

St. Paul Lutheran Church
of Stillwater, Minnesota

December 21, 2025

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Your presence at worship is important to God and to us! Whether you are a first-time visitor, frequent participant, neighbor, member, or friend, please take a moment as you prepare for worship to share some information on the "Welcome to Worship" card included with your bulletin. Place it in the offering plate at the time the offering is received.

Today Isaiah prophesies that a young woman will bear a son and name him Emmanuel. The gospel is Matthew's account of the annunciation and birth of the one named Emmanuel, God-with-us.

During these final days of Advent we pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," a beloved hymn based on the O Antiphons, ancient prayers appointed for the seven days preceding Christmas. On this final Sunday of Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one born to save us from the power of sin and death

Many of our worship materials are taken from the red Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW). Page numbers are located in the front half of the book, and hymn numbers are located in the back half of the book.

The assembly **speaks** or **sings** the bold responses.

GATHERING

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

Prelude

Advent Invocation

The time is coming.

Indeed, it is almost here.

Turn toward us, be born in our hearts;

give us life, that we may call upon your name.

Restore us, God of hosts.

Let your face shine upon us, Emmanuel.

Let us pray . . .

Shepherd of Israel,

you are the gift we await.

You are the light of the world that shines in the darkness.

Make our homes ready for your arrival,

confident that you are always with us—Emmanuel.

With hope, peace, joy, and love we pray.

Amen.

Gathering Song

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
and bless the homes your people dwell.
Melt ev'ry weapon forged for war.
Bring peace on earth forever more.

Rejoice, rejoice! Take heart, don't fear,
God's chosen One, is drawing near.

O Come, Strong Branch of Jes-se free
your own from Satan's tyr-anny.
Forge justice for the poor and meek,
Grant safety for the young and weak.

O come now, Living Stream- of Grace,
bring new life to desert-ed place;
Speak comfort to each fear-ful heart:
"Be strong! Fear not, I shan't depart."

O come, O Dayspring, come- and cheer
our spirits by your ad-vent here.
Love stir within the womb of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

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.



Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

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

First Reading

Pew Bible: Old Testament Page 636

Isaiah 7:10-16

An Israelite and Aramean military coalition presented a serious threat to King Ahaz of Judah. In response, Ahaz decided to secure his throne and kingdom by seeking Assyrian help. Isaiah reminds Ahaz that human attempts to establish security will fail. The prophet gives the sign that is the only source of true safety: Immanuel, God is with us!

At the conclusion:

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 80 (paraphrase)

**O Shepherd, hear and lead your flock,
as lambs we crave your care;
what strength on earth approaches yours,
what mercies can compare?**

**Restore, O God, your favor, the radiance of your face
to lighten and reveal the gift of your redeeming grace.**

**Our selfish prayers deserve God's wrath,
our pride, a sudden burst;
we have but stones to serve as bread,
and tears to quell our thirst.**

**Restore, O God Almighty, the radiance of your face
to lighten and reveal the gift of your redeeming grace.**

**God's lineage, like a vine, once spread
and flourished in the land;
but now the vineyard fails, the fruit lies withered in the
sand**

**Restore, Lord God Almighty, the radiance of your face
to lighten and reveal the gift of your redeeming grace.**

Second Reading

Pew Bible: New Testament Page 152

Romans 1:1-7

Most of the Christians in Rome do not know Paul. In this letter's opening he introduces himself as an apostle divinely appointed to spread God's gospel. The gospel's content is the promised coming of Christ, and Paul's mission is to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations, including his Roman audience.

At the conclusion:

Word of God, word of life.

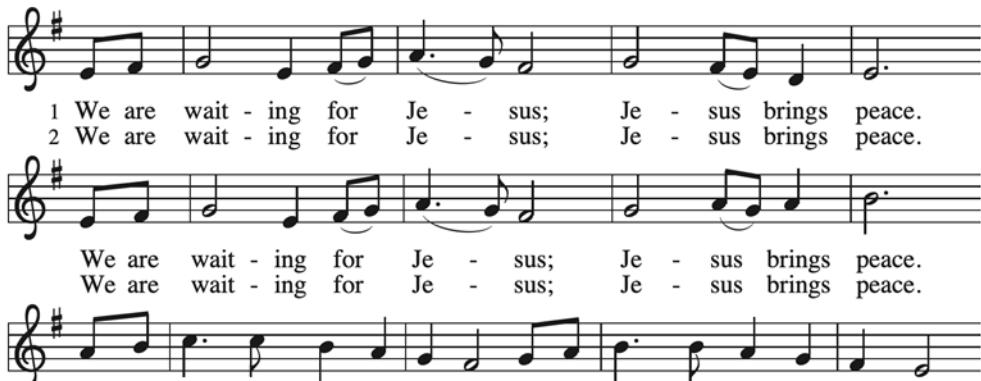
Thanks be to God.

Children's and Outreach Message

Jenny Brelje

Gospel Acclamation

"We Are Waiting for Jesus"



1 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
2 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.

We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.

Sun of jus - tice, shine up - on us; we are trust - ing in your prom - ise.
Lov-ing Shep - herd, walk be - side us; stir our hearts, and gent - ly guide us.



