

Messiah Lutheran Church

GATHER, EMPOWER, SERVE



✠ Holy Communion ✠

Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2025



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

At the heart of our Advent preparation stands John the Baptist, who calls us to repent and make a new beginning. As the darkness increases we turn toward the approaching light of Christ. For Christians he is the root of Jesse, the righteous judge who welcomes all, especially the poor and meek of the earth. We wait with hope for that day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and there will be no more hurt or destruction. From the Lord's table we are sent in the spirit of John the Baptist to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near.

GATHERING

PRELUDE

Stand

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose home is heaven and earth,
whose salvation is sure.

C: Amen.

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

Kneel

P: Long-expected God,

C: we confess that we look to ourselves
for the peace and security only you can provide.
We reach for swords and spears,
reluctant to release our grip on the ways of war.
We become impatient while waiting
and weary of keeping awake.
Free us from self-reliance,
and teach us to live in harmony with our neighbors.
Increase our trust in God's timing,
and awaken us to your advent among us,
that we may abound in the hope you have promised.
Amen.

P: God judges us not as we deserve,
but according to God's own righteousness.
† You are freed and forgiven,
saved by grace,
and ready to welcome the Savior.

C: Amen.

Stand

GATHERING HYMN

Lo! He Comes with Clouds DescendingLBW 27

1 Lo! He comes with clouds de - scend - ing,
2 Ev - 'ry eye shall now be - hold him
3 Those dear to - kens of his pas - sion
4 Yea, a - men, let all a - dore thee,

once for fa - vored sin - ners slain;
robed in glo - rious maj - es - ty;
still his daz - zling bod - y bears,
high on thine e - ter - nal throne;

thou - sand thou - sand saints at - tend - ing
those who set at nought and sold him,
cause of end - less ex - ul - ta - tion
Sav - ior, take the pow'r and glo - ry,

swell the tri - umph of his train:
pierced and nailed him to wor - ship
claim his ran - somed as the ship - ers.
the king - dom as thine own.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia,
deep - ly wail - ing, deep - ly wail - ing,
With what rap - ture, with what rap - ture,
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia,

al - le - lu - ia! Christ the Lord re - turns to reign.
deep - ly wail - ing, shall their true Mes - si - ah see.
with what rap - ture gaze we on those glo - rious scars!
al - le - lu - ia! Thou shalt reign, and thou a - lone!

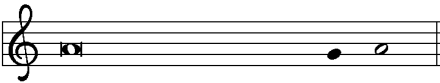
Text: Charles Wesley, 1707–1788, alt.
Music: HELMSLEY, Thomas Olivers, 1725–1799

APOSTOLIC GREETING

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

C: And also with you.

KYRIE



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from a-bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



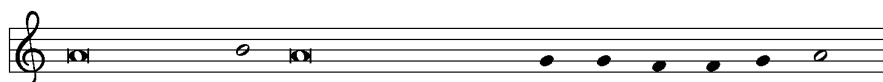
For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor-ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord.

Lord have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de-fend us, gra-cious Lord. A - men.

PRAYER OF THE DAY**P:** Let us pray.

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen*Sit***LIGHTING OF THE WREATH**

A We praise you, O God, for this evergreen crown
that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent.
As we light the first candle on this wreath,
rouse us from sleep, that we may be ready to greet our Lord
when he comes with all the saints and angels.
Enlighten us with your grace,
and prepare our hearts to welcome him with joy.
Grant this through Christ our Lord,
whose coming is certain and whose day draws near.

C: Amen**ADVENT CHORAL VERSE**

As the second candle is lit, the choir sings the verse.

WORD**FIRST READING: Isaiah 11:1-10**

Isaiah describes the coming of a future, ideal ruler who will renew David's royal line (the stump of Jesse). Gifted by the spirit of God, this ruler will reign with perfect justice. Enmity and danger will be restored to harmony and peaceful coexistence.

