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CHRISTMAS EVE 2020

(View the videotaped version of the service at the Bethany Lutheran Church Scottsdale site on YouTube and the link below)

<https://youtu.be/miZ3k40-jfw>

GATHERING

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

OPENING HYMN "O Come All Ye Faithful"

CALL TO WORSHIP

Worship is a time to learn the ways of God.

As God's love is genuine, may our love toward one another be authentic.

Worship is a time to be caught up in the Spirit of God.

We call upon God to instill within us a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and hope.

Worship is a time to nurture peacefulness within and among ourselves.

We pray for a humbleness of heart and a willingness to forgive and receive forgiveness.

May this time of worship nurture us in the ways of God.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

If we say we have no sin, if we believe we are not broken; we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We trust that your mercy is our forgiveness, your compassion our healing.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

*We live in the power of a forgiving God.
We live in the presence of Jesus the Christ ... we are forgiven, thanks be to God. Amen.*

HYMN OF PRAISE *“Away in a Manager”*

GREETING

*The Lord be with you
Be filled with the spirit of God today.
We worship to open our hearts for God’s blessing.*

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

“Night of Silence/Silent Night”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

**The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You 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.
For 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.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His 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 onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

2nd Reading

Psalm 96

**O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.**

**For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.**

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the LORD in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

PSALM RESPONSE *"Today is Born Our Savior"*

*Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.
Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.*

Gospel reading

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And 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.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

When 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.’ So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

CHRISTMAS CAROL “*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*”

SERMON – Pastor Joseph Dillion

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020. “Shepherds.” Bethany

2020 has been a year that has seemed to go forever. The majority of our plans for this year wiped out, and now Christmas and much of its’ joy seems beyond our reach and many of our people feel abandoned and unable to reach out even to family and loved ones. In some ways, we may feel closer to one set of people who were witnesses that night of Jesus’ birth than we realize. For when that night began, the shepherds in the fields were often some of the most forgotten, despised people in all of Judea. On this night as we hear again the Christmas story, let us hear another side of the story. The story as seen from the shepherds and the life that they had to deal with in those days.

We shepherds of old need to extend a thousand thanks to those children and others who have portrayed us in Christmas plays down through the centuries. They have made us seem respectable, and to be perfectly frank at the time that our Lord was born we were not respectable in the least.

We were despised; we could not testify in courts because everyone thought that we lied all the time. Because shepherding was seen as low-class work, and yes we did have some thieves, and yes there were a few who were running from authorities, but

they were the exception and not the norm for us. But because of the few we are marked with being those who were not to be trusted. Also, our profession was considered unclean by the religious authorities. We couldn't worship with our families, with our friends, we felt unwanted by the majority of our communities, be it in our towns and villages and certainly in Jerusalem. Oh, I know that there are a few of you men who feel like you're here because your wives drag you, but we didn't even have that option to come and complain! Because of that we were a pretty irreligious lot. If God didn't want us because He saw us as unclean, well bluntly we didn't want to be bothered with God. I think some of you may know that feeling. Our thought was, if all God was interested in were the 'clean ones' then let Him have them?

Then came 'that' night. It was a quiet night—strangely quiet some thought, the sheep were quiet. The wind was still. It was as through—well it was through there was a feeling of expectation in the air. Like the earth itself was waiting for something. For someone. Some of us gathered around the evening fire and were talking—telling some irreverent stories if the truth be known after all these centuries.

Then suddenly there was this unbelievably bright light all around us—it as through the sky lit up at the snap of a finger from horizon to horizon. I cannot begin to tell you of the fear we all felt at that moment. We were sure that we were all going to die! Then in the midst of that light, a figure appeared and were sure we were dead. When he spoke the whole of the ground and the air seemed to shake and vibrate! "Fear Not" were the first words out of his mouth—easy for him to say! But at least we knew that we would survive a little longer. Then he told us something that was just astounding—unbelievable really—at least words such as these coming to the likes of us. He said: "Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." This was the child that Israel—that the world had been waiting for, for centuries. This child was the one who would bring peace to the world—to us. And the news of his birth came to us—to us the outcast of Israel! We the irreverent, the doubters—this great news came to us. So that night we learned that God does care about us after all! I cannot tell you the emotions that each of us felt in that moment. Awe! Thanksgiving! Hope! Tears were running down our eyes. The sense of love that washed over us was indescribable! But happened next was even more beyond words—from horizon to horizon the sky was filled with legion after legion of the heavenly armies of God signing to us—to the world! "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to those who enjoy his favor." It was then that all of us realized that even though we were the lowest of the low, we also enjoyed God's favor, and it was we, who God had graced with the news of the birth the Messiah.

As suddenly as they had come to us the left us, and back into the heavens the angels went. We decided we had to go to Bethlehem to see this child that the angels had told us about. Somehow, we knew that the sheep would be OK. We ran to Bethlehem. I can't tell you how we knew where to go in Bethlehem, but we did, and there in a stable cave was a family with a new born child wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger just as the angel had told us. The mother was young, the father a little older, and we told them of what had taken place out in the fields. They were just as amazed as we were.

The child—well yes, this is after all is about that child that Mary was holding. It was clear that nothing would ever be the same again. Such a feeling of love, of hope, of the world turning up-side-down. Our lives would never be the same again because of this child.

We have no doubts that God who told us about this child—the God who comes to us in this child cares about you as He cares about us. No matter how dark the world seems and is He is with us; He cares for us; He brings us hope when it seems that there is no hope to be had. Fear not! The angel said, for today in the town of David a savior has been born to you—and for you. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY “O Holy Night”

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*We believe in God,
Creator of the universe,
Giver of every good gift,
Author of life itself.*

*We believe in Jesus Christ,
who reminded us of the coming of God’s kingdom,
who commanded us to care for those in need,
who taught us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth,
and who gave us the example of self-giving love.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who inspires us to faithful stewardship of God’s gifts and
that God has given us gifts to be shared freely and generously, in a spirit of love and joy.
We believe that faithful stewardship is an act of worship,
a means of praising God who has blessed us abundantly.
We believe that God has great things in store for us,
for it is in giving that we receive. AMEN*

(Allen & Sara Ewing-Merrill, 2004)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless our lives, lead us in your ways, gives us hearts for gratitude and service. Fill us with your grace, that what we desire is also what you desire. Grant us the understanding that our hearts' true desire is the love of you. May the love of Christ urge us on, may we walk by faith. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless those who govern. Bless the leaders of nations, countries, towns, and cities. Bless all those who lead in all manner of ways – social, political, and religious. Fill the hearts of all with your wisdom. Guide us in the way of justice and integrity for all. Guide us to walk by faith. Holy God, tend to those who suffer in mind, body, and spirit. Tend to the tired, the dying, the poor and the hungry. Help us to follow the love of Christ, a love which urges us on to seek and serve Christ in others. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING (Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of all blessing, giver of all good gifts; day by day you shower us with what we need to live and prosper. With glad and generous hearts and in a response of thanksgiving, we return a portion of our wealth. May what we give be a symbol of our gratitude and a blessing of your love for those who may be helped through our offering. AMEN

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.**

BENEDICTION

People of God, look for Jesus!

Seek him as a treasure in this great wide world.

Seek him in the eyes of your loved ones and in the eyes of strangers.

May your heart burn within you as the Lord draws close to you this week.

CLOSING MUSIC "Joy to the World"

DISMISSAL

Go in Peace ... to live and serve in the way of the cross

Thanks be to God.