

Order of Worship for January 3, 2021

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

**Opening Hymn:** *“Greet Now the Swiftly Changing Year”* - LW #183 vs. 1, 3-5, 7

**Confession and Forgiveness:**

P: Christmas and New Years are over in our society. It is on now to the hard grind of winter.

**C: Shoveling snow, tight-rope walking on ice, dreary days, cold nights, coughs and flu. The celebration seems over with.**

P: We forget about the joy of Christmas because we see Christmas too often as time of tinsel, “warm fuzzies”, and presents under the tree.

**C: The message of Christmas, that God sent His Son into our world to give us real life, seems so often forgotten.**

P: Instead we live in fear.

**C: Fear of the pandemic. Fear of the economy. Fear of losing what we have: jobs, financial security, health, comforts.**

P: That fear above us keeps us from sharing the true message of Christmas with others.

**C: Instead we live for ourselves. We live in sin.**

**All: Forgive us Lord.**

P: Christmas still goes on because Jesus came to our world not for a break in the winter, but to take away our sins and give us eternal life. By His authority and command I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

**Entrance Psalm:**

P: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

**C: and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

P: Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God;

**C: for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.**

P: Great is our LORD, and abundant in power;

**C: His understanding is beyond measure.**

P: The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him,

**C: in those who hope in His steadfast love.**

P: Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!

**C: Praise your God, O Zion!**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

**C: and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

**Prayer of the Day:**

P: O God, our Maker and Redeemer, Who wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature, grant that we may be alive in Him Who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen**

**Old Testament Lesson:** 1 Kings 3:4-15

R: King Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward You. And You have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give Your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this Your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Holy Gospel:** Luke 2:40-52

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter

**C: Glory to You, O Lord.**

P: And the child Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing Him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for Him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were

amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when His parents saw Him, they were astonished. And His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us so? Behold, Your father and I have been searching for You in great distress.” And He said to them, “Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?” And they did not understand the saying that He spoke to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: **Praise to You, O Christ.**

**Sermon Hymn:** “*Within the Father’s House*”- **Hymn #410**

**Sermon:** “*In My Father’s House*” – **Luke 2:40-52**

One of the challenges in last few months is being able to see people in person. Something we took for granted a year ago has been much more difficult this year. Virtual meetings allow us to stay connected, but not in the same way. Even seeing someone in person makes it difficult to recognize or talk sometimes when both are masked up. Add in the usual Iowa winter gear we are all wearing now, and it’s hard to be together in person, face to face.

This is a challenge for us in the church, as well. While God is everywhere, and we can read our Bibles and pray wherever we are, being in the presence of God and the presence of others as we worship God is important. God comes not in just abstract ways, but in tangible ways. There’s a reason the Lutheran definition of a sacrament requires a physical element, like water, bread, or wine. We want to be in the presence of God.

In the beginning, God was with humanity face to face. Genesis says that God met with Adam and Eve face to face. They knew they were in the presence of God, they were able to be in the presence of God, and everything was good.

When sin entered the picture, that connection was severed. Sinful people could no longer be in the presence of the holy God. Something needed to happen.

When the Israelites were on the Exodus, they were commanded to build a tabernacle. It was a fancy tent that they set up everywhere they went. In it was the Ark of the Covenant, which you might know from the Indiana Jones movie. That contained the Ten Commandments, the staff of Aaron, and some manna. While they saw God do miraculous signs, and even lead them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, God gave them the tabernacle so they knew they were in the presence of God.

When the people of Israel were finally able to establish a capital and be at peace, God commanded Solomon to build a temple. It was a permanent house for God. It was where God’s presence would be. The people would only be able to go so far into the temple, the priests could go further on behalf of the people, but only one priest could be in the Holy of Holies. The people were comforted because they could see the temple, see where God’s presence was, and know that God was with them.

Again, sin got in the way. The people disobeyed God, refusing to worship God alone, refusing to care for the poor in their midst, refusing to welcome the stranger. So God's presence left the temple. Eventually, even the temple itself was destroyed. The people were taken off into exile, with no sign of God's presence. They felt abandoned by God, forsaken by God.

Even without the temple, God never left his people. Throughout their exile, God continued to send prophets like Daniel to show that he was with them. When the exiles returned to Israel, they rebuilt their houses, the city walls, and finally, the temple. The temple wasn't anywhere near as splendid as Solomon's had been, but it was a sign and symbol of God's presence once again, and their renewed commitment to God.

When Jesus goes to the temple, God reenters his house. God's presence returns to the temple, even if not everyone realizes it. When baby Jesus is brought to the temple to be named, Simeon and Anna see the importance of the event. They'd been waiting their whole lives to see the Messiah, and both were old. Finally Joseph and Mary bring their baby to the temple to fulfill their obligations, and Simeon and Anna are able to share what God had promised them with Joseph and Mary and those around them. They rejoice that God's presence had returned to the temple.

The second time Jesus enters the temple, God's presence returning causes a bit more of a stir. Joseph and Mary and their family had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, as was their custom and tradition. On their way home, they discover that almost teenage Jesus isn't with them. Eventually they retrace their steps and find Jesus in the temple, sitting with the teachers and acting like a whiz kid, amazing them with his learning and understanding.

When his parents finally find Jesus, his mother asks him what he was thinking, in much the same way that any other worried mother would ask a child who had wandered off. Jesus' response, though, is anything but normal. "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I needed to be in my father's house?" Jesus doesn't say it to be cute. Jesus doesn't respond that way because he's a kid and doesn't know any better. No, Jesus says it because it's the truth. He needed to be in his Father's house. He needed to be there teaching, helping those who taught God's people learn about God and what they've been missing. The Word of God teaching the word of God to those who should know it.

Jesus would return to the temple throughout his ministry. He'd debate with the chief priests and the scribes. He would watch the people there, and commend the widow who put in her two last coins. He would turn over tables and chase the money changers away for keeping the people out of God's house, out of God's presence.

But Jesus wouldn't do his most important work at the temple. One of the most important things that occurred at the temple was the sacrifices. The people needed to make up, atone, for their sins, and had to offer sacrifices. Mary and Joseph offered up two turtledoves when Jesus was named. The perfect lamb was killed on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, for the sins of the people.

The most important sacrifice wouldn't happen at the temple, though. Jesus would die on the cross outside the gate, outside the walls, outside the temple. But Jesus did that so everyone would be able to enter into his Father's house. Jesus died on the cross so we could all enter into the presence of God.

The pandemic has made us change how we get together. It's even made us change if we even get together. It accelerated the drop in church attendance across the board. Not everyone wants to be in the presence of God.

But when we can't safely gather together in God's house, God doesn't stay confined. When visiting with shut-ins who are sad they can't make it to church, I usually remind them that even if they can't come to church, the church will come to them. That happens even more now.

As we wait and long for the day when we will all be able to come together in our Father's house without worry of disease, we rejoice that we are able to be in the presence of God because Jesus has ended the separations caused by sin and opened the way for us to be with God forever. What a wonderful promise.

**Hymn: "O Sing of Christ" – Hymn #362**

P: Lord God, we enter a New Year wondering if it will be like the last year.

**C: Will there be an end of the pandemic? Will we recover from it?**

P: We now hear these wonderful words from God that assure of that we are His and that our destiny is to be with Him forever:

**Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 1:3–14**

R: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Prayer of the Church:**

P: Lord, in Your mercy.

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**The Lord's Prayer**

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**C: Amen.**

**Closing Prayer:**

P: Almighty God, You have filled us with the new light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**Blessing:** (Pastor)

**C: Amen.**

**Closing Hymn:** *"From East and West"* – **Hymn #385**