at mid - night calm and still.
 death he saves us and light - ens ev - 'ry load.
 courts of heav - en and to the end - less day.

Text: German, 16th cent.; tr. Harriet R. K. Spaeth, 1845–1925, stn. 1–3;
 John C. Mattes, 1876–1948, st. 4, alt.

Tune: *Alle Catholische Geistliche Kirchengeseng*, Köln, 1599; setting: Michael Praetorius, 1571–1629

Text and music: public domain

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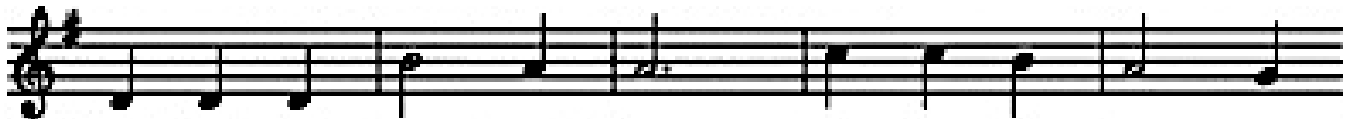
Revised edition by the American People's Songbook

"Jesus, The Very Thought Of You"

[O Jesus, King, Most Wonderful tune]



1. Je - sus, the ver - y thought of you
2. No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
3. O hope of ev - 'ry hum - ble soul,
4. O Je - sus, be our joy to - day;



1. Fills us with sweet de - light; But sweet - er far your
2. Nor can the mind re - call A sweet - er sound than
3. O joy of all the meek, How kind you are to
4. Help us to prize your love; Grant us at last to



1. face to view And rest with - in your light.
2. your blest name, O Sav - ior of us all!
3. those who fall, How good to those who seek!
4. hear you say: "Come, share my home a - bove."

5. Here, at Your Table, Lord, we meet --
We feed on Food Divine.

Your Body is the Bread we eat, Your precious Blood, the wine.

6. For surely You shall have my heart,
My soul, my strength, my all;
With loving itself, I'll freely part, My Jesus, at Your call.

Text: CM; *Jesu, dulcis memoria*, ca. 12th cent.; attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux, 1091–1153; tr. by Edward Caswall, 1814–1878, alt.
Music: ST. AGNES; John B. Dykes, 1823–1876.

POST COMMUNION HYMN:

“O Lord Know Let Your Servant”

1 O Lord, now let Your ser - vant De -
2 All glo - ry to the Fa - ther, All
part in heav'n - ly peace, For I have seen the
glo - ry to the Son, All glo - ry to the
glo - ry Of Your re - deem - ing grace:
Spir - it, For - ev - er Three - in - One;
A light to lead the Gen - tiles Un -
For as in the be - gin - ning, Is
to Your ho - ly hill, The glo - ry of Your
now, shall ev - er be, God's tri - une name re -
peo - ple, Your cho - sen Is - ra - el.
sound - ing Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

O Father, as You fed Your children with the True Manna, the Living Bread from Heaven, give unto us, we humbly pray You, that the Body and Blood of Your Son may be our support throughout our earthly pilgrimage, until we reach that land where there is neither hunger nor thirst, Your magnificent Heavenly Banquet; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

BLESSING:

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour and + give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN:

"In The Bleak Midwinter"

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;

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

Text: Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1830-1894
 Music: Gustav Holst, 1874-1934

CRANHAM
 Irregular

REV. TODD HOEFFS

Advent 4

Scripture: St. Luke 1: 26-38

December 24, 2023 (10 AM)

What do you want to be when you grow up? It's a common question. It was probably asked of you in your younger years. We ask it of our children and grandchildren.

Teachers talk about it in school.

In ancient times kids lives and futures were pre-arranged by parents. Martin Luther, for example, was the 1st born and his dad expected him to be a lawyer (not a priest). Artist Vincent Van Gogh was the 2nd born (but eldest, as his older brother died in infancy) and his dad expected him to fulfill every Dutch family's expectation as the 1st born, to be a Dutch Reformed pastor. World leaders pre-arranged marriages to for their infant children in the hopes of securing empires of power.

From the moment I discovered crayons and paper I wanted to be an artist. I used to dream of creating sets for movies and TV shows. And yet all those years the Lord was moving me into the direction that I become a pastor in the midst of learning how to make and teach art.

Sometimes I still hear adults saying that they don't know what they want to be when they grow up. Because the idea of a vocation today isn't as set into stone as in the past.

