

Christmas Worship
December 24, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

Merry Christmas and welcome to Cross of Glory Lutheran Church! We're glad you're with us. As we prepare to worship together, you are invited to have a candle present with you, which we will light at the end of the service when we sing Silent Night. We are also celebrating Holy Communion together, so please gather bread (or a cracker) and wine (or juice). Whatever table you find yourself at today, know that God is present with you, and through this meal, we are present with one another. Come and be fed.

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Here, in winter's deep night, we gather to share the light of Christ, a light that shines in the darkness.

All: We gather together in the wonder of this night.

Like the shepherds, we come to the stable, uncertain of what we have heard and seen,

Longing to hear a word of peace.

Like the wise ones, we have journeys to make, gifts to offer, and hope in our hearts,

Longing to see that you are among us.

Like the angels, we have come to sing of this good news of great joy.

Longing to share the news of joy with the world.

Come, let us gather, let us hear and see and sing, let us share the good news of the Lord who is come.

Amen!

MUSIC #267 Joy to the World verses 1, 2 and 4

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| <p>1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.</p> | <p>2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.</p> |
| <p>4 He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.</p> | |

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

On this silent night when we gather to celebrate the birth of Emmanuel, we confess that we have too often made much noise that drowns out the melody of God's redeeming love. On this silent night, we confess our sins:

Loving God, **we confess that we have sinned against you and our neighbors. We have rejected your invitation to life. We have failed to live in your love. We have turned away**

from the lowly and downtrodden in whom you dwell. 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 great joy: God forgives us all our sins, not through our own efforts, but through † Jesus Christ, who is born to all people. Rejoice in this amazing gift of grace. **Amen.**

Thanks be to God!

MUSIC #283 O Come, All Ye Faithful verses 1, 2 and 3

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| <p>1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him,
born the king of angels:</p> | <p>Refrain O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!</p> |
| <p>2 The highest, most holy,
light of light eternal,
born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;
Son of the Father
now in flesh appearing! Refrain</p> | <p>3 Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
in the highest: Refrain</p> |

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES

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

MUSIC #270 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing verses 1 and 3

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| <p>1 Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king;
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all you nations, rise;
join the triumph of the skies;
with angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"</p> | <p>Refrain Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king!"</p> |
| <p>3 Hail the heav'n-born Prince of peace!
Hail the Sun of righteousness!</p> | |

Light and life to all he brings,
ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise each child of earth,
born to give us second birth. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. And also with you.

Let us pray . . . **God Emmanuel, you come to dwell among us. Be our light in the midst of darkness, be our life in the midst of death, and be our hope in the midst of despair; in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who is born to us. Amen.**

FIRST READING: Isaiah 9:2-9

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

⁸ The Lord sent a word against Jacob,
and it fell on Israel;

⁹ and all the people knew it—
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—
but in pride and arrogance of heart they said:
The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

MUSIC #296 What Child is This?

1 What child is this, who, laid to rest,
 on Mary's lap is sleeping?
 Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
 while shepherds watch are keeping?
 This, this is Christ the king,
 whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 haste, haste to bring him laud,
 the babe, the son of Mary!

Verses 1 and 3

3 So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
 come, peasant, king, to own him.
 The King of kings salvation brings;
 let loving hearts enthrone him.
 Raise, raise the song on high,
 the virgin sings her lullaby;
 joy, joy, for Christ is born,
 the babe, the son of Mary!

SECOND READING: Luke 2:1-14, 15-20

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.

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!"

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. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

MUSIC #276 Infant Holy, Infant Lowly verses 1 and 2

1 Infant holy, infant lowly,
 for his bed a cattle stall;
 oxen lowing, little knowing
 Christ the child is Lord of all.
 Swiftly winging, angels singing,
 bells are ringing, tidings bringing:
 Christ the child is Lord of all!
 Christ the child is Lord of all!

2 Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
 vigil till the morning new
 saw the glory, heard the story,
 tidings of a gospel true.
 Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
 praises voicing, greet the morrow:
 Christ the child was born for you!
 Christ the child was born for you!

SERMON

Pastor Ali Tranvik

Beyond all the sights of Christmas, the smells of Christmas, the tastes of Christmas, it is the *sounds* of Christmas that I cherish most. I love Christmas music, and I love coming to church to hear it. I love the handbells, the organ, the harmony of the choir. I love the pomp and circumstance around the Hallelujah Chorus, and the quiet serenity of Silent Night.

There are many reasons why this Christmas is difficult. Because of Covid-19, we find ourselves worshipping from our living rooms, isolated from our friends and family, communing apart, but I'm really grieving singing alone. And I've heard this same thing from many of you in conversations throughout the past couple of weeks. Especially when it comes to Silent Night, the beloved song we sing together at the end of worship when the sanctuary would get dark and we'd slowly illuminate it with candles. **How can we sing Silent Night alone at home?**

This year, as I reread the familiar words of the Christmas story from Luke, it struck me that this story perhaps sounds more like our grief-filled, solitary Silent Night than it does the voluminous and harmonious Hallelujah Chorus. Yes, we've got the choir angels singing in their triumphant "gloooooorias" in the skies above, but what are the sounds of the earth below?

