

**Christmas Carol Service for December 25, 2022**  
Based on the form of Luther's German Mass (1526)

**Prelude**

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

**Opening Hymn: “Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light” – Hymn #378**

**Confession of Sin:**

P: The Lord has come! Prepare to welcome Him with the open arms of faith.

**C: We are not worthy to receive the gifts You give, for we have sinned.**

P: The Lord has come! Prepare to welcome Him with the open arms of faith.

**C: For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

P: The Lord has come! Our eyes have seen His salvation. For the sake of Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

**C: Lord, let your servants go in peace; Your Word has been fulfilled.**

**Gloria in Excelsis: “Angels We Have Heard on High” – Hymn #368 (vs. 1)**

**Prayer of the Day**

P: O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever 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: Isaiah 52:7-10**

P: How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

P: This is Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Epistle- Hebrews 1:1-9**

P: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of

all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are My Son; today I have become Your Father"? Or again, "I will be His Father, and He will be My Son"? And again, when God brings His firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship Him." In speaking of the angels He says, "He makes His angels winds, His servants flames of fire." But about the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy."

P: This is Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Gradual Hymn:** *"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"* – Hymn #358 (vs. 1 & 2)

**The Holy Gospel – John 1:1-14**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

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

P: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord

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

**Sermon Hymn:** *"God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It"* - Hymn #594

**Sermon:** *"Happy Birthday!"* - Titus 3:4-7

The Christmas story is really only recorded in 20 verses of Luke's Gospel. Luke spends more time describing the birth of John the Baptist in his first chapter. Matthew tells us about how Joseph was told by God to take care of Mary and Jesus and the story of the wise men, but that is all there is about Christmas. It is not mentioned in Mark and John, who both begin with Jesus as an adult. By contrast half of Mark's Gospel and over 1/3 of John's Gospel describe what took place in just one week—Holy Week, the week of Jesus' death. From a literary

standpoint all four Gospels center on Holy Week, around the events leading up to and including Jesus' death.

Yet we have such a big celebration for Christmas. Far more music has been written for Christmas than all other events in Jesus' life including Good Friday and Easter combined. Why?

We could say that Christmas was actually a pagan holiday which the Church "Christianized" to get people to stop doing pagan things. Christmas has become a pagan holiday with all the commercialism. But I think that the main reason why Christmas is so big is that it is about a birth. Good Friday is about death. Even Easter, though it brings life, is not the same as birth. Birth is at the beginning. Good Friday and Easter are at the end.

A championship season is great to experience, but where would you rather be—at the beginning of it or the end? Back in the days of Harrision Barnes and Doug McDermott, Ames High dominated Iowa high school basketball. But with their second championship it ended. The players graduated. An epic movie may have a good climax, but where would we rather be—at the beginning or the end? Wouldn't we rather be young, at the beginning of our lives, than old, at the end? Even if the end is great, it is the end. It's all over with!

That's fine if we are going through something bad like an illness. Then we want to be at the end. But it is not when things are good. And we want to think about the good, not the bad. Birth seems so much better than death.

But now we are at Christmas Day. It is just about the end. Radio stations won't play Christmas carols tomorrow. As the nights go on fewer people will turn on their lights. Old trees will be seen along driveways waiting for trash pickup. Sales at stores will be about New Years. Bowl games will replace Christmas specials. In this town most Christmas activities have to take place by the 15<sup>th</sup> before school is out. It is just about over.

People used to celebrate 12 days of Christmas beginning with the 25<sup>th</sup>. Parents put up the tree, decorated, and set out the presents on Christmas Eve night. But now it is all the "getting ready for Christmas" that dominates. For many, Christmas is more about getting ready for Christmas than it is Christmas itself. Soon it will be over with. Soon it will end.

But not with the real Christmas. Christmas was not just about how Jesus was born. No, it is God coming down into our world, into our lives. And that story is just beginning.

Our Epistle lesson this morning is from Titus 3 where Paul writes:

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured

out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Paul mentions the “washing of regeneration and renewal.” “Regeneration,” means “rebirth.” It is a “washing,” literally a “baptism.” In baptism you and I are reborn. It is a birth story, a beginning story, the Christmas story. When Jesus began his ministry, He announced, “The Kingdom of God is here.” The Kingdom was not a political movement or a new administration. It is Jesus ruling in our lives. The best definition of God’s Kingdom I know of is what we sang in the hymn before our Gospel reading. Martin Luther wrote in His Christmas hymn:

Ah dearest Jesus, Holy Child/ make Thee a bed soft, undefiled/  
Within my heart that it may be/ a quiet chamber kept by Thee.

That isn’t just what happened 2,000 years ago when Jesus was born—or more rightly so nine months before when He was conceived. It isn’t even just the day when you and I were baptized. Each and every day God’s Kingdom comes. Each day Jesus comes to bring a birth, a new life in us to turn the ending into the beginning. We pray, “Thy Kingdom come.” Luther said God’s Kingdom comes without our prayer, but we pray that it may come among us also. Each day Christmas can come as Jesus knocks on the door and asks to come into our lives.

No full life, no epic story, no great emperor or nation, no great cause will go on. They will all come to an end, a death. Everything, that is, except God’s Kingdom. What Jesus brings into our lives is about birth, about beginning—about going beyond the end at death.

So today and each day we say, because Jesus was born on Christmas—“Happy Birthday!”

**Hymn:** “*Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*” – **Hymn #393**

## **Prayers**

### **Call to Communicants:**

P: Jesus was born today to come into our world, into our lives. He continues to come to us in the Sacrament, offering His true body and blood to us for the forgiveness of sins. We hear His call to join Him at His table and share in His meal.

**Sanctus Hymn:** “*What Child Is This?*” – **Hymn #370**

## **Words of Our Lord:**

**Agnus Dei** (“Lamb of God”): *(sung to tune of – “Once in Royal David's City”)*

Lamb of God, the world's Redeemer,  
Mercy to your people give.  
Lamb of God, the world's Redeemer,  
May we in Your mercy live.  
Lamb of God, we all implore;  
Grant us peace forevermore.

## **Distribution**

**Communion Hymn:** *“Now Sing We, Now Rejoice”* – **Hymn #386**

**Hymn after Communion:** *“Go, Tell It on the Mountain”* – **Hymn #388**

## **Prayer after Communion:**

P: Lord Jesus we thank You not only for coming into our world on that first Christmas Day, for coming to us in our Baptisms, and for coming to us today as we received Your true body and blood in Holy Communion. Sustain us in the joy of Christmas until You come again.

**C: Amen**

**Blessing** (Pastor)

**C: Amen**

**Closing Hymn:** *“Let Us All with Gladsome Voice”* – **Hymn #390**

**Postlude**