In university they told us that in an average working life, most people will change jobs at least 4 times. I'm sure it's more like 8 now.

Sometimes we can allow ourselves to dream of being something or someone else. At another level such dreams and desires point to the assumption that we are responsible for creating the life we want.

Look at your relationships, friendships, your family and marriage, your jobs and careers, your education, your home. All of those are attempts to create your life. That is not necessarily wrong. We have decisions to make and opportunities before us. We must be good caretakers of our resources and what God has given us. The difficulty comes when we start to believe and carry the burden that we are the ultimate creator of our life.

For in the beginning, God said and there was. He said let there be light and there was, let there be sky, dry land, earth that brings forth vegetation, fish that fill the waters, a sun and a moon.

Let us create humankind in our image and likeness. God said let there be all these things and there was all those things. Creation is the larger context for today's gospel, the Annunciation to Mary.

God speaks the creative word. Today, however, we remember Mary's words, "Let it be with me according to your word." Mary's words, "Let it be," echo God's words, "Let there be." It's like an ongoing call and response between God and humanity. He literally prays creation into existence with His Word and Spirit... and Mary says, "Amen. Let it be so." This is not an ending to the creation story but the continuation of creation and beginning of our salvation...ending with the new creation on Easter morning after

Good Friday's hauntingly glorious crucifixion – for us – for our world. God says, "Let there be" and his words bring forth creatures into the world. Mary says, "Let it be" and her words recognize that she will bring the Creator into the world. How amazing is that? 6 months along after cousin Elizabeth's miracle pregnancy enters the angel Gabriel...to Mary...a virgin betrothed to Joseph. It's not every day one sees or hears from an angel. Not even every century. The last time Gabriel was heard from was over 500 years before to Daniel during the Babylonian exile. And now he comes not once but twice within six months, first to Jerusalem and the temple and then to Nazareth in Galilee. And while the appearances of an angel may be very rare occurrences, they do serve the purpose of being God's method of announcing to something really important. People may still hear from angels today, but there's no promise that we will. I recall praying with a dying man in a hospital who saw hovering in the corner of his room "angels in frills". He died a few days later. With God nothing is impossible.

It's an unconventional birth announcement.

Faithful. Prophetic. Unsentimental. We like to paint Mary in the softer hues—her robes clean, hair combed and covered, body poised in prayerful surrender—but this young woman was young, full of strength and the Holy Spirit. When she receives the dangerous charge before her, (every birth was risky in those days, this one especially so), rather than reciting a maternal blessing, Mary offers a prophecy: *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."*

With her famous words, words from Scripture itself, Mary not only announces a birth, she announces the inauguration of a new kingdom, one that stands in stark contrast to every other kingdom—past, present, and future—that relies on violence and exploitation to achieve "greatness."

This Kingdom will come because the power of the Most High God is in control and HE will direct NOT only the birth of her baby but His Work to Save Humanity.

Mary stands at the end of a long promise line that began with Eve in the beginning and God's words to the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed." Mary is Eve's historical counterpart, the bookends of motherhood. Eve is the mother of all the living; Mary is the mother of the One who is life. Eve heard the tempting devil's word, and with Adam, believed the serpent's lies; Mary heard the Word of God through the angel, and she carried the Christ child, born to take away all sins. Eve conceived and bore a sinner, Cain, the murderer of his brother. Mary conceived and bore the Lord, the Savior of His brothers.

All according to God's Word. The Holy Spirit's seed will overshadow Mary, and God will take on flesh because Mary's humanity gives him that possibility. Through God's gift of humanity to Mary He transforms our humanity because we are forgiven and carry the Holy Spirit within. The incarnation of God in Jesus is not, however, limited to Mary. It is an affirmation of God's creation and the goodness of humanity. God chooses human flesh, not a cedar house, as the place of God's dwelling. Each one of us can stand as the "favoured one," with Mary.

Each of us is called to grow up as God-bearers, to carry the life of God within our own humanity by faith in God's Word and Baptism. So let it be to us, who are washed in the

Blood of God's own Son. Let it be to us who fight against our own failures and faults and sins and have only the one hope of Christ our Saviour Whose birth as a human means we will remain with our God forever. Nothing stands in the way. The infant in Mary's womb makes the way easy for us to journey to God's Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus the Christ could have come as a mighty man born of royalty; but He came as an infant born of a virgin. He could have come in glory; yet He came in hidden humility. He could have come in power; and still He came in hidden strength. He could've skirted the suffering, the manger, the brutality, the thorns, the nails, the spear; but not only did our LORD not avoid it but fully embraced it with open arms. Arms stretched out across the beams gathering all of the lost world into His embrace.