Our story begins with the sound of footsteps. The very-pregnant Mary and Joseph are making their way from Nazareth to Galilee, an arduous 90-mile trek to Joseph's hometown, where they are to be registered as part of an empire-wide census. It was the time, Luke tells us, of Emperor Caesar Augustus, a time referred to as the *pax Romana*, meaning "Roman peace." But the majority of the people subjected to imperial Rome experienced something other than peace. One Roman senator who served in Rome's provinces wrote "they make a desolation and call it peace" (Powery). The empire's "peace" was forged by violence. Its "prosperity" was achieved by way of exploitation. The "health" of the empire's elite relied on the hunger and sickness of the empire's masses. For the majority of people, then, the time of Jesus' birth was a time of despair, darkness, and death—a time not unlike our own.

It was a world that needed a Savior—a world not unlike our own. But this Savior we read about in Luke didn't quite fit the Savior job description particularly well. He was not born of the powerful, but of the lowly. He didn't come dressed in a superhero cape, but in a baby's swaddling cloth. He didn't rescue us from despair, but did something even more remarkable: he came to *dwell* with us in it.

As John's Gospel describes it, "the Word became flesh and dwelled among us" (1:14). The Greek verb "dwelled" literally means "to set up camp," "to tent," or "to tabernacle." One translation puts it particularly memorably: "The Word became flesh and *moved into the neighborhood*" (The Message).

We see Jesus dwelling in places of despair throughout his whole life. He first dwelled in the darkness of the womb of Mary, who along with bearing Jesus, bore the social stigma of being an unwed, pregnant teenager. When it was time for him to be born, Jesus dwelled not in the well-lit inns and shiny hotels of town—there was no room there—but in the dimness of an off-the-beaten-path barn. Just days later, Jesus dwelled in the desert, covered in the cloak of the night, as the holy family fled to Egypt to escape the slaughter of babies decreed by King Herod when he learned there may be a threat to his power. Throughout his whole life, we continue to find Jesus dwelling in the places seen as dark—in the shadow of the empire, in the wilderness, in the cracks and corners, on a cross, in a tomb.

Jesus' presence among us does not rid the world of darkness, or death, or despair, but it does tell us that there's something else. Let me say that again: Jesus' presence among us does not rid the world of darkness, death, or despair, but it does tell us that there's *something else*. John calls this "something else" light: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it," John writes (1:5). He does not say that the light shines *instead* of the darkness—it shines *in* the darkness. The light, in that sense, does not get rid of the darkness. The light does not overcome the darkness. *But* the light does make it so the darkness does not overcome us.

Darkness remains, but light pierces through. Death carries on, but life finds a way and makes its home among us. Despair continues—but make room—because hope has moved into the neighborhood.

Often times, these forces are portrayed as mutually exclusive. We live in a world that says it's either one thing or the other. You're either this or you're that. You either pass or you fail. You're either right or you're wrong. You either like lutefisk or you don't. You either cheer for the Vikings or the Packers. Or perhaps more seriously, you're either one of us or one of them. You're either rich or you're poor. You're either black or you're white. You're either Christian or you're not.

We do the same thing within our faith lives: there's either darkness or light, death or life, despair or hope. If you despair, the world tells us, you lack hope. Alternatively, if you're hopeful, you've diluted yourself into thinking that there is nothing to despair, that everything is OK.

Faith—particularly the Lutheran faith—undercuts this timeless "divide and conquer" strategy, one that Caesar of Jesus' day used, and one that the caesars of today continue to wield. But our faith rejects these binaries. Our faith is full of tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes. *Saint and sinner*, Lutherans often say. *Darkness and light*. *Death and life*. *Despair and hope*. We can't have one without the other.

Which is to say, the hope that is born to us in Jesus Christ is not some happily-ever-after kind of hope. It's not some hallmark movie optimism. It's honest. It tells the truth about death (including, this year, the 1.7 million—and counting—deaths caused by the Covid-19 pandemic). Hope doesn't tell us to deny our despair. To get over our grief. To dismiss our fears and anxieties. It doesn't ask us to "clean ourselves up" for its arrival. To leave behind our baggage or brokenness and replace it with some shinier, purer, more "put together" version of ourselves.

Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber says that the Christmas story reveals a God who comes to us just as we are, not as we wish we would be. A God who has entered our world as it actually is, and not as the world we often wish it would be." She says "God did not enter the world of our snow-blanketed, peace-on-earth, sugar cookie, suspended-reality of Christmas. God slipped into the vulnerability of skin and entered a world as violent and disturbing as our own." Which is to say "we've lost the plot if we use religion as the place where we escape from difficult realities instead of as the place where those difficult realities are given meaning." Where those difficult realities, we might say, are met with *something else*.

And as we see in Luke's Christmas story, it is precisely *in* those difficult realities where the something else is born. Light in the midst of darkness. Life in the midst of death. Hope in the midst of despair.

