

Christmas Eve 2020 Home Worship Service

Living Grace Lutheran Church, Hawley, MN

*A worshipping community of the ELCA focused on making known God's love and grace by:
Welcoming Everyone, Sharing Jesus' story, Growing in faith and Serving beyond ourselves.*

Pastor Hope Deutscher
livinggracehawley@gmail.com

Office: 218-486-5880; Cell: 701-730-5051
PO Box 477, Hawley, MN 56549



As you light your Advent Wreath candles or one candle, we celebrate our journey through Advent that leads us to this holy night, in which we light the Christ Candle – and we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, born of Mary.

Because Christ has been born, people who walked in darkness now live in great light. Because Christ has been born, we respond in wonder: with the angels, we sing glory to God; with the shepherds, we share the good news; with Mary, we ponder the words of this night; and the Word that has come into the world: Immanuel, God with us.

Hymn: *Oh, Come All You Faithful*

*Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant! Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him Born the King of angels. Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

Prayer: Gracious God, may we quiet our minds, releasing our fears and anxieties of what has weighed us down this year. We come this night to celebrate Christ's birth, which gives hope to people from generation to generation. Help us to focus on this light, which shines through our darkness and despair, guiding us from the manger through the empty tomb and into a life of compassion for all people. Amen.

The Birth of Jesus: Luke 2:1-7

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Hymn: *Away in a Manger*

*Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay, The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

Jesus' Birth is Announced to the Shepherds: Luke 2:9-14

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

The Shepherds Find the Baby Jesus: Luke 2:15-18

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

Hymn: *The First Noel*

*The first Noel the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the King of Israel.*

Reflection by Pr. Hope Deutscher:

Look around and you'll see twinkling lights, lit stars on the top of Christmas trees and Monday night (December 21st) around the world we looked to the sky to see the *Christmas Star 2020 – a great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn*. Some speculate this is the Christmas Star, others say it might be rare and impressive but not the Christmas star the wisemen followed. Nonetheless, at Christmas – there are lights aglow, if just in the physical form this year as our hearts maybe heavy missing loved ones who have died, separation from family, praying for loved ones who have been ill with Covid this year, a pandemic that has turned our "normal" upside down brings plenty of darkness.

When Jesus was born – the world was also a very broken and dark place. Anticipating the birth of the Christ child centuries before Mary was pregnant, Isaiah wrote: *that the light that was coming into the world, came to a people shrouded in darkness* (9:1-7). Gloom, anguish, and contempt were just some of the adjectives used to describe this darkness.

When Christ was born, the Word of God had not been heard for four centuries. The last book in the Old Testament, Malachi, concludes with the statement that God would send Elijah the prophet as a forerunner for the Messiah – but that prophecy would eventually be fulfilled in John the Baptist...God seemed silent.

The people of God were under oppressive Roman rule. We hear in our scripture this night that there was a census being taken by Caesar Augustus – a blatant reminder that the people of Israel were owned someone else.

So Mary and Joseph, who lived more than 100 miles north of Bethlehem had to make the long, hard and dark trip to be counted in the census.

And yet – in that dark and bleak world there was LIGHT...God came to Mary and Joseph to bring HIS son into the world! Without family or hospitality, with no room in the inn, Mary and Joseph laid Jesus in a manger, a feeding trough for the cattle.

Christ's light breaks through the darkest places of our world. "Rejoicing in the Lord happens while we still struggle in the now. Struggling and rejoicing are two concurrent movements... one fluid with the other," writes Ann Voskamp, author of *The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the Full Love Story of Christmas*. "As the cold can move you closer to a fire, struggling can move you deeper towards God, who warms you with joy. Struggling can deepen joy. Even now."

The angels sang out "Fear Not! For behold! We have a Savior!" This night we repeat the sounding joy in the assurance of God's light and the wonders of God's love that is not just celebrated here and now – but every day God enters our messy, broken and dark lives and gives us the gift of light and hope that breaks through the darkness of this world.

Prayer:

Rejoicing in the good news of Christ's birth and dwelling in hope, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of creation. Living God, on this holy night we gather – to stand with shepherds, amazed at your glory; to sing with the angels, rejoicing in your work; to wait with Joseph, trusting in your promise; to sit with Mary, cradling your love. Prince of Peace, in the midst of chaos, your Son was born for us. May your light break through our chaos and darkness of our world. We pray for all who are suffering in mind, body and spirit this night and ask you to protect all of your children who are suffering. May we find hope and joy in the birth, life and resurrection of Christ Jesus, our Lord so that we too might be like the shepherds telling the world of our great joy: for unto us a Savior, our Messiah, is born! Amen.

Holy Communion:

Communion Element Blessing: Please take your bread/cracker, juice/wine – Almighty God, may you bless these elements in this special circumstance. Amen.

As we see the infant Christ laid in a dirty manger (a feeding trough) in the town of Bethlehem, which means *House of Bread*; we know that Jesus was also called "*the Bread of life*." The same body, which was laid in a dirty manger, would be broken in crucifixion for the forgiveness of our sins. Everything about Jesus' birth quietly points to the extraordinary and humble way He intends to keep coming to us. In a very real way, every time we receive the Lord's Supper we are experiencing Christmas all over again.

So we read these Words of Institution: 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 in 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 in the remembrance of me.

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. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. 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.

Please take and eat/drink as you say these words: *The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.*

Passing the Light

At this time, dim the lights in your room and if you have a candle available, light it. We rejoice in the light shining, breaking through the darkness as we read John 1:1-5: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Hymn: *Silent Night* *Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.*

Blessing

May the Word that Mary brought to birth carry you into new and abundant life.

May the Word that Joseph cradled in his arms enfold you with love and strength.

May the Word that angels proclaimed in song bring harmony to our world.

May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.