

Order of Worship for December 21, 2025

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: (Needs introduction) *“Lift Up Your Heads, You Everlasting Doors”* –
Hymn #339

Confession and Forgiveness p.184

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm

P: The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,

C: the world and those who dwell therein,

P: for He has founded it upon the seas

C: and established upon the rivers.

P: Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

C: And who shall stand in His holy place?

P: He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

C: who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

P: He will receive blessing from the LORD

C: and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

P: Such is the generation of those who seek Him,

C: who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

C: that the King of glory may come in.

P: Who is this King of glory?

C: The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

C: that the King of glory may come in.

P: Who is this King of glory?

C: The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory!

Gloria Patri (*Glory be to the Father*) p. 186

Kyrie (*Lord, Have Mercy*) p. 186

Hymn of Praise: *“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”* –**Hymn #341, vs. 1 and 5**

Salutation pg. 189

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And with Thy Spirit.

P: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen (sung)

Old Testament Lesson--Isaiah 7:10-17

R: Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

R: This is the Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson--Romans 1:1-7

R: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

R: This is Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Alleluia and Verse p. 190 (first version)

The Holy Gospel--Matthew 1:18-25

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the first chapter

C: Glory be to Thee, O Lord (sung)

P: This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel"—which

means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to Thee, O Christ. (sung)

Creed: 2nd Article and Explanation

Sermon Hymn: *"The Night Will Soon Be Ending"* – **Hymn #337**

Sermon: *"Signs from God"* - **Isaiah 7:10-17**

We all look for signs from God. We look for signs that we are in the right career, that we are marrying the right person, that we're making the right decision about any number of choices that face us each day. We also look for signs from God to prove that He exists, or that he cares for us. When we reach the end of our rope, when troubles seem to overwhelm us, we ask God for a sign. Where is the healing? Where is the rescue? Where is the end of my troubles?

Throughout the Bible, people ask for and receive signs from God. Gideon tests God by casting a fleece and challenging God to make the fleece wet while keeping the surrounding ground dry. When that works, Gideon tries again, asking God to make the fleece dry while the surrounding ground is wet. When that works, too, Gideon finally goes along with the mission God had for him. Moses famously sees a burning bush, but receives a couple other signs from God before he'll go on his mission to go tell Pharaoh to let God's people go.

We look for signs because we want to know the future. We look for signs that the girl or guy we like is interested in us. We look for signs that our kids will be amazing athletes or megastar musicians. We look for signs from God to know that we haven't been abandoned. We look for signs because we want to be in control. If we can read the signs correctly, if we know what the future holds, then we can perhaps breathe a little easier.

We look for signs because we want to be in control. But signs remind us we are not in control. A woman called in to a Minnesota radio station, because no one else would listen to her. She had been in several accidents over the past years involving deer. She wondered why the DOT couldn't just move the deer crossing signs so that the deer would cross somewhere that was less busy. She didn't understand that the signs have no control over the deer. The signs just warn us of what is coming.

As Isaiah writes, the people of Jerusalem are looking for a good sign. Not a sign of Christmas cheer. They need more than that. Facing the end of their kingdom and impending invasion, they need signs of real hope. They need a sign to rally behind.

In the past, that sign was the king. But the recent kings had not been up to the level that their predecessors David and Solomon had been. King Ahaz was notoriously atrocious, even in the

lengthy list of deadbeat kings of Judah. He sold his soul to the Assyrians, built an idolatrous altar for the temple, sacrificed children. Yet now he's offered a sign from God.

Ahaz isn't sure of how to continue, how to go on. The nation was at the brink of failure, and he wondered if God had forsaken them. Ahaz was tempted to not trust in God, but to trust in his own abilities. Instead of trusting that God would protect them, he was contemplating an alliance with one opposing empire to protect him from another.

Instead, Isaiah tells him to trust that God will protect the nation as he had in the past. As proof, God offers to show Ahaz a sign, anything from the depths of hell to the highest heavens. Ahaz refuses, piously claiming that he doesn't want to test God. It seems like a good response, because the Israelites are commanded in Deuteronomy to not test God. God sees through Ahaz's false piety, though, and gives him a sign whether he wants one or not. In the time it takes a child to be born and weaned, God will defeat the enemies they are worried about.