The late Pauli Murray—a writer, poet, labor organizer, civil rights activist, lawyer (rejected from UNC Law School because of her race, only to later attend Howard Law School, where she was the only woman), and the first black woman to become an ordained Episcopal priest—faced a lot in

the world that could have caused her to lose hope. Living within and fighting against the Jim Crow system, Pauli Murray intimately knew darkness, death, and despair. But Murray kept on singing. **“Hope,” she said, “is a song in a weary throat.”**

How will we sing, alone and at home, on this Christmas night? We will raise our weary, lonely, despairing, shaking, solitary voices and hope will be our song. Hope will sing in us, sing through us, sing for us.

And this song will continue long after we are done singing Silent Night. Because hope is not only the song in our weary throats that will sing in our living rooms tonight. Hope is a song that becomes the melody for our whole lives, a song that moves us into the neighborhood toward other weary singers. A song that calls us and carries us into the neighborhood *where Jesus dwells*. A song that does not just give us life, but invites us into life *together*—a life together where we find hope in the midst of despair.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.” How can we keep from singing? Amen!

Sources:

- Luke Powery, “Peace in the Age of Terror,” *sermon preached at Duke University Chapel*, Dec 13, 2015.
- Murray, Pauli. “Verse 8” in *Dark Testament and Other Poems* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 2018).
- Nadia Bolz-Weber, “The Slaughter of the Innocents of Sandy Hook,” *Patheos*, Dec 12, 2014.
- Thurman, Howard. *The Luminous Darkness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

MUSIC #290 Go Tell it On the Mountain

Refrain

Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and ev'rywhere;
go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!

2 The shepherds feared and trembled
when, lo, above the earth
rang out the angel chorus
that hailed our Savior's birth. **Refrain**

verses 1, 2 and 3

1 While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
behold, throughout the heavens
there shone a holy light. **Refrain**

3 Down in a lonely manger
the humble Christ was born;
and God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn. **Refrain**

CONFESSION OF FAITH Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one

baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

Christ our light, **shine in the darkness.**

OFFERING

To make a Christmas offering, you can mail a check to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center MN 55426) or click the giving link found at the bottom of our homepage at www.crossofglory.us. Thanks for so generously supporting the mission and ministry of Cross of Glory!

SPECIAL MUSIC

Mary Did You Know?

Mark Trease

OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God, you have given us the gift of new life, the gift of community, and these gifts of the earth that become the meal of your grace. Move in our hearts, that we might use your gifts to bring hope and joy to the tables of our lives, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

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.**

We praise you and we bless you, holy and gracious God, source of life abundant...lifting our voices to magnify you as we sing:

SONG OF PRAISE *(tune: "Angels We Have Heard on High")*

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of hosts, all praise be given!
All your glory fills the earth,
all your power fills the heavens.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Blessed is the child who comes,
bringing love and light divine.
Blessed is the One who's here,
in the bread and in the wine.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

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 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.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together as one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray the prayer 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.

HOLY COMMUNION

The Word is revealed in a lowly manger, and in simple bread and wine. Come meet Christ in this meal.

The body of Christ is given for you. The blood of Christ is shed for you.

You are invited to partake in this holy meal at home with a form of bread and either wine or juice, trusting that God is present in it, and that it draws us together as one body, even while we are apart.

SPECIAL MUSIC **Away in a Manger**

Keith Williams and Rev. Ali Tranvik

COMMUNION PRAYER

God-with-us, you freely offer us the gift of grace and give us bread for the journey. Send us out into this world that you love, to extend the grace we've received and to share the bread we've been given, in the name of Jesus Christ, the bread of life. **Amen.**

CELEBRATION OF LIGHT

You are invited to dim the lights at your home and light a candle as we sing Silent Night. You may keep your candle lit through the end of the service (if you are watching on Zoom, please keep it lit until the recording ends and we gather as a group on Zoom).

One candle is but a flicker, but together--even across distance--our individual flames join together to reflect one light, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, who shines in the darkness.

MUSIC **#281** **Silent Night**

verses 1, 2 and 3

1 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.

2 Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

3 Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from your holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

BLESSING

Our candle reflects the star that led the magi, the angels who shone in the night sky, and the light of Christ who is come. Let your light shine as you go forth into the neighborhood, knowing that the presence of God † accompanies you, the peace of Christ dwells with you, and the love of the Holy Spirit never leaves you. **Amen.**

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. God is with you! **Amen**

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<p>Congregational Support as of 11/30/2020 Annual Budget: \$225,000.00 Year to Date Budgeted: \$204,741.67 Year to Date Received: \$206,347.29 Difference: \$1,605.62</p>
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WORSHIP LEADERSHIP

Lead Pastor: Rev. Ali Tranvik
Pianist, vocalist: Mark Trease
Vocalist, choir director: Keith Williams
[Virtual] Lectors: Abby Kelley, Chad Bailey
Acolyte: Earl Simons, Dawn Bailey
Tech Director: Ryan Bailey
Ministers: The people of Cross of Glory

If you're watching on Zoom at 4 pm, you're invited to join the Cross of Glory community for a brief time of fellowship following today's service.