A: A Reading from Isaiah:

- ¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- ² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
- ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,

- ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor

and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

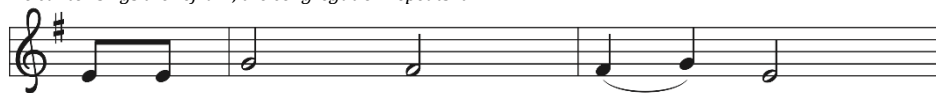
⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the
nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

A: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

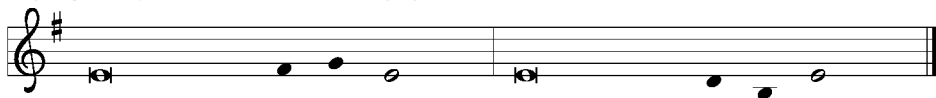


PSALM: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19*The cantor sings the refrain; the congregation repeats it.*

May the righ - teous flour - ish;



let there be an a - bun - dance of peace.

Sung responsively between the cantor and congregation.

- ¹ Give the king your jus - tice, O God,
and your righteousness to | the king's son;
- ² **that he may rule your | people righteously
and the | poor with justice;**
- ³ that the mountains may bring prosperity | to the people,
and the | hills, in righteousness.
- ⁴ **Let him defend the needy a - | mong the people,
rescue the poor, and crush | the oppressor. R**
- ⁵ May he live as long as the sun and | moon endure,
from one generation | to another.
- ⁶ **Let him come down like rain upon | the mown field,
like showers that wa - | ter the earth.**
- ⁷ In his time may the | righteous flourish;
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall | be no more.
- ¹⁸ **Blessed are you, LORD God, the | God of Israel;
you alone do | wondrous deeds!**
- ¹⁹ And blessed be your glorious | name forever,
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. A - | men. Amen. **R**

SECOND READING: Romans 15:4-13*God's promise to include Gentiles within the circle of God's blessed people has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christians live out their unity by welcoming and encouraging each other just as Christ has welcomed them into God's family.***[A]:** A Reading from Romans:

- ⁴ Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,
so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we
might have hope. ⁵ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ

Jesus, ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors ⁹ and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰ and again he says,

“Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹ and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹² and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the gentiles;
in him the gentiles shall hope.”

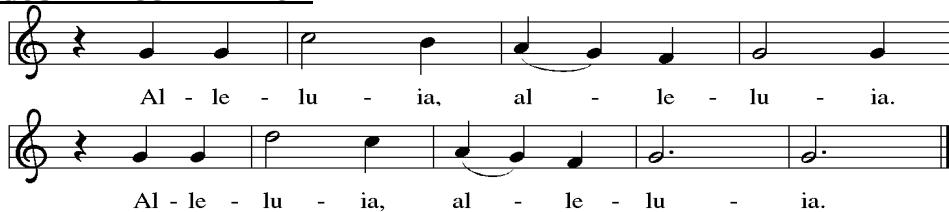
¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Stand

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



CANTOR: Prepare the way | of the Lord. * All flesh shall see the salva- | tion
of God.

C: Repeat the Alleluias

GOSPEL: Matthew 3:1-12

Just before Jesus begins his public ministry, John the Baptist appears, calling people to mend their ways and speaking of a powerful one who is to come.

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the third chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3 This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ”

4 Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, 9 and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

P: The Gospel of the Lord

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sit
SERMON.....**Pastor John McNassor**

Stand

HYMN OF THE DAY

On Jordan’s Banks the Baptist’s Cry.....LBW 36



1 On Jor - dan's banks the Bap - tist's cry an - nounc - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin; make straight the
3 We hail you as our Sav - ior, Lord, our ref - uge
4 Stretch forth your hand, our health re - store, and make us
5 All praise to you, e - ter - nal Son, whose ad - vent

that the Lord is nigh; a - wake and hear - ken,
way for God with - in, and let us all our
and our great re - ward; with - out your grace we
rise to fall no more; oh, let your face up -
has our free - dom won, whom with the Fa - ther

for he brings glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare for Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way like flow'rs that with - er and de - cay.
on us shine and fill the world with love di - vine.
we a - dore, and Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er - more.

Text: Charles Coffin, 1676–1749; tr. composite
Music: PUER NOBIS, European tune, adapt. Michael Praetorius, 1571–1621

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;

by the power of the Holy Spirit

**he became incarnate from the virgin Mary,
and was made man.**

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.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He 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 INTERCESSION

A brief silence is held after the introduction.

P: In our waiting and watching, we come to you in prayer, O God, trusting
your promise to renew the church, the nations, and the whole creation.

After each petition:

P: God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

The prayers conclude:

P: Draw near to us, O God, as we commend all for whom we pray, trusting
in your mercy through Jesus Christ, Emmanuel.

C: Amen

PEACE

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

The pastor and congregation greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Peace be with you. **R:** Peace be with you.

Sit

MEAL

OFFERING

The Offering is received as the Lord's table is prepared.

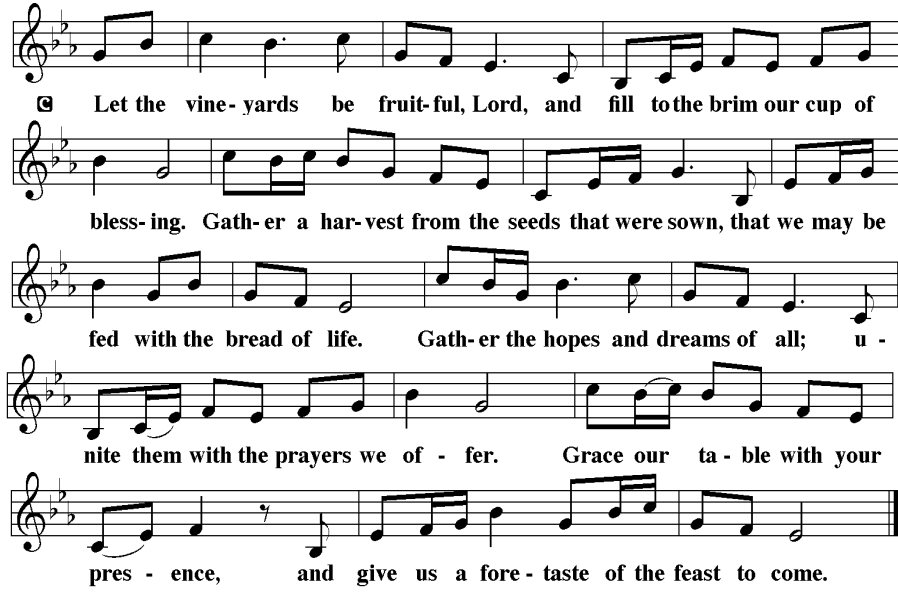
ANTHEM

In the Silence, Wondrous LoveRuth Elaine Schram

Stand

OFFERTORY

As the gifts are presented, the Offertory is sung



Let the vine- yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be
fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -
nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

OFFERING PRAYER

- A**: Let us pray:
- C**: Nourishing God,
you are water in the wilderness and streams in the desert.
Through this meal, satisfy our parched places,
that we may rejoice and be for the world
signs of your kingdom come.
- C**: Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. And al - so 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.

PREFACE

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:

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might,

heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.

Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P: 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.

P: Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

C: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

P: 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.

C: Come, Lord Jesus.

P: 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.

C Come, Holy Spirit.

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

C Amen

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.

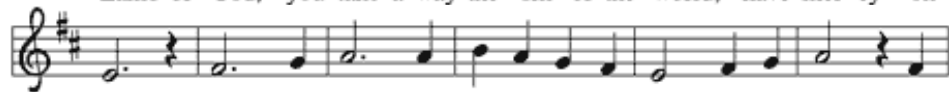
INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P: Here is life. God is with us.
Come, receive what God has promised.


C: Thanks be to God.



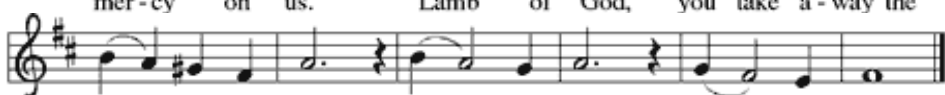
Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the



sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

Sit

COMMUNION

All baptized believers are invited to this holy meal. Those not communing are invited for a blessing. Please follow the instructions of the ushers to gather at the altar table.

As the ministers give the bread and wine, they say these words to each communicant:

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

The communicant may say: Amen

COMMUNION HYMN *All Earth Is Hopeful*




To - da la tie - rra es - pe - ra, al Sal - va - dor

1 All earth is hope - ful, the Sav - ior comes at last!

2 Peo - ple of Is - rael, you heard the proph - et tell:

3 Moun - tains and val - leys will have to be pre - pared;

4 We first saw Je - sus a ba - by in a crib.




yel sur - co - a - bier - to, la ob - ra del Se - ñor; es el

Fur - rows lie o - pen for God's cre - a - tive task: this, the

"A vir - gin moth - er will bear Em - man - u - el"; she con -

new high - ways o - pened, new pro - to - cols de - clared. Al - most

This same Lord Je - sus to - day has come to live in our




mun - do que lu - cha por la li - ber - tad, re -

la - bor of peo - ple who strug - gle to see how

ceived him, "God our broth - er, whose birth re -

here! God is near - ing, in beau - ty and grace! All

world; he is pres - ent, in neigh - bors we see our



cla - ma jus - ti - cia y bus - ca la ver - dad. dar - nos li - ber - tad.
God's truth and jus - tice set ev - 'ry - bod - y free.
stores hope and cour - age to chil - dren of this earth.
clear ev - 'ry gate - way, in haste, come out in haste!
Je - sus is with us, and ev - er sets us free.

- 2 *Dice el profeta al pueblo de Israel:*
“De madre virgen ya viene Emmanuel,”
será “Dios con nosotros,” hermano será,
con él la esperanza al mundo volverá.

3 *Montes y valles habrá que preparar;*
nuevos caminos tenemos que trazar.
Él está ya muy cerca, venidlo a encontrar,
y todas las puertas abrid de par en par.
- 4 *En una cueva Jesús apareció,*
pero en el mundo está presente hoy.
Vive en nuestros hermanos, con ellos está;
y vuelve de nuevo a darnos libertad.

Text: Alberto Taulé, b. 1932; tr. Madeleine Forell Marshall, b. 1946
Music: TODA LA TIERRA, Alberto Taulé
Spanish text and tune © 1993 and English text © 1995 Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, admin. OCP Publications, 5536 NE Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213.

Stand

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

A: Let us pray.
God our host,
at this table you have fed us with joy and gladness.
Send us forth, eager to share the feast,
welcome the stranger,
and bear good fruit in the name of Jesus.

C: Amen

SENDING

BLESSING

P: May God who comes among us,
Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit,
grant you patience in waiting, peace in the darkness,
and good news to share today and always.

C: Amen

SENDING HYMN***Comfort, Comfort Now My People* LBW 29**

1 "Com - fort, com - fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
 2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
 3 Straight shall be what long was crook-ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain!



Com-fort those who sit in dark-ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.
 call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the king-dom now is here.
 Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits his ho - ly reign!



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!
 Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way!
 For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for - ev - er.
 Let the val - leys rise to meet him, and the hills bow down to greet him!
 and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

Text: Johann G. Olearius, 1611–1684; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1829–1878, alt.

Music: FREU DICH SEHR, *Trente quatre psaumes de David*, Geneva, 1551

DISMISSAL

A: Go in peace. Keep awake.

C: Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

SERVICE ASSISTANTS

Ushers: Charles Luppert, Larry and Donna Britton, Rhonda Koch, Sylvia McCarty, Larry Solomon; **Lay Assistant:** Susan Bryan; **Comm. Assist.:** Candy Watkins; **Acolyte:** Doriann Morris; **Altar Guild:** Rita Strickler, Carol Winter
Greeters/Presenters: Fred and Meg Harbaugh
Cantor: Bob Schweppenheiser; **Flower Delivery:** Paul Weaver

IN BLESSED MEMORY

The Altar Flowers are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of loved ones.

The Basket of Flowers is given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of Sam Hessert, with love Carol, Bill, Elise, Sharon and Pam.

The Bud Vase is given to the Glory of God and in honor of Autumn Rundio's 7th birthday, with love from Grammy and Pappy Bausinger.

The Sanctuary Lamp burns in memory of my father Sam Hessert, with love Pam.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to Messiah Church! It is our joy to have you worship with us. If you are visiting, please make yourself known and leave your name & information with a congregational member. *We hope to see you again.*

This morning we welcome Pastor John McMassor, John is an adjunct Professor in the religion department at Lycoming college. John was born and raised in Denver, Colorado, graduating with a BA from Rockmont College (Colorado Christian University) in 1977. He earned a M.Div. from Central Baptist Theological Seminary in 1986 and served as a pastor for sixteen years before beginning graduate studies at Drew University in 2002. He received a M. Phil. in 2006, and a Doctorate (Ph.D.) in 2009. His dissertation was on the relationship of philosophy and theology in the work of Karl Barth and Jean-Luc Marion. John and his wife Laura share the joy of three daughters, Rachel McNassor, Elizabeth McNassor Harris, and Christine McNassor, and one granddaughter, Juliet, daughter of Elizabeth and husband Andrew. He is currently a devoted member of St. Luke Lutheran Church, Williamsport, Pa.

Join us after worship today for our Annual Christmas dinner.

Poinsettia orders are due tomorrow, December 8.

Sunday, December 21 immediately following worship we will be decorating the church. **VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED!** Please sign-up on the sheet in the Narthex. **Many hands make quick work. Please share your time and talent.**

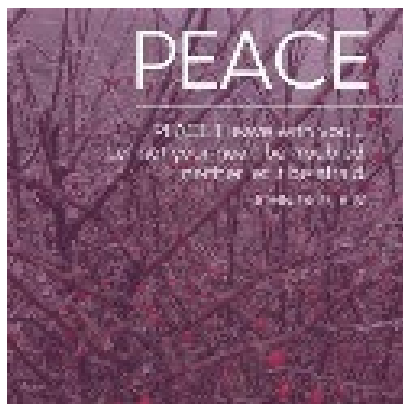
The congregation council members will be installed Sunday, December 28, during worship. The members of council for 2026 are: Newly elected to council is Lauren Russell. Re-elected members are Jimmy Gardner and Rhonda Koch. Current members are Anita Bair, Alfred “Al” Cole, Jody Fullmer, Craig Kropp, Joanie Jackson, Sylvia McCarty and Ronald “Ron” Yeagle.

For all the saints who can join us in singing praise to God:

The next Saints in Song Sunday will be the fourth Sunday in Advent, December 21. The anthem is easy to learn. Rehearsal will be after church on Sunday, December 14 and again on December 21 before worship at 8:45. If you like to sing, we hope you will join us.

White Gifts Ministry - The Angel Trees are up! Each year, we provide Christmas gifts to families in need who are members of our congregation or whose names we get from the South Williamsport Area School District. Requested items are listed on angel tags which adorn the trees in the narthex. If you’d like to help, please take as many tags as you’d like from the tree, purchase the needed item, and ***wrap the gift in white paper.*** Gifts should be brought in and placed in the blue bin in the Chapel alcove by December 14. Cash donations will also be accepted.

Christmas Food Baskets: Please see the Messenger for a list of food items we are collecting. Cash donations will also be accepted. All donations are needed no later than December 14. **Recipients** are now being identified. If you know someone who could benefit from receiving a Christmas basket, ***please contact the church office by Friday, December 5.*** Baskets will be ready for pick-up Saturday, December 20.



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Turning and Mending (Again)

Being on the receiving end of sharp language can be heartbreaking. Indeed, words can wound—or worse. John the Baptizer, a key figure in our Advent narratives, finds himself at odds with other religious leaders of the time, and uses the tool he has (language) to call attention to their broken relationship. It's unclear what exactly led to this prickly, pointed exchange between John and the Pharisees and Sadducees, but there is a growing chasm between them.

“Prepare the way of the Lord,” John cries out in the wilderness, echoing the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah cried out in his own day centuries prior, testifying to God’s desire to mend the world (though the world seemed to be at an end). Perhaps John repeats Isaiah’s plea in order to remind the people of his day of God’s intent for all things: for the world to be mended, healed, made right; for the reign of heaven to be revealed on earth, here and now. Often, however, mending brokenness requires honesty first about the wounds that have been inflicted and the death that has been wrought. With John’s painful honesty, his strained relationship with other leaders of his time takes a step toward healing, toward justice, so that a new beginning might take hold. This is a starting point, as difficult as it may be.

Every Advent, as the church year begins again, we hear the familiar call: *Repent. Turn back to God.* Repentance is no easy thing, but thankfully, God draws us back to this imperative, year after year, day after day, hour after hour. With infinite mercy, once again God invites us to turn toward healing, toward justice, toward the righting of the world, one relationship at a time.

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