So let it be unto us. Let His birth give us life and His death give us eternal peace. Mary is a part of us, too, as we die and rise anew in the mother church. For as part of God's redeemed faithful creation we carry the Christ child in our word, our preaching, our singing and in our serving.

Like Mary, we discover the life God is creating in us and who are to be when we grow up. Mary teaches us how to say, "Yes."

We echo Mary's words, "Let it be so unto me according to Your Word." This is not a "live and let live" whatever attitude. It means we are made humble, vulnerable, open, receptive to God and His Word and His plan to take care of us in good and bad. To trust that the Christ child born anew in us through the Holy Spirit will keep us safe and secure and certain of the hope that we have. That nothing can ever separate us from God's Love.

"Let it be so unto me." With those words Mary receives the life God is creating in her. Between "How can this be?" and "Let it be" the impossible becomes a reality, the never before heard of will forever be spoken of, and the veil between divinity and humanity has fallen.

Baptism is the connecting watery word that births you from above in a birth that is every bit as miraculous as Jesus' birth from a virgin mother. That same Word forgives you daily and richly, in an absolution spoken not by an angel but by a fellow sinner called and ordained to an office that dares to speak in the stead and by the command of Jesus.

And it is by the same Word that a bit of bread brings that Body born of Mary given into death on the cross to your mouth, and a sip of wine that brings that Blood which is the life of the Son of God to your lips.

God's Word of hope spoken by the angel Gabriel is clear, at Christmas time and every time.... "Nothing will be impossible with God." No matter where life takes us or whatever we become when we grow up, we are 1st and foremost growing up into Christ, our light and Life - "Let it be so unto us, according to our God." Amen.

REV. TODD HOEFFS
CHRISTMAS DAY CAROL COMMUNION
Scripture: St. John 1:1-10
December 25, 2023 + 10 AM

It begins with...a word.

Words are everywhere.

Our Christmas carols are words set to music.

Words fill our Christmas cards, our dinner conversation, our emails, lists and our worship. John's Gospel begins with a word...the WORD.

Mirroring the WORD at the very beginning, *when God created the heavens and the earth*. John's Gospel in fact connects the creation of the world to the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Christmas and Creation. New life and new birth. And both begin with THE WORD.

Words are used without much thought or care by people but to GOD, the WORD means everything. It means life. It does what the speaker says.

And the Word is Jesus. THE VERBAGE spoken at the beginning of everything was the VERY LORD JESUS himself, without a human body. So what John is saying is that Jesus' story doesn't begin at his birth in the manger nor at his baptism. It doesn't begin with his ancestors. No, Jesus' story begins all the way back at the beginning of all things. At the beginning of creation.

John makes a startling claim. *In the beginning was the Word, and... **All things came into being through him. Without him not one thing came into being.***

Notice that in *this* Christmas story, it isn't Mother Mary who is giving birth. No manger, no lack of room in an inn, no angel messengers, no visiting shepherds. Here, Jesus is the one who is giving birth as John says, "*All things came into being through him.*" All things came into being *through* him.

What is most important to John is that the Word, Jesus, has given birth to all things. To the world! To you. To me. To the very snowy cold ground beneath our feet.

So, according to John, today isn't just Jesus' birthday, it is ours. We are re-born anew in Jesus' birth, re-created in His image as redeemed, saved, love brothers and sisters. The Word of God has given birth to all things, which makes it our birthday and a day in which we are claimed as children of God. By His light and life and water and word. For His Word is not meaningless or powerless but accomplished whatever our Lord deems appropriate.

But John's story doesn't stop there. Because this isn't just about birth. This Word of God, this light of all people -- shines in the darkness. Jesus the real LIGHT -- enlightens -- Everyone.

Which is amazing and remarkable. Not only does he give birth to all things, but he illuminates everything He makes. Not only revealing what is hidden in the dark, but we become aware of what God has done and continues to do in our lives. We are made aware of our sins but also aware of our forgiveness by the WORD, the Lord Jesus.

