

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



First Sunday of Christmas
December 27, 2020



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

First Sunday of Christmas

The psalmist calls on the natural world, celestial bodies, fire and earth, creatures, and all humanity, to praise God. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon's song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God's salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we tell of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.

Prelude “*Es ist ein Ros*” (PENFIELD)

Confession & Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God's relentless grace.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who was in the beginning,
who makes a dwelling among us,
who covers us with justice and mercy.
Amen!

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of goodness and lovingkindness,
**we confess that we have sinned against you
and our neighbors.**
We have turned away from your invitation to new life.
We have turned away from the lowly and downtrodden.
In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins,
those we know and those known only to you,
for the sake of the one who came to live among us,
Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Hear the good news of peace and salvation!
 God forgives us all our sins,
 not through our own work,
 but through † Jesus Christ, made known to all people.
 With all who come to the manger,
 rejoice in this amazing gift of grace.
Amen!

Gathering Hymn *Let All Together Praise Our God*

#287



1 Let all to - geth - er praise our God be - fore the
 2 From God's right hand the Son de - scends, is born an
 3 O ten - der Child, you veil in flesh the splen - dor
 4 Your moth - er feeds you ten - der - ly, sings you a



high - est throne; to - day God o - pens heav'n a - gain and
 in - fant small, and lies in pov - er - ty, his bed a
 of your might; a ser - vant's garb now wraps the one who
 lul - la - by, while an - gels, hail - ing Da - vid's heir, your



sends the on - ly Son, and sends the on - ly Son.
 man - ger in a stall, a man - ger in a stall.
 clothed the sky with light, who clothed the sky with light.
 glo - ry mag - ni - fy, your glo - ry mag - ni - fy.

5 A wonderful exchange you make:
 you take our flesh and blood,
 and in return give us to share
 the shining realm of God,
 the shining realm of God.

6 Unlock the door again today
 that leads to paradise;
 the angel bars the way no more.
 To God let praises rise,
 to God let praises rise!

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen!

First Lesson

Isaiah 61:10--62:3

To the people who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, the prophet proclaims that God's salvation will fully come to pass. Jerusalem will become a shining light to the nations and righteousness and praise will spring up as surely as the earth puts forth vegetation.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

^{62:1}For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

²The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.

³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Word of God, word of life!

Thanks be to God!

¹Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise God in the heights.

²**Praise the LORD, all you angels;
sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.**

³Praise the LORD, sun and moon;
sing praise, all you shining stars.

⁴**Praise the LORD, heaven of heavens,
and you waters above the heavens.**

⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD,
who commanded, and they were created,

⁶**who made them stand fast forever and ever,
giving them a law that shall not pass away.**

⁷Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps;

⁸**fire and hail, snow and fog,
tempestuous wind, doing God's will;**

⁹mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars;

¹⁰**wild beasts and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds;**

¹¹sovereigns of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the world;

¹²**young men and maidens,
old and young together.**

¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD,
whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.

¹⁴**The LORD has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD. Hallelujah!**

Second Lesson

Galatians 4:4-7

Paul seeks to show the Galatians that the purpose of Christ's birth was to liberate us from the law's condemnation so that we would be fully adopted into God's family as beloved children.

⁴When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Word of God, word of life!

Thanks be to God!

Gospel

Luke 2:22-40

Luke's narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus' connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!

Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *In His Temple Now Behold Him*

#417



1 In his tem - ple now be - hold him, see the long - ex -
 2 In the arms of her who bore him, vir - gin pure, be -
 3 Je - sus, by your pre - sen - ta - tion, when they blessed you,
 4 Prince and au - thor of sal - va - tion, be your bound - less



pect - ed Lord; an - cient proph - ets had fore - told him,
 hold him lie; while his a - ged saints a - dore him,
 weak and poor, make us see your great sal - va - tion,
 love our theme! Je - sus, praise to you be giv - en



God has sent the prom - ised Word. Now to praise him,
 ere in per - fect faith they die. Al - le - lu - ia!
 seal us with your prom - ise sure; and pre - sent us,
 by the world you did re - deem, with the Fa - ther



his re - deem - ed shall break forth with one ac - cord.
 Al - le - lu - ia! Lo, the in - car - nate God Most High!
 in your glo - ry, to your Fa - ther, cleansed and pure.
 and the Spir - it God of maj - es - ty su - preme!

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.

A brief silence.

Night and day, all creation praises you, O God. Strengthen your whole church across the nations, denominations, and traditions. Fill us with wisdom and unify our proclamation of your forgiveness and mercy. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

All creation is holy to you, O God. You cause the earth to bring forth its shoots and gardens to spring up. Protect hibernating animals and frozen lands that wait earnestly for longer days of awakening and growth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

The nations are upheld by your hand, O God. Cause righteousness and praise to spring forth, inspiring leaders to serve with compassion and integrity. Strengthen the discernment upon all those grappling with complex decisions for the sake of the common good. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Fill our hearts with your compassion, O God. Come quickly to hearts that race with fear, hearts that break with grief, and hearts that long for wholeness. Reveal your power to heal and to save. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have adopted us into your family, O God. Bless our elders with the peace and joy of Simeon and Anna. Strengthen those who have retired, those who work in older age, and those in need of income, food, company, or health care. Connect young and old across generations. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us depart in peace, O God, according to your word. For all your saints, we give you thanks. Prepare our salvation in the sight of all your witnesses of every time and place. 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 our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Music Interlude *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (CALLAHAN)

Please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Holy God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor,
at the birth of time your Word brought light into the world,
and throughout the ages, you proclaim newness of life.

For your wondrous Word, we thank you, O God.

We thank you, O God!

In the fullness of time, your Word became flesh,
to shine in our world's darkness,
to speak peace to all people,
and to welcome us as members of your family.

For your loving Word, we adore you, O God.

We adore you, O God!

Grant us now the gift of you as the Holy Spirit,
that held, nourished, and protected by your Word,
we may live as your children,
bearing your goodness throughout the world.

For your powerful Word, we praise you, O God.

We praise you, O God!

All glory to you, holy God,
now and forever.

Amen!

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

Almighty God,
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,
proclaimed joy through the angels,
sent the shepherds with good news,
and led the magi by a star,
bless you this day ✠ through the Word made flesh.
Amen!

Sending Hymn *Cold December Flies Away*

#299



1 Cold De - cem - ber flies a - way at the rose - red splen - dor.
2 In the hope - less time of sin shad - ows deep had fall - en.
3 Now the bud has come to bloom, and the world a - wak - ens.



A - pril's crown - ing glo - ry breaks while the whole world won - ders
All the world lay un - der death. Eyes were closed in sleep - ing.
In the lil - y's pur - est flow'r dwells a won - drous fra - grance.



at the ho - ly un - seen pow'r of the tree which bears the
But, when all seemed lost in night, came the sun whose gold - en
And it spreads to all the earth from the mo - ment of its



flow'r. On the bless - ed tree blooms the red - dest flow'r. On the tree blooms the
light brings un - end - ing joy, brings the end - less joy of our hope, high - est
birth; and its beau - ty lives. In the flow'r it lives, in the flow'r, and it



rose here in love's own gar - den, full and strong in glo - ry.
hope, of our hope's bright dawn - ing, Son be - lov'd of heav - en.
spreads in its heav'n - ly bright - ness sweet per - fume de - light - ful.

Text: Catalanian carol; tr. Howard Hawhee, b. 1953
Music: EL DESEMBRE CONGELAT, Catalanian carol
Text © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the gift of the Messiah with the world!
Thanks be to God!

Postlude *Cold December Flies Away* (BUSAROW)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Steve Dobush, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Claudia Senderak, Arlene Stoltz, Tim Susanek, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 12/20/2020: \$1485

Lectionary Blog: On Remembering the Old Promises



iStock.com/yuriz

For the first Sunday of Christmas, a time when we live into and practice many of our favorite old traditions, it's useful to consider some words and traditions that were ancient—even those from before Jesus became incarnate.

Joseph and Mary were a poor couple who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to redeem their firstborn son in accordance with God's law. Because all firstborn boys, as well as herd and flock animals, belong to the Lord (Exodus 13:2, 22:28-29, Numbers 3:13, etc.), they needed to be consecrated to God. But the Exodus narrative reveals that our God is disgusted by human (and donkey) sacrifices (Exodus 13:13). The solution was to present a lamb in the place of human lives.

Luke recorded the story about Mary and Joseph going to the temple to present their offering on behalf of their son, and it included an important detail. Instead of a lamb, they presented two birds, either doves or pigeons. This tells us that they were especially poor because they couldn't bring a lamb to sacrifice. But God made provision for just such an occasion, stipulating that if a family were too poor to buy a sheep, they could sacrifice two birds instead (Leviticus 5:7).

As an aside, when we lived in the Kingdom of Morocco, people would ask if I was going to slaughter a sheep after my children were born. Even in tight economic times, most families can afford to kill a sheep to mark the birth of most children, not just the firstborn male. It's definitely an expense, but because it is eaten by the family and guests instead of devoted to God or priests, it's usually counted as part of the food budget of the family and neighbors. It represents an important occasion for community celebration.

Jesus' presentation was also a cause for community celebration. As Joseph and Mary were redeeming Jesus, Simeon was led by the Spirit to the temple to encounter the baby (Luke 2:25-27). God's Spirit had told Simeon earlier that he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. Overjoyed to behold Jesus, Simeon thanked God for his faithfulness in keeping promises to his servant. Not only had God kept this promise, but also, as Simeon sang, God kept God's promises through the prophet Isaiah to shine a light of revelation to the gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 51:4). Simeon blessed God for the fulfillment of promises made to him personally and those made to the nations hundreds of years earlier.

Hannah (“Anna” in many English Bibles) is one of my favorite people in Scripture. She is the last representative mentioned in the Bible of the women who had ministered at the tabernacle and temple since the time of Moses (Exodus 38:8, 1 Samuel 2:22, 2 Kings 22:13-20). Hannah was a prophet (Luke 2:36) who had lived for years in the temple, fasting and praying on behalf of the people of Israel. Her decades of long, faithful service to the Lord and looking forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises allowed her to recognize the Messiah as a baby, even among all the worshipers in Herod’s monumental temple.

Hannah was the first person in Scripture who encountered Jesus and then, on an ongoing basis, taught and testified about him (Luke 2:38). Hannah bat Phanael, whose name is hardly ever mentioned in Christian history, was the first apostle of Jesus!

The Gospel of Luke opens and closes this reading about witnesses to Jesus by stating that his parents did everything to fulfill the law of the Lord (2:22-24, 2:39). God was doing a new thing in Jesus, to be sure. But the new thing was in fulfillment of some very old promises and prophecies. God promised to send a light for the Gentiles, a messiah to save God’s chosen people Israel, and to cause the falling and rising of many. Instead of seeing Jesus as a completely new thing, I believe that Luke’s Gospel invites us to see his entry into human history in deep continuity of God’s work in redeeming people.

May we look to God’s words, law and promises from of old and join Simeon, the loyal bondservant of God (Luke 2:29), and Hannah, the prophet (Luke 2:36), in rejoicing in God’s faithfulness. Simeon’s and Hannah’s models for us, and that of the holy family, encourage us to not forget the old promises of God, but to bless God for their fulfillment in our lives!

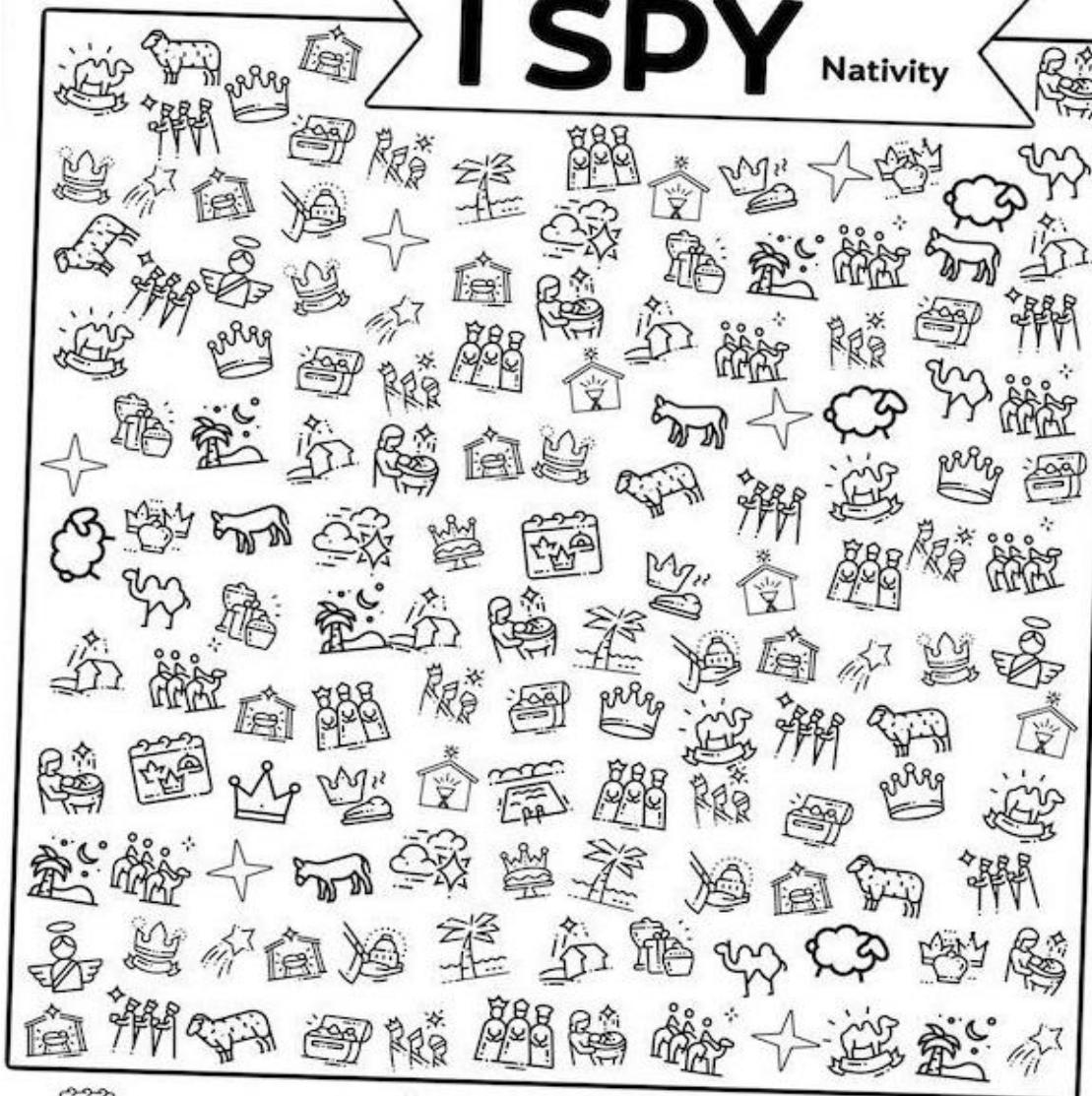
This, and other resources for the journey of faith, available at LivingLutheran.org.



Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.

I SPY

Nativity



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Joy to the World



ADVENT
ANGEL
BETHLEHEM
BIRTH
BLESSINGS
CAMELS
FRANKINCENSE

INFANT
JESUS
JOSEPH
MAGI
MANGER
MARY
MIRACLE

MYRRH
NATIVITY
REJOICE
STABLE
STAR
THREE KINGS
WISE MEN

