

Introduction to the Day

Within the gospel reading's profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, the waters of new birth, and the bread and the wine. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who was in the beginning,
who makes a dwelling among us,
who covers us with justice and mercy.

Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of
one another.

God of goodness and lovingkindness,
**we confess that we have sinned against you
and our neighbors.**

**We have turned away from your invitation to
new life.**

**We have turned away from the lowly and
downtrodden.**

**In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins,
those we know and those known only to you,
for the sake of the one who came to live among
us,**

Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Hear the good news of peace and salvation!

God forgives us all our sins,
not through our own work,
but through † Jesus Christ, made known to all
people.

With all who come to the manger,
rejoice in this amazing gift of grace.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your Word made flesh. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Lesson – Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷Thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." ⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. ¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.

¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

Gospel – John 1:1-18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Message

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We come off the glow of Christmas. Time has hurried itself and we have eagerly flipped the calendar to a new year. Many of our Christmas trees may be down, even though we are three days away from the 12th day of Christmas.

We are reminded, confronted, challenged by the Gospel – something the Gospel does often – remind, challenge, confront. And that is the case again, today, as we hear from John chapter one, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God."

John is testifying to what Jesus is to be – the one that is coming who will bring new life and new hope and promise to a weary world, which is quite a relatable for all of us here now in 2021.

Putting the year that was 2020 behind us, but we are feeling weary it, and we are still in the midst of all of that made 2020 a difficult year.

"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. And the word was God...the true light, which enlightens everyone was coming into the world." John is testifying to the light.

We heard this Gospel text a few weeks ago. One of our Advent Sundays had this as our Gospel text as we looked eagerly to the coming Messiah and now we have it again as Jesus has arrived.

And what does that mean? What does it mean to testify to the promise that is Jesus Christ? What does it mean that we hear this Gospel text again after the arrival of the Baby Messiah after having just heard it as we eager

waited? What does it mean for us to again be reminded of the light that is Christ? What does it mean for us that in the beginning all that was created came from the word, and now the Word has come to us?

God said there will be this and there was this - and it was good.

And God said, there will be that and there was that - and it was good.

And God said, there will be these things and there were these things - and they were good.

All with the word - God created.

And in that beginning, when that creation happened was the Word.

But in this sense, it's Jesus. In the process of that creation, there was Jesus. The Word, Jesus, was with God, and the Word, Jesus, was God.

As we think about those creation texts, we think back to our Christmas Eve Service as our candles were being lit - or this year as we saw the progression of luminary bags - the beautiful image of the sanctuary full of those bags that you all so wonderfully returned. And as we saw the beauty that was, and we heard the words from John 1 and the Creation Narrative from Genesis.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God.”

“In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.”

There was nothing. It was empty. There was darkness. There was a void.

Into that, God spoke, and there was life. In creation, from the nothingness, God's word filled those empty spaces and there was newness. In our lives, in our weary world, God speaks and the Word fills the emptiness.

Looking at these texts I came across the texts from a few weeks ago, Christ the King Sunday,

“what you did to the least of these you did to me. When you fed the hungry you fed me. When you clothed the naked you clothed me. When you set the prisoner free you set me free.”

In creation when God creates human they are created in God's image. When there's that nothingness, that void, and God creates this, that, and the other thing, God then creates human to look over all of it. God creates human in God's image, that when we look at ourselves, and maybe we should do that first just to say, “okay, is this really an image of God I'm okay with, and then we look at our neighbors. Because, when we look in the face of our neighbors, we see God, because we were created in God's image. In the image of God we were created so that when we look at one another, we see God.

And when we see the spaces of emptiness in ourselves and when we hear the spaces of emptiness in others, the Word - God's word in Jesus Christ - fills those holes. God's word in Jesus Christ fills those spaces.

The texts from John chapter one goes on. “In the beginning was the word. The word was with God and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and lived among us.” And, perhaps most importantly, “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

Because God knew we would screw it up.

God knew that in creating human in God's lightness, that we would see each other and not see God.

God knew that in creating human in God's likeness, there would be war and tension and violence and hatred and judgment and injustice.

In sending Jesus Christ to live among us, the Word made flesh, God's own self in human form among us, we would receive grace upon grace.