Yes, Christmas is a birthday indeed. Unlike candles on a birthday cake, Jesus' light shines into every dark corner so that nothing is hidden from sight.

John's story still doesn't stop there. The true light, Jesus, enlightens everyone and is coming into the world **even though the world received him not.**

Jesus comes to us and opens us up to His holiness and grace even when we do not know him. THIS is good news.

And we can only know HIM because He has made Himself knowable. As the Word of God born in a manger for us to see and embrace and relate to. HE's like us. He's a baby, same way we all enter this world. Only He is without any sin or fault.

It's also good news for those of us who struggle to know Jesus. Or for those of us whose family members struggle to know Jesus. Or for those who either have given up on seeking Christ or who feel abandoned by God. It is most truly at Christmas time we see our God cozy up very close to us in winning us over to His saving Kingdom. Not by coercion or bribery or good works but by His WORD, the Living Word, Jesus.

Christmas is not simply when we celebrate the birth of Christ, but when we celebrate the birth of all things. All of us. It is when we are reminded of where we come from.

And to whom we belong.

For **The Word became flesh and dwelled among us.**

Dwelled is the word for Tabernacle in the Greek Bible. The Word tabernacled among us in the flesh in Bethlehem just as He tented with His people of old in the wilderness. The spoken Word took on a body. Flesh that bleeds and blesses. Flesh that touches and tears. Flesh that callouses through hard work and grows thin when the work of life is finished. Finished on Calvary. At the manger we see the cross. The ancient Word of promise that life will grow new from death. From suffering we have salvation.

Such a fragile, vulnerable idea, this incarnation. Such a risky thing, this love of God for His wayward people. That God would put His very own life and flesh on the line (HIS ONLY SON'S LIFE) just to be with us. By actually becoming part of us. In the fleshiness of life. Into this everyday stuff.

So "all of human life and history is infused with God's goodness." Which isn't to say that everything in life is just perfect and wonderful. Or that people are connected to God apart from faith. To trust in this Word of God does not mean that people do not waste their lives, get hurt or hurt other people. It does not mean that there is no hardship...no evil, no tragedy. (But) what it does mean is that there is no corner of (this life) so hidden that (God's presence) cannot find it...There is no moment so dark that it can extinguish the light of God which even now shines in it."^[2]

It means that God is at work in every place at every single moment, no matter how dark it is, bringing light to this world. That is the story that John is trying to tell.

You are God's children. Each and every one of you. You came into being through Jesus – born out of God. And God is with you. In our Hebrews reading, it says that the Son of God is anointed with oil of joy. As God's very own sons and daughters, adopted into His family with the baptismal shower, you too will have a chance to be anointed

with the oil of joy this morning during holy communion. At the very WORD bread holds Jesus' Body and wine holds Jesus' Blood. A great and mighty wonder, Christmas comes to your mouth. As the oil of WORD AND SACRAMENT is placed onto your fragile flesh, know that it's there to soften your life and your heart, so that there will be no doubt in your mind who you are – you are the children of God.

And as children of God, we are called to share in the risk of incarnation. In the midst of heartache and fear that life can bring, we too are asked to embody the Word and words of God – to allow words like love, mercy, forgiveness, grace to be enfleshed in our bodies.[3]

From here, we go back to our homes, or travel to other places and encounter other beloved children of God for Whom the WORD has come to save. May we see each other and others as fellow redeemed in the Light of Christ. This means that others like us are worthy of love, forgiveness, and grace. That around our meal tables we share in the great gift of life, that the Christmas joy be born in our words and attitudes and actions. That includes siblings, parents, in-laws, strangers. And yourself.

In the beginning...with a word, THE WORD. That Word has become flesh, dwelling among us. The child has been born in a manger, worshiped by shepherds, sung by angels.

The Word has been spoken and enfleshed. What words are left to say?

Like John, we are Gospel storytellers and we have an amazing story to tell. The Word of God, Jesus, gave birth to you, which means you are his descendants. You have his DNA coursing through your veins. Let us then do the world a favor and share his story with everyone. Let us witness about how Christ is God's Word, embodying His promise to never leave us forsaken. And when you tell that story to another person, Jesus is right there, born anew there with you. In the flesh. Close. And not far off.

So with our words and lives, let us celebrate birth and life and this holy Christmas day. Amen.



O HOLY NIGHT

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PEACE
SAVIOR
SHEPHERD
STAR
WISE MEN

