

Today, we share a service from the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. Pastor Cathy will return next week.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
**And also with you.**

CHRISTMAS

## 243 GOD REST YOU MERRY, GENTLEMEN

Verses

1. God rest you mer - ry, gen - tle - men, Let noth - ing you dis - may;  
2. From God our heav'n - ly Fa - ther A bless - ed an - gel came,  
3. "Fear not, then," said the an - gel, "Let noth - ing you af - fright;  
4. Now to the Lord sing prais - es, All you with - in this place,

1. Re - mem - ber Christ our Sav - ior Was born on Christ - mas Day  
2. And un - to cer - tain shep - herds Brought tid - ings of the same,  
3. This day is born a Sav - ior Of Vir - gin pure and bright,  
4. And with true love and char - i - ty Each oth - er now em - brace;

1. To save us all from Sa - tan's pow'r When we were gone a - stray,  
2. How that in Beth - le - hem was born The Son of God by name,  
3. To free all those who trust in him From Sa - tan's pow'r and might."  
4. This ho - ly tide of Christ - mas Is filled with heav'n - ly grace.

Refrain

O tid - ings of com - fort and joy, com - fort and joy;

O tid - ings of com - fort and joy.

Text: 86 86 86 with refrain; trad. English carol, 18th cent.  
Music: GOD REST YOU MERRY; trad. English carol; melody fr. *Little Book of Christmas Carols*, ca. 1846,  
arr. by John Stainer, 1840-1901, in *Bramley and Stainer's Christmas Carols New and Old*, 1871, alt.

**Prayer of the Day:** Almighty God, you sent Jesus to illumine the world with your light. By your grace, enlighten us with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in readings, scripture, and song\*

**FIRST READING**

**Isaiah 52:7-10**

<sup>7</sup>How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

<sup>8</sup>Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the LORD to Zion.

<sup>9</sup>Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the LORD has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup>The LORD has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

**Psalms 98**

<sup>1</sup>O sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have gotten him victory.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

<sup>3</sup>He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.

<sup>4</sup>Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

<sup>5</sup>Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

<sup>6</sup>With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

<sup>7</sup>Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.  
<sup>8</sup>Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy  
<sup>9</sup>at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

## **SECOND READING**

### **Hebrews 1:1-4**

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

## **HOLY GOSPEL**

### **John 1:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.  
<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.  
<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.  
<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## **Sermon**

**Rev. Emily Carson, Assistant to the Bishop  
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA**

Beginnings are important. Where we start a story shapes its meaning. As we step closer to December 25, it's important to remember: Christmas isn't the beginning. Christmas is a continuation of an eternal story. That's where the Gospel of John begins. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

John invites us, right from the start of his account of Jesus, into a cosmological imagination. He doesn't start by orienting us to a particular geographic place. He doesn't identify a particular intended audience either. Instead of zooming way in on the details of Jesus birth, John zooms way out.

It's like John is inviting us out into the woods on a clear night so that he can say "Look up" as we gaze into a sea of stars. "The story starts here," John says. The Gospel of John is the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and it's also the story of the birth of creativity and humanity and existence. We celebrate all of it at Christmas.

Interestingly, for a book about Jesus, John doesn't even use Jesus' earthly name until verse 17 of chapter 1. Instead, he refers to Jesus as the Word. In the original Greek translation, the word for Word is *Logos*.

Right off the bat, John invites his hearers to into a new way of hearing, thinking and being. Perhaps a similar reorientation would be useful for us, too.

Can we step back from the dynamics of this complicated, challenging year for a moment and find our way back to the beginning of the beginning? Can this Christmas season be an invitation to look up and look around in a new way? What might we notice from a different perch?

John, in the first few verses of his Gospel, describes an infinite, eternal thread that runs through all of existence. He calls this thread *Logos*. The Word. Everything is woven into being through this thread, and nothing that exists is outside the Word. The Word is life, and the life is the light for all of humanity. Christmas, the story of Jesus earthly birth, isn't the beginning. It's a continuation of a story that stretches all the way backward and all the way forward. Christmas is an important chapter of the eternal story of a God who brings possibility into being.

Dear reader, as you look up and look around - as you look in and look out - what you notice? Where have you experienced the Word that is Light to all of humanity?

2020, for all its wounds and complications, has also been a year in which the Light continued to shine. We see things that we didn't see before. We feel things that we didn't feel before. It's hard and it aches. There's tension. There's injustice. There's hurt in our individual households and in our families and in our churches and in our world.

We all know, deep down, that 2020 isn't the beginning of the story on all this brokenness. The heaviness of this year...and this moment... didn't just appear when the first Minnesotan contracted coronavirus or the mandatory shut downs began in March. A lot of what's hard and broken and uncomfortable is systemic and tangled. Political turmoil. Racial injustice. Economic inequity. 2020 isn't the beginning of these stories. The Word...the Light...has empowered us this year to see more clearly what was already there. And this seeing equips us to act and live in new ways.

Noticing what has been illuminated this year has given many a chance to reimagine how we do life and church together. Congregations have said, "Yes" to worshipping and living together in new ways. People have said "Yes" to being family and loving neighbor in new ways. We won't stop here. The work will continue on, and we will continue on knowing that 2020 is an opportunity to practice what God has been commanding all along: justice, mercy, humility and love.

Look up. Look around. Look in. Look out. There is nothing outside the reach of the Word. The Word that is ever-illuminating. The Word that is always breathing life. The Word that forever grants hope to the weary.

May you know, trust and experience the Word made flesh. And may this Word - this perspective-granter - this Jesus...remain the center of our Christmas and our lives. Always. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Redeeming God, you gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You bring together heaven and earth. All creation testifies to your splendor. Hold the ecosystems of this earth in delicate balance, from coastlands to farmlands, forests to wetlands, deserts to rainforests. Show us new ways to live in harmony with the world around us. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labor under the weight of pain or sickness, especially Katie, Carla, Ruth, Judy, Alrita, Lisa, Pam, Frank, Jeff, Annette, Jim, Paul, Darlene, Dale, Bud, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honor your image in one another. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith. With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

**Amen.**

## Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be your 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.

## What Child Is This



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



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



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



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

Go in peace. Rejoice in the Word made flesh.  
**Thanks be to God!**

## Away in a Manger



1 A - way in a man - ger, no crib for his bed, the lit - tle Lord  
2 The cat - tle are low - ing; the ba - by a - wakes, but lit - tle Lord  
3 Be near me, Lord Je - sus; I ask you to stay close by me for -



Je - sus laid down his sweet head; the stars in the bright sky looked  
Je - sus, no cry - ing he makes. I love you, Lord Je - sus; look  
ev - er and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear chil - dren in



down where he lay, the lit - tle Lord Je - sus a - sleep on the hay.  
down from the sky and stay by my cra - dle till morn - ing is nigh.  
your ten - der care and fit us for heav - en, to live with you there.

Text: North American, 19th cent.  
Music: AWAY IN A MANGER, James R. Murray, 1841–1905

## CONTACTS DURING CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

In case of emergency, contact Pastor Cathleen, via text, 608-865-1074,  
or call Justin Arndt (608-435-6336) (414-587-6642) or Nalani Bever (608-387-2311).

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