King Ahaz is given a sign, a baby is promised, and will be called Immanuel, which means, God with us. That sounds like a pretty good promise, but not to king Ahaz. He was trying to play politics, playing the Egyptians and Assyrians off against one another, trusting in alliances instead of God. He didn't want God involved in his business.

Like it or not, though, God was involved. God was with Ahaz and the Israelites. God was with them through the bad kings and the good kings. God was with them as they strayed away to follow other gods. God was with them when they were taken into exile, while they were in exile, and when they returned from exile. God being with them was sometimes a sign of judgment, sometimes a sign of grace.

God gives us other signs, too. Later in the book of Isaiah, God promised a sign to his people that he had not, and would not, abandon them. "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). It wouldn't be a signal only for the people of Israel, though. It would be more than that, a signal for the whole world to rally around.

The Hebrew word for signal is used several other places in the Old Testament. One of those times is when the Israelites needed a sign of hope as they were wandering the desert, complaining about God, and were attacked by snakes. Moses was commanded by God to build a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Those who looked on it would live.

That sign was mentioned again in the New Testament. Jesus uses that story to describe how his death on the cross will save. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Jesus was lifted up on the cross, where he died for the sins of the whole world. Because of His death, the cross became the sign of God's redemption.

The cross would be the sign that nations would stream to. It would become a sign of hope for the whole world. The baby born in the manger, the sign given to the shepherds, would be raised up on a cross to be a sign for the whole world. That was the good news of great joy for all people.

When John writes his Gospel, he uses the Greek word *semeia*, signs, to describe the miracles that Jesus does. Jesus' miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but signs, significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith. The miracles, the signs, are not important in and of themselves. The signs are important because of what they point to. The signs point to who Jesus is and what he came to do.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned and struggling with his doubts, he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if he was the promised one, or if they should wait for someone else. Jesus told them to go back and tell John what they saw and heard, the signs that Jesus was doing of healing the blind and the lame. Those signs pointed to who Jesus is.

Signs can frighten us. Signs can remind us of what we don't know, of the uncertainty of the future, and that we're not in control. But the signs we look for are the signs that remind us that God is in control. The signs we look to show that God loved us enough to come into the world as a baby, to die on a cross, to rise again for us. The signs we look to that point us to all that God has done, continues to do, and will do for us. Those signs aren't scary. Those signs are hopeful. What a wonderful promise.

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering-Voluntary

Offertory (*Create in Me*) p. 192

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord in Your mercy . . .

C: hear our prayer.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface: p. 194

P: It is truly good, right, and proper that we should in all times and in all places give thanks to You, almighty God, heavenly Father, for You kept Your promise to Isaiah to send "Immanuel," God with us, in Your Son, Christ Jesus, who birth You told Joseph to accept. Through Jesus You brought about salvation for all of us. Therefore with angels and all the army of heaven we praise and make great Your holy name, evermore praising You and singing .

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Sanctus:*(Holy, Holy Holy)* p. 195

Lord's Prayer, The Words of Our Lord and Pax Domini: *(Peace of the Lord)* p. 196-7

Agnus Dei: *(Lamb of God)* p. 198

Distribution Hymns:

“*Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates*” – **Hymn #341, vs. 2-4**

“*Of the Father's Love Begotten*” – **Hymn #384**

Dismissal: (pastor)

Nunc Dimittis: *(Song of Simeon)* p.199

Thanksgiving: p. 200

Prayer after Communion: p. 201

P: Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son's body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout the days of our journey here on earth, that on the day of His coming, we may, together with all Your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of Jesus with His bride, the Church. In His name we pray;

C: Amen. (sung)

Benedicamus (“*Let Us Bless*”) **and Blessing:** p. 201

Closing Hymn: “*What Hope! An Eden Prophesied*” – **Hymn #342**

Postlude: