

**We are using the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons.** Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together.

### **The Gathering**

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

**Hymn: LBW 71 – Angels we have heard on high**

**Dialogue p.127**

Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

I will hear what the Lord has to say - a voice that speaks for peace.

Peace for all people and his friends and those who turn to him in their hearts.

His help is near for those who fear him, and his glory will live in our land.

Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

### **The Apostles' 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.

**The Lord be with you** ~ and also with you.

Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **The Word**

The Old Testament lesson is from Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalms 147:12-20 is found on page 287

The New Testament lesson is from Ephesians 1: 3-14

Please rise for the gospel lesson.

Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.

Gospel: John 1: 1-9:10-18 Glory to you o Lord / Praise to you o Christ.

**Sermon ~ Rev. Bruce Thompson - Dean of the Ottawa Ministry Area**

John 1:1-18

I greet you in the name of Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. Amen.

First of all, let me say what a privilege it is to be with you, the members and friends of St. John's Lutheran Church in Arnprior, during a time of holidays for Pastor Norine and on this the Second Sunday of Christmas.

It is wonderful for Pastors and congregations to share resources during these challenging days. We need each other more than ever before – this is truly evident. So, thank you Pastor Norine and Randy Zimmerling for reaching out to the Dean of the Ottawa Ministry Area. Please know your ministry is in my prayers.

Now, for some thoughts on today's Gospel lesson.

There are rare opportunities throughout the church year when using the lessons from the Revised Common Lectionary that a preacher has a choice. This Sunday is one such case. Looking at the week ahead you will notice Wednesday is Epiphany. It is the twelfth day of Christmas – you know as twelve drummers drumming. It is at this point of the story of Jesus that we celebrate the visit of the Magi to Jesus yet more important the manifestation, the appearance, of God in Christ Jesus. This feast day is an important celebration in our lives and here was my struggle this week: use the appointed text for Tuesday and Epiphany or turn to the lessons of the Second Sunday of Christmas. Then it occurred to me, the Bishops across our

Church are writing sermons for us to use during the season of Epiphany. The decision was an easy one – leave Epiphany Sunday for one of them!

Then, before us this day is the reading from John; John's Christmas story – well kind of! I must say, I have always been intrigued by John's glorious symphony of words. They possess notes of promise and hope.

“The light shines in the darkness, and darkness did not overcome it.”

In this short sentence, we find this simple fact: light is stronger than darkness. Within this fact is a great promise – even when it seems otherwise – even when the headlines on CNN or our favourite news channel can make it seem otherwise – the light continues, yes continues to shine and the darkness has neither overcome. This captures the life of faith. We can live confidently that light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hate, and life, the abundant life is stronger than death. This is our faith in Christ.

John's words have an important message for us during this time of Covid-19. In the darkness of this pandemic, God's light continues to shine brightly: to guide us and protect us as we navigate our way through these challenging times.

Yet, there is something more we can discover of John's poetry. Let me try to explain.

Certainly not so much this year, but in years gone by; we celebrate before Christmas Day; office parties, gatherings with family and friends, shopping, pageants both at church and schools, over-indulging in so many ways and let's not forget all those presents. During the months of November and December, we are bombarded with Christmas carol after Christmas carol over the air waves. Then Boxing Day comes and for the most part; it is all gone. The heirloom ornaments are carefully taken from the majestic Tannenbaum and placed in the same ornament box our grandmothers used and put away for safe keeping until next year. The carols cease and we exchange our greeting of “Merry Christmas” to “Have a Happy New Year” in a blink of an eye.

So, here is my question: What happened to Christmas? Deep down, this is a question many of us ask ourselves each year.

You see, each year at just about this time, I wish and maybe you as well, Christmas would last a little longer. Let's face it, we give Easter seven weeks, Pentecost three times that much (sometimes more), and even Lent and Advent receive six and four Sundays respectively. Yet Christmas is only a short twelve days. And, truth be told, because New Year's Eve is a significant holiday in our lives, Christmas barely gets a week of our attention before it is lost in the making of resolutions and wondering how we are going to pay for those Christmas bills and all the rest. But these verses from John remind us that Christmas isn't just a season, it's a way of life. Christmas isn't over when we reach Epiphany, Christmas begins once again. While the Christmas season may pass through time, the hope and life it promises is just getting started.

Christmas reminds us that God decided to become one of us, to share our mortal life that we might enjoy God's eternal life. This is not merely a season or a celebration; it is God's promise which came to us, which requires our active participation every day of the year. Our lives matter to God. And here is the thing, there are no worries too small, no challenges too great, that God is not ready to journey along side of us. And that is good news!

My Friends in Christ. I don't know about you, but I have stopped making New Year's resolutions. Instead, I look at my life and try to live it better. May I suggest that on this the last Sunday of Christmas and the first Sunday of the New Year; we emulate God's activity to bring grace, mercy and love to those of the world in need; so that the light might continue shining – even in the darkness – even in this pandemic.

Christmas is just getting started for you and I who confess Jesus as God who has become flesh. Christmas for us is not over when we place the tree at the curb – it is only the beginning. May we be the light to a world that God loves so deeply.

Amen.

**Hymn: LBW 42 – Of the Father's love begotten**

### **Our Response**

#### **OFFERING PRAYER**

Gracious God,  
you came to us as one unknown,  
bringing joy and salvation to the earth.  
Nourish us at your banquet table,  
that with all who welcome your birth  
we may proclaim your peace,  
revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

**Amen.**

#### **Prayers of the People**

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.*

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*). 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.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith (*especially*). 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.

**The peace of Christ be with you always . . . . . and also with you.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The 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;  
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.

**Hymn: LBW 50 – Angels, from the Realms of Glory**

**Benediction**

The Lord bless you and keep you,

The Lord's make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,

The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

**Dismissal** Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.

**Thanks be to God.**