Gospel Reading

Pew Bible: New Testament Page 1

Matthew 1:18-25

Matthew's story of Jesus' birth focuses on the role of Joseph, who adopts the divinely-begotten child into the family of David and obediently gives him the name Jesus, which means "God saves."

The gospel is introduced:

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

At the conclusion:

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Pastor Nathan Baker-Trinity

Silence for reflection follows the sermon.

Hymn of the Day

ELW Hymn 258

"Unexpected and Mysterious"



Prayers of Intercession

After each prayer:

God of grace,

hear our prayer.

At the conclusion:

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

Amen.

Peace

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

All are invited to greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace.

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Offering

"A Christmas Suite"

Our offering is a collection of money for the church's mission, including the care of those in need, as a sign of the giving of our whole selves in grateful response for all God's gifts. Your offering and "Welcome to Worship" card may be placed in the offering plate. The QR code on the right may be used if you wish to give electronically.



Offering Prayer

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.

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.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy . . .

. . . we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, oh most ho - ly, God of pow'r and God of might!



Heav'n and earth are full of glo - ry! Sing Ho-san - na - to the heights!



Bless - ed be the one who comes now! Hail Ho-san-na! Prince of Peace!

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 the next page.)
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.**



O Lamb of God you take - a - way; you take a-way the
sin - of the world. Have mer-cy on us now - we pray; have mer-cy on us
now - and al-ways. Re - joice! Re-joice! O Lamb - of God, grant
us your peace, oh grant - - us peace.



Communion

We celebrate at an open communion table. All who hear our Lord's invitation are welcome to participate. Receive the bread first with an open hand and eat immediately, followed by the juice (white) or wine (red). Gluten-free bread is available at the front end of the center aisle. Please indicate to an usher if you need to receive communion from your pew. Children who have received age-appropriate instruction are welcome to commune. If you prefer instead to receive a blessing, please indicate by crossing your arms over your shoulders.

When giving the bread and cup, the communion ministers say:

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

and each person may respond:

Amen.



Communion Hymn

ELW Hymn 299

“Cold December Flies Away”

Prayer After Communion

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.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Announcements

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 \ddagger give you peace.

Amen.

Sending Song

ELW Hymn 248

"People, Look East"

Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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DAILY PRAYER

Prayer for Families



Triune God, whose will it is that humans live in community, bless family life everywhere and fill all homes with respect, joy, laughter, and prayer. Strengthen the commitment of husbands and wives to one another, that they may mirror your covenant faithfulness; pour out your Spirit on parents, that through them their children may taste your unconditional love; and empower all family members to live in your grace and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONNECTIONS WITH THE LITURGY

Forgiveness through Baptism



The prayer of the day, based on a seventh-century prayer in a collection known as the *Gelasian Sacramentary*, is one of the rare ancient liturgical prayers addressed to Christ. This week it is Christ's power that must be stirred up so that, freed from our sin, we can eagerly say yes to God's promises.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

Do not fear



Martin Luther's Small Catechism begins with a teaching on the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods." What does this mean? Luther says, "We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things." In the gospel today, Joseph is afraid to take Mary as his wife. But in the silence of his dream, God's holy voice speaks through an angel. Joseph's unholy fear of doing the right thing for Mary withers under his holy fear of God. Fearing, loving, and trusting God frees us to consider the needs of the weakest ones first, just as Joseph does with Mary.

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

Friday, December 26, 2025

Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning.

John, Apostle and Evangelist

Saturday, December 27, 2025

The son of Zebedee and brother of James, John was one of the twelve disciples and witness to the transfiguration. Tradition has named him also the writer of the Gospel of John, the three New Testament letters bearing his name, as well as Revelation.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

Promises Made Real

Dreams are delicate things, often hanging in our minds only long enough to evaporate in the morning like dew on the grass. Yet dreams can also endure and shape the arc of social movements and the identities of people near and far. Joseph has the rare privilege of an angelic dream, of all things—a visitation from a divine messenger, beckoning a change of heart and a change of direction for him and the person he loves.

It is no small thing to change direction in life, especially when family expectations and social norms can make life harder than it needs to be. Yet, Joseph and Mary do a remarkable thing as they face uncertainty: They trust God's promise that something incredible is about to happen. They take the angel's words to heart and lean into the possibility of God's Holy Spirit doing something neither of them expected.

Joseph and Mary are at a precipice, a pivot point, a threshold, a new beginning. Isaiah's language reminds us of the relationship that stands at the center of this divine arrival: God is with us, God is with humanity, God is with (and in) the world! Emmanuel!

We stand at a similar threshold every time God gathers us in worship. In word and sacrament, God's promise unfolds anew, birthing love and grace in our lives. Such mercy may seem like a fever dream, a vanishing vision, an impossibility. Yet it is the very thing that undergirds our lives of faith, turning us time and again to what is most important: God's promises fulfilled. As God chose to be with Mary and Joseph, God has chosen to be with us, as we together bear witness to the Spirit who brings about a world where sin is forgiven and God is ever near.