

Spirit of Grace

ELCA UMC



December 24th, 2023
Christmas Eve

Prelude

Welcome

“The Risk of Birth”

Madeleine L'Engle (1973)

This is no time for a child to be born,
with the world betrayed by war & hate
and a comet slashing the sky to warn
that time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
in a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
honor & truth were trampled by scorn –
yet here did the Savior make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
and by a comet the sky is torn –
yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Opening Hymn

Love Has Come – ELW 292
verses 1+3

Advent Litany

written by Rev. Anna Blaedel – adapted for this service by Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller

We come to know you, Holy One, as Wisdom Incarnate, as Flickering Flame, as Spirit of Life, as Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, enfleshed.

You come to us as the Stranger, and the Strange.

Often we do not recognize you.

Often we turn away from your gifts and your demands.

Yet you come to us in the Wilderness, in the Impossible Made Possible, in Silence and Singing and Sighs Too Deep for Words.

You abhor dominance, mastery, fear, and control.

You are made known to us in Vulnerability, and Courage, and Divesting from the Powers of Empire.

We come to you this night in need, with longing, in pain, captive to fear, desiring a more just world, a more livable life for us all.

We long for your presence to be born among us here on earth.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel - ELW 257
verse 1

The Sibley Family

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
the Word made flesh,
our life and our salvation.

Amen.

Trusting the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior,
let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of life,
**you promise good news of great joy for all people,
and call us to be messengers of your peace.
We confess that too often we hoard our joy,
our resources, and our security.
We nurture conflict and build barriers.
We neglect the needs of our neighbors
and ignore the groaning of creation.
Have mercy on us.
Where we are self-centered, open our hearts.
Where we are reluctant, give us courage.
Where we are cynical, restore our trust.
Renew us with your grace
and give us again the hope of eternal life in you.
Amen.**

Hear the good news:
We are children of God and heirs of God's promises
through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
In † Jesus we are forgiven and redeemed.
Sing with joy, for all the ends of the earth
shall know the salvation of God.
Amen.

Carol: I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve

ELW 271
verses 1-4

Prayers of the People

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

A brief silence.

Glory to you, God, for the song of the angels, proclaiming to the world Christ's holy birth. Give your church a joyful song to sing, that we bring the good news of peace and salvation to all people

God of grace,

receive our prayer.

Glory to you, God, for the stars that shine in the depth of the night. Provoke awe in our hearts at the expansive mystery of the cosmos. Open us to find beauty in the clear darkness of night and in the first glimmers of dawn.

God of grace,

receive our prayer.

Glory to you, God, for the child born to us who establishes a kingdom of justice and righteousness. Break bonds of oppression, bring reconciliation to warring lands, and establish peace from this time onward and forevermore.

God of grace,

receive our prayer.

Glory to you, God, for Mary's loving care. Lead us to tend to one another in time of need. Share the comfort of your presence with all people tonight who are alone or separated from loved ones due to estrangement, incarceration, or illness.

God of grace,

receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace. In the name of eternal love made flesh in Christ Jesus this night, we pray.

Amen.

Offering

Lessons & Carols

Opening Prayer

Spirit of Love,
We welcome you.
We celebrate your coming to abide with us.
And we remember the ways you have been faithfully companioning us since the beginning.
It was you who wove all life together.
Your glory is painted across all of creation.
Throughout history, over and over again, you have taken on flesh,
in the ordinary and the extraordinary,
in the vulnerability of infants,
the fierce proclamations of prophets,
the enduring hope of those who persevere under evil's threats.
Where there is grief, where there is holy rage,
where there is fear or sacred imagination growing,
You abide across the ages.

Bless our time together, as we remember again the still-unfolding story of your love:
A love that comes to dwell among us.
A love that surprises and disrupts.
A love that reveals the way of liberation.
May it be so among us.

Amen.

Carol: It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

ELW 282
verses 1+4

First Lesson

Genesis 22:15-18

Shelley Oates

The angel of God called Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "I swear by myself – it is YHWH who speaks – because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only child, I will shower blessings on you; I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing – all this because you obeyed my command."

Carol: O Come All Ye Faithful

ELW 283
verses 1+2

Second Lesson

Jill McBee

Isaiah 9:2-7

*“The people walking in darkness
are seeing a brilliant light –
upon those who dwell in a land of deep shadows
light is shining!*

*God, you have made the nation greater –
you have brought them abundant joy!
They celebrate in your presence
as with the harvest celebrations,
or as warriors celebrate when dividing spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them,
the weight on their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressors –
you have shattered it,
as you did at the defeat of Midian.*

*For every boot that trampled in battle,
every cloak that was dragged through blood,
is now used as fuel for the fire.*

*For a child is born to us,
an heir is given us,
upon whose shoulders
dominion will rest.*

*This One shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, the Strength of God
Eternal Protector, Champion of Peace.*

*This dominion, and his peace,
will grow without end,
with David’s throne and realm
sustained with justice and fairness,
now and forever.*

*The zeal of YHWH Omnipotent
will accomplish it!”*

Carol: In the Bleak Midwinter

ELW 294
verses 1+2

Third Lesson

Lee Huckins

Isaiah 11:1-4a, 6-9

*Then a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse;
from Jesse's roots, a branch will blossom:
The Spirit of YHWH will rest on you –
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and reverence for YHWH.
You will delight in obeying YHWH,
and you won't judge by appearances, or make decisions by hearsay.
You will treat poor people with fairness
and will uphold the rights of the land's downtrodden.
Then the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
and calf and the lion cub will graze together,
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear;
their young will lie down together.
The lion will eat hay like the ox.
The baby will play next to the den of the cobra,
and the toddler will dance over the viper's nest.
There will be no harm, no destruction,
anywhere in my holy mountain,
for as water fills the sea,
so the land will be filled with knowledge of YHWH.*

Carol: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

ELW 272
verses 1+2

—

Cindy Murahashi

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary; she was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!"

Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel's greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus - 'Deliverance.' His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have never been with a man?"

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you - hence the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God. Know too that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a child in her old age; she who was thought to be infertile is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God."

Mary said, "I am the servant of God. Let it be done to me as you say."

Carol: What Child is This?

ELW 296
verses 1+2

—

Alicia Bermes

*Mary said,
 "My soul is alive with thoughts of God.
 What a wonder, Their liberating works.
 Though the world has been harsh to me,
 God has shown me kindness,
 seen my worth, and called me to courage.
 Surely, those who come after me will call me blessed.
 Even when my heart weighs heavy with grief,
 still, so does hope abide with me.
 Holy is the One who makes it so.
 From generation to generation,
 Love's Mercy is freely handed out;
 None are beyond the borders of
 God's transforming compassion.
 The power of God is revealed
 among those who labor for justice.
 They humble the arrogant.
 They turn unjust thrones into dust.
 Their Wisdom is revealed in
 the lives and truths of those on the margins.
 God is a feast for the hungry.
 God is the great re-distributor of wealth and resources.
 God is the ceasing of excessive and destructive production
 that all the earth might rest.
 Through exiles and enslavement, famines and wars,
 white supremacy and climate crises,
 God is a companion in loss,
 a deliverer from evil,
 a lover whose touch restores.
 This is the promise They made
 to my ancestors, to me,
 to all the creatures and creations,
 now and yet coming,
 and in this promise,
 I find my strength.
 Come, Great Healer,
 and be birthed through us.*

Carol: O Little Town of Bethlehem

ELW 279
verses 1+3

Sixth Lesson

Luke 2:1-7

Sharon Pantely

In those days, Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole Roman world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people were instructed to go back to the towns of their birth to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to “the city of David” – Bethlehem, in Judea, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David; he went to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her delivery. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn.

Carol: Away in a Manger

ELW 277
verses 1+3

Seventh Lesson

Luke 2:8-20

Debby Chenoweth

There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them, and they were very much afraid.

The angel said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you – news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David’s city, a savior – the Messiah – has been born to you. Let this be a sign to you: you’ll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in high heaven!

And on earth, peace to those on whom God’s favor rests.”

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see this event that God has made known to us.” They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw this, they reported what they had been told concerning the child. All who heard about it were astonished at the report given by the shepherds.

Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds went away glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told.

Carol: Angels We Have Heard on High

ELW 289
verses 1+3

*In the beginning
there was the Word;
and the Word was in God's presence,
and the Word was God.
The Word was present to God
from the beginning.
Through the Word all things came into being,
and apart from the Word
nothing came into being.
In the Word was life,
and that life was humanity's light –
a Light that shines in the darkness,
a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.
Then came one named John, sent as an envoy from God, who came as a witness to
testify about the Light, so that through his testimony everyone might believe. He
himself wasn't the Light; he only came to testify about the Lord – the true Light that
illuminates all humankind.
The Word was coming into the world –
was in the world –
and though the world
was made through the Word
the world didn't recognize it.
Though the Word came to its own realm,
the Word's own people didn't accept it.
Yet any who did accept the Word,
who believed in that Name,
were empowered to become children of God –
children born not of natural descent,
nor urge of flesh
nor human will –
but born of God.
And the Word became flesh
and stayed for a little while among us;
we saw the Word's glory –
the favor and position a parent gives an only child –
filled with grace,
filled with truth.*

Closing Prayer

God of Love,
Holy and Divine,
your wonder and majesty stretch across the universe –
yet still, you found embodied form here,
taking on flesh to dwell among your people.
We stand before you now,
in awe of your indescribable nature.
We honor this night as sacred.
We tell your story each year,
that it might live in our hearts
as a steady fire, burning bright,
leading us in the way of
your hope, peace, joy, and love
for all of Creation.
In the name of your precious Son,
Jesus Christ, born among us this night, we pray.
Amen.

Passing of the Light

Carol: Silent Night

ELW 281
verses 1, 2, 3, and 1

Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light

written by Jan Richardson

*Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable.
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow
and grief.*

*Blessed are you
in whom
the light lives,
in whom
the brightness blazes –
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines every broken thing
it finds.*

Carol: Joy to the World

ELW 267
verses 1+2

Benediction

God bless you and keep you,
✠ Jesus grant you grace and truth,
and the Spirit send peace upon your hearts,
now and forever
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in Peace. Rejoice in Christ our Savior.
Thanks be to God.



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Church Office Hours

Closed on Fridays

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M-Th 9-1, or by appointment

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Tuesday 10-1

Attributions

Advent Wreath litany - enfleshed, 2018, Rev. Anna Blaedel – adapted for this service by Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller

Confession and Forgiveness and Prayers of the People from Sundays & Seasons, 2021 Augsburg Fortress

A modern interpretation of Mary's Magnificat, written by Rev. M Barclay, enfleshed

“Blessed are you who bear the light” written by Jan Richardson from “Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons”