**Worship Plan for Sunday, December 22, 2024** **\* Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Introduction to the day**

Cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Between a lovely tribute to the little town of Bethlehem and Mary’s magnificent song of praise, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us in no uncertain terms that Christ’s advent is for “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” It is the kind of tension in which the church always lives as when in holy communion—with high delight—“we proclaim the Lord’s death.”

**GOSPEL MESSAGE: Not Fate but Faith**

It’s easy to take for granted that everything came together just so. With Christmas only days away, the expectant mood of the Advent season turns swiftly to joy. We might as well already be pacing outside the stable as we eagerly anticipate the baby soon to be born. Because we know what happens next, we might even assume that events had to unfold exactly the way they did: The angel Gabriel came to Mary, her pregnancy seemed inevitable, and the promises God had made to Israel would be proven complete. We are not likely to give Mary’s role in the story a second thought. We assume she had little choice. At least that’s the way we often think about her response.

But that’s not entirely the way the story goes. The gospel itself doesn’t assume as much. Elizabeth certainly doesn’t. She acknowledges Mary’s willingness to honor the angel’s announcement: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Luke 1:45). For indeed, the angel’s words initially confused Mary: none of it seemed to make sense. Her part in the story could have ended there. And yet she is moved by what she hears. Her trust in God’s word is neither coerced compliance nor certain knowledge, but a response rooted in trust—not a foregone conclusion but a faithful leaning into the promises presented to her. The story did not have to go the way it did, but Mary trusted that it would.

Often only when we reflect on the journey we’ve already made, do we fully appreciate the ways God has repeatedly shown up. There’s a gift in such moments of clarity. There’s also a gift in the realization that even in seemingly impossible circumstances, choices must often be made. This was true for Mary, and also for Jesus. His journey from the cradle to the cross was not fate: it was a series of faithful choices, like Mary’s, to trust in God’s promises of new life.

**Processional**

**AM: Welcome**

Welcome to Faith Lutheran Church where grace and love abound. A special welcome to those of you here for the first time, or joining us online, and to our guest pastor, Shane Freiberg. It's a joy to worship with all of you! We're in the season of Advent - the season of expectation and preparation not only for the birth of the Christ child, but for the coming of the permanent pastor God has in mind for us. While this is a time for prayer and discernment, it's also a time for action. So, let’s all tune into where the Holy Spirit is leading us and then jump in. Multiple blessings await as we work together to experience and share the love of Jesus Christ here at Faith and beyond our doors.

**P: Gathering**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**P: Greeting**

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.**

This is the day that the Lord has made,

**let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

**Advent Litany**

**P:** At every beginning there is a yearning for the one who is coming. O Emmanuel,

**A: Wake us up to your coming.**

**AM:** We gather together to expect the unexpected and imagine the unimaginable. O Emmanuel,

**A: Wake us up to your coming.**

**P:** We wait for the day when God will recycle tanks into tractors and transform minefields into soccer fields. O Emmanuel,

**A: Wake us up to your coming.**

**AM:** We stay awake by telling stories that offer a glimmer of a future and agitate dormant hope within us. O Emmanuel,

**A: Wake us up to your coming.**

**P:** Jesus, we welcome your presence now with the lighting of this candle, whose flame brings warmth to winter and fills this place with the glow of love.

**Amen.**

**Advent Wreath Lighting**

**LIGHTING SONG: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (ELW 257, vs. 7, 8)**

**AM: ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The altar flowers were provided by the Sinclairs and by Earlean Wagner celebrating birthdays.

It’s that time again! Order forms for poinsettias to decorate our sanctuary are now in your mailbox! Orders must be in by December 24th!

The Flower Chart for 2025 is now up just outside Lynn’s office. Feel free to stop by and sign up for as many weeks as you’d like!

For the month of December, we are collecting canned soup and chili, grocery bags, and empty egg cartons for the Community Cupboard. Please place donations in the wire basket in the foyer.

For more information and a complete monthly calendar, contact the church office.

**P: Silence**

Let us take a moment of silence to quiet our hearts and minds and prepare for worship.

**AM: Please turn to hymn 242**

Please stand as you are willing and able.

**Gathering Song:*Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn* (ELW 242)**

**P: Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever.

**Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

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

Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.**

**Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

**P: Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.

**Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**Children's Chat**

**P: Word**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**Lector: First Reading:** Micah 5:2-5a

### 2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5a and he shall be the one of peace.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**AM: Psalmody:** Luke 1:46b-55

46b My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, 47 my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 **for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed:**

49 you, the Almighty, have done great things for me and holy is your name.

50 **You have mercy on those who fear you, from generation to generation.**

51 You have shown strength with your arm and scattered the proud in their conceit,

52 **casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.**

53 You have filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

54 **You have come to the aid of your servant Israel, to remember the promise of mercy,**

55 the promise made to our forebears, to Abraham and his children forever.

Amen.

**Lector: Second Reading:** Hebrews 10:5-10

5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’ (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).” 8 When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. 10 And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Word of God, word of life.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel Acclamation (ELW p. 151)**

**Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.**

***Please stand for the gospel***

**P: Gospel:** Luke 1:39-45

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Sermon**

**AM: Please turn to hymn 267**

Please stand as you are willing and able.

**Hymn of the Day:*Joy to the World* (ELW 267)**

**AM: Apostle's Creed**

We continue as we confess our faith using the words of the Apostle's Creed.

**Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**Pastor and Assisting Minister: Prayers of Intercession**

As we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us, let us pray for all people and places that long for God’s presence.

God our uniter, increase communication and cooperation in our relationships with those of other traditions and religions. Root your church in the radical message of your incarnation, and enable us to pursue your justice in the world. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

God our creator, we praise you for the beauty that surrounds us. Awaken in us a renewed sense of care for the wildlife in our communities. Form us into faithful stewards of what you have made. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

God our sovereign, Mary proclaims a new way of life that lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. Nurture in local governments and municipalities a desire to care for all who are overlooked and ignored. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

God our beacon, as the northern hemisphere begins its slow turn toward more daylight, remind us that even in the deepest nights, you are there. Comfort the lonely and bereaved. Hold closely the frightened, anxious, depressed, and ill, especially Kiki; Lynn Bennett; Rudy Bosinger; Arnette Calkins; Vicki Crow; Eleanor Diaz; Reba Dyer; the family and friends of Ruth Ditsch; Yvonne Fields; Doris Hays; Leah Henroid; Sarge Hunter; Patricia Lee; Pat Loughboro; Patsy Loughboro; Donna McCain; Jean Miles; Sandra Miller; Thordis Moe; Carol Morris; Michael Myers; Esther Neumen; Marilyn Rieti; Dee Seel; Amy Sinclair; Joyce Stromberg; Diana Ward; the homebound; the emergency responders; and those grieving and anticipating surgery or tests. At this time, we also pray for those we name aloud or silently in our hearts. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

God our guide, shepherd the leadership of this congregation. Bless the council and staff in discerning future ministry and open their hearts to the voices of the community. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

God our life, you remember the promises you have made to your people. In gratitude for those who have died, we praise you for your faithfulness throughout history. Lord, in your mercy,

**receive our prayer.**

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**P: Peace**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**P: Offering**

This week we highlight the ministry of the Church Council, the governing body of Faith Lutheran. They assure that the constitution of our congregation is followed and updated when necessary. They also oversee staffing, general activities of the various committees, teams, special ministries and finances of the church.  They can approve or disapprove certain expenditures. It is an honor and privilege to be invited to be nominated and elected to serve on the council. Please consider helping in this necessary and vital ministry. A multitude of thanks to those who have and are currently serving on the Church Council. We are grateful for your generous gifts of time and dedicated service.

**AM: Offering Prayer**

Let us pray.

God of abundance, we bring before you the precious fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives. Teach us patience and hope as we care for all those in need until the coming of your Son, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

***Please feel free to either listen to our musical offering or sing along***

**Musical Offering: *In Christ Alone* (MICHAEL W. SMITH)**

**P: Great Thanksgiving**

**Dialogue (ELW p. 152)**

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 our thanks and praise.**

**P: Preface (ELW p. 153)**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer, through whom you will also make all things new in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, Holy, Holy (all sing) (ELW p. 153)**

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of pow’r and might: Heav’n and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

**P: Thanksgiving at the Table**

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life: Blessed are you for the birth of creation. Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light. Blessed are you for your promise to your people. Blessed are you in the prophets’ hopes and dreams. Blessed are you for Mary’s openness to your will. Blessed are you for your Son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

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 for 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 for the remembrance of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

With this bread and cup we remember your Word dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection. We look with hope for his coming.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

Holy God, we long for your Spirit. Come among us. Bless this meal. May your Word take flesh in us. Awaken your people. Fill us with your light. Bring the gift of peace on earth.

**Come, Holy Spirit.**

All praise and glory are yours, Holy One of Israel, Word of God incarnate, Power of the Most High, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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;**

**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.**

**P: INSTRUCTION FOR COMMUNION**

As you are comfortable, you are invited to come forward to receive communion. All of God’s children are welcome to Christ’s table.

Gather at the altar rail to receive the communion elements or if you wish to receive a blessing, please cross your arms over your chest. You may commune yourself once you’ve received the communion elements. Please commune the bread first, turn over the vessel and then carefully open the grape juice. A gluten-free option is available upon request. Please deposit empty cups in the provided baskets on your way back to your seat.

If you would like communion brought to you at your seat, indicate by raising your hand for the Assisting Minister to see and they will bring communion to you.

**P: Invitation to Communion**

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

**During Distribution: *Christ, Be Our Light* (ELW 715)**

***Eat This Bread: Jesus Christ, Bread of Life* (ELW 472)**

**P: Communion**

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

Amen.

**AM: Prayer after Communion**

Let us pray.

God for whom we wait, in this meal you give us a foretaste of that day when the hungry will be fed with good things. Send us forth to make known your deeds and to proclaim the greatness of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**P: Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

**Amen.**

**P: Please turn to hymn 290**

Please stand as you are willing and able.

**Sending Song:*Go Tell It on the Mountain* (ELW 290)**

**AM: Dismissal**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**AM: Invitation**

The Church Council Members invite guests and visitors to come and meet us in the narthex as you exit so that we can meet and welcome you. All are welcome to join us in the Fellowship Hall for cookies, coffee and conversation.

**THIS WEEK AT FAITH**

Tuesday, the 24th: Candlelight Worship begins at 5:00 with Pr. Ajer

Wednesday, the 25th: Christmas Day

Thursday, the 26th: Pr. Ken's Zoom Bible Study begins at 7:00. To join in, email Pr. Ken at hopegiver@aol.com

Friday, the 27th: Al-Anon meets at 10:30

Sunday, the 29th: Lessons & Carols service

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