A radio DJ in the Twin Cities, early on in Advent jokingly posted to Twitter that she had asked her husband, “where was Jesus born?” And his response was, “the cross.”

We chuckle a bit at that. On the cover it is laughable. We think that's funny until we really start to think about it. Jesus Christ was sent to die for us. Saying what she thought was the wrong answer, that Jesus was born on the cross, is really quite profound.

I've seen images of Jesus life with a manger scene at the bottom of a hill and the three crosses at the top.

There is the story called the “Three Trees.” Each tree has dreams of what they will one day become. They would all dream to one day carry the greatest treasure, or a most powerful king. In the end one becomes a manger, another a fishing boat, and the third a cross.

We see that imagery everywhere of God taking on flesh and living us starting as a baby in a manger but truly, Christ was sent to die for us. Answering the question, “where was Jesus born” with the answer “on the cross” isn't so wrong necessarily, but perhaps it's a truth we're not quite ready to deal with.

But in this creation, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. And the Word was God...And the Word took on flesh and lived among us...And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

We don't get that grace *just* from the cute little baby in a manger who won't stop crying, but we get that from that baby, who would one day be on the cross. We get that from a Jesus who would come and live among us and take on all the things, all the hurt, all the pain, all the holes, all the voids - and fill them with that redemptive act of dying on the cross for us.

People of God, let us see our God in our neighbor. Amen.

Apostle's Creed

Prayers

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.
A brief silence.

Redeeming God, you gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth in unimaginable ways. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You bring together heaven and earth. All creation testifies to your splendor. Hold the ecosystems of this earth in delicate balance, from coastlands to farmlands, forests to wetlands, deserts to rainforests. Show us new ways to live in harmony with the world around us. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labor under the weight of pain or sickness especially those we name now both silently and aloud. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honor your image in one another. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith. With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Offering

Our 1st Quarter Well Offering / Mission Offering will be determined by you, the people of Good Shepherd. A theme for us for the coming year is going to be Extravagant Generosity. Instead of US telling YOU what our Mission Offering for the first quarter is going to go to, we are going to have YOU tell US. If there is a local cause that you are passionate about, we want to hear about it. At the conclusion of the 1st Quarter, the Leadership Team will meet to discuss the causes that folks are passionate about, and determine the distribution of funds from there.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious God, you came to us as one unknown, bringing joy and salvation to the earth. Nourish us at your banquet table, that with all who welcome your birth we may proclaim your peace, revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

At Home Communion Liturgy**+WORDS OF INSTITUTION+**

(Holding the bread) 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.”

(Holding the cup) 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 all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.” When we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

(Tear the bread, share with each person – invite them to dip into the cup of wine/grace juice) +

LORD'S PRAYER +**PRAAYER AFTER COMMUNION +**

Lord Jesus, in this simple meal you have set a banquet. Sustain us on the journey, strengthen us to care for the least of your beloved children, and give us glad and generous hearts as we meet you on the way.

Amen.

BLESSING EACH OTHER +

(Using your pointer finger, dip it in the bowl of water, and make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or the back of their hand)

"Child of God, marked as God's own, Jesus loves you, and will love you forever. AMEN"

Take turns until each person has been blessed.

Blessing

Almighty God,
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,
proclaimed joy through the angels,
sent the shepherds with good news,
and led the magi by a star,
bless you this day + through the Word made flesh.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.

Thanks be to God.

ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS!

Carport Carside Communion

Join us NEXT SUNDAY, January 10th, for Carport Carside Communion from 10 am – 11 am.

Annual Meeting!!

The Annual Meeting of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd will be held on the morning of January 31st. This meeting will be happening via Zoom and details will be coming. YOU DO NOT NEED A COMPUTER TO JOIN A ZOOM MEETING. We encourage you to attempt to join Zoom Fellowship the next few Sundays to work out any kinks if you plan to "attend" the Annual Meeting. If you have a computer without a camera, it may be easier to join via telephone.

Topic: LCGS Fellowship

Time: Jan 3, 2021 09:45 AM Central Time (US and Canada)

Meeting ID: 817 0588 1196

Passcode: 666406

One tap mobile

Dial this number to join (312) 626 – 6799 and you will be prompted to enter the passcode **666406.**

You can join Zoom Fellowship at 9:30 this Sunday to give it a test. Dial the phone number and enter the passcode.