

St. Paul Lutheran Church
of Stillwater, Minnesota

December 28, 2025

First Sunday of Christmas



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.

As we celebrate the Twelve Days of Christmas, our gospel today confronts us with the death of innocent children at the hands of Herod. The birth of Christ does not remove the power of evil from our world, but its light gives us hope as we walk with all the "holy innocents" of past generations and today who have suffered unjustly. In our gathering around word and meal, God continues to redeem us, lift us up, and carry us as in days of old.

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.

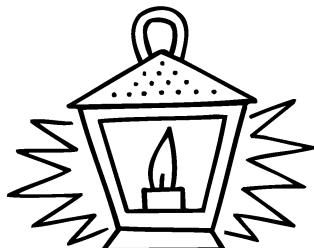
The assembly **speaks** or **sings** the bold responses.



GATHERING

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

Prelude



Gathering Song

"I Am the Light of the World"

**I am the light of the world
You people come and follow me
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
Of what you were meant to do and be**

**When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and the shepherds
Have found their way home
The work of Christmas is begun R**

**To find the lost and lonely one
To heal the broken soul with love
To feed the hungry children
With warmth and good food
To feel the earth below the sky above R**

**To free the pris'ner from all chains
To make the powerful care
To rebuild the nations with strength of good will
To see God's children ev'rywhere R**

**To bring hope to ev'ry task you do
To dance at a baby's new birth
To make music in an old person's heart
And sing to the colors of the earth R**

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

O Lord God, you know that we cannot place our trust in our own powers. As you protected the infant Jesus, so defend us and all the needy from harm and adversity, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you 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 693

Isaiah 63:7-9

God does not delegate divine intervention to a messenger or angel. God's own presence brings salvation. The prophet and all who read these words join in celebrating God's gracious deeds. God trusts that God's people will not act falsely.

At the conclusion:

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn

ELW Hymn 296

"What Child Is This"

Second Reading

Pew Bible: New Testament Page 219

Hebrews 2:10-18

Through Jesus' suffering and death, the trail to eternal salvation has been blazed for us. We do not fear death, because he has conquered the power of death. Thus Christ, our merciful and faithful high priest, has the final say over the destiny of our lives.

At the conclusion:

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Children's and Outreach Message

Jenny Brelje



Gospel Acclamation

ELW Hymn 277

"Away in a Manger"

Gospel Reading

Pew Bible: New Testament Page 2

Matthew 2:13-23

In a dream, Joseph is warned to flee to Egypt to protect the infant Jesus from the jealousy of Herod.

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.

Silence for reflection follows the sermon.

Hymn of the Day

“Mary’s Boy Child”

**Long time ago in Bethlehem, so the Holy Bible say
Mary’s boy child, Jesus Christ, was born on Christmas Day.**

*Hark, now hear the angels sing, new king born today.
And we will live forevermore because of Christmas Day.*

**While shepherds watch their flocks by night
They saw a bright new shining star
They heard a choir sing a song, the music came from afar. R.**

**Now, Joseph and his wife Mary came to Bethlehem that night.
They found no place to bear her child; not a single room was in sight.
By and by they found a little nook in a stable all forlorn.
And in a manger, cold and dark, Mary’s little boy was born. R.**

**Trumpets sound and angels sing listen to what they say.
That we will live forevermore because of Christmas day.**



Prayers of Intercession

*After each prayer:
God of grace,
hear our prayer.*

*At the conclusion:
With the joy of Christ’s birth in our hearts, we commend our
prayers to you, O God, trusting in your boundless mercy and
eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

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

Mark Zempel, soloist

"Do You Hear What I Hear?"

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

Good and loving God, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with your gifts, let them be blessing for others. With the trees of the field, with all earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our 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.

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
who preached good news to the poor,
and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

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.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and
ascension,
we await his coming in glory.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord,
and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food,
the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord;
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory, 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.

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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.

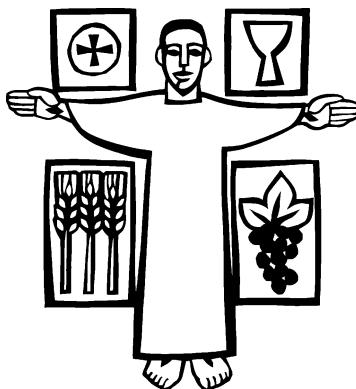
When giving the bread and cup, the communion ministers say:

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

and each person may respond:

Amen.



Communion Hymn

ELW Hymn 282

"It Came upon the Midnight Clear"

Prayer After Communion

Radiant God, with our eyes we have seen your salvation, and in this meal we have feasted on your grace. May your Word take flesh in us, that we may be your holy people, revealing your glory made known to us in 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 290

"Go Tell It on the Mountain"

Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

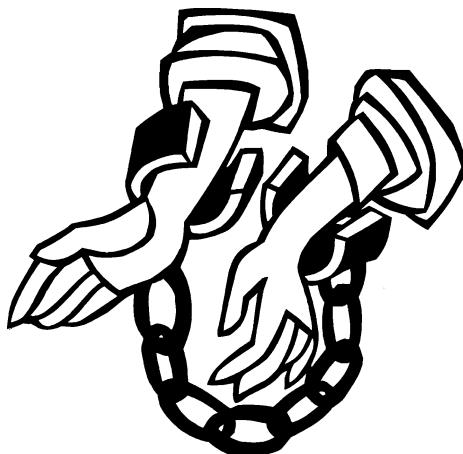
Thanks be to God.

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DAILY PRAYER
The Oppressed



Look with mercy, gracious God, upon people everywhere who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Rouse us from our complacency and help us to eliminate cruelty wherever it is found. Strengthen those who seek equality for all. Grant that everyone may enjoy a fair portion of the abundance of the earth; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONNECTIONS WITH THE LITURGY

One Family in Solidarity with The Poor



As we hear in the second reading, Jesus calls us brothers and sisters, and so in the Thanksgiving for Baptism we hear, “By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons.” (ELW page 97) In the prayers of intercession, we pray for “the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely, and all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit,” and so we ask God to care for all suffering children around the world. (ELW page 105)

CATECHISM CONNECTION

Pray for Everything



Not all of us have a daily fear of death, but more of us might fear the loss of a property, reputation, meaningful work, and personal independence. In his teaching on the final two petitions of the Lord's Prayer ("and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil") Martin Luther encourages us to pray daily for protection from all kinds of loss. It might be scary to voice these fears, but we have the promise that God hears whatever we express that is on our heart. "I should be certain that such petitions are acceptable to and heard by our Father in heaven," says Luther.

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

December 28 - The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

On the fourth day of Christmas, the church remembers the infant martyrs who were the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger. Feeling threatened by the birth of a new "king", King Herod killed these innocent ones shortly after the birth of Jesus (see Matthew 2:16-18). Saint Augustine, a North African church leader, called these innocents "buds, killed by the frost of persecution the moment they showed themselves." Those linked to Jesus through their youth and innocence encounter the same hostility Jesus encounters later in his ministry.

January 1 - Name of Jesus

The eighth day of Christmas (also called "the octave") has roots in the sixth century. Until the recent past, Lutheran calendars called this day "The Circumcision and Name of Jesus." The emphasis on circumcision is the older emphasis. Every Jewish boy was circumcised and formally named on the eighth day of his life. Already in his youth, Jesus bears the mark of a covenant that he makes new through the shedding of his blood on the cross. That covenant, like Jesus' name, is a gift that marks the children of God. Baptized into Christ, the church begins a new year in Jesus' name.

January 2

Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, renewer of the church, died 1872. On the ninth day of Christmas, the church remembers Wilhelm Loehe (approximate pronunciation: LAY-uh) who was a pastor in nineteenth-century Germany. From the small town of Neuendettelsau, he sent pastors to North America, Australia, New Guinea, Brazil, and Ukraine. His work for a clear confessional basis within the Bavarian church sometimes led to conflict with the ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Loehe's chief concern was that a congregation find its life in the holy communion, and from that source evangelism and social ministries would flow. Many Lutheran congregations in Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa were either founded or influenced by missionaries sent by Loehe.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

God Still Speaks

Today's gospel reading contains a terrible story. There is no way around that fact; there is no way to wrap this account in fancy paper and tie it with a bow, disguising the fact that this is a terrible story. There have always been terrible stories; maybe there always will be. And yet, tucked in and around and between Bible stories of death, despair, and hopelessness are often stories of new life, courage, and hope. This gospel text is no exception.

Where is God when evil happens? This is a question people have pondered since time began. What the Bible tells us over and over is that God never abandons people, no matter how bad things get. As God was with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus as they rushed to leave the area and find shelter in Egypt, God was with all families in Bethlehem too, weeping alongside them.

In today's story, God speaks to Joseph through his dreams. Remarkably, Joseph responds by fleeing to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, and then returning to Judea after Herod dies. While we're more likely to set dreams aside as we look at all the facts and weigh all our options, Joseph simply pays attention and acts. If he had waited for some sort of proof that Egypt was the only way out for him and his family, this would be a very different story.

God still speaks to us today, especially in holy baptism, holy communion, and the Bible. In the gospel reading, what might God be saying to you and to your faith community? How might you spend more time listening for God this week?