

True and lasting joy

Night. A liminal time. A time when God sends messages and messengers to mortals. A time when nocturnal predators are active. A time when, while the world is asleep, greater vigilance is required of those who keep watch.

And here are these shepherds. Except for Mary and Joseph, they were the first to learn of Jesus' birth. Shepherds figure prominently in Scripture as metaphors for faithful leaders, good kings, compassionate and brave. David was a shepherd boy called into God's service. Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd. But in actuality, shepherding was hard and dangerous work, and shepherds were not considered to be among the elite in society. Shepherds were an out-of-bounds people, living outside of the city, and a little suspect. Why would the news of the birth of the king be announced to them?

What about Bethlehem? The prophet Micah called Bethlehem "one of the little clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2). Even today, Bethlehem would not be counted among the world's great cities. In 1950, Christians made up 86% of the population. Now they are under 10%. Its economy is based on tourism, which has been decimated by the current conflict. Bethlehem is in the occupied West Bank, in a war zone.

To these terrified shepherds, literally sitting in the dark outside of Bethlehem, an obscure town in an occupied province of the Roman Empire, God chose to reveal the birth of the Messiah. What on earth was God thinking? Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in Herod's palace? Why not in Rome, where the emperor claimed to be soter, "savior"?

How does the angels' announcement of the birth of the Messiah sound to people living in obscure places, far from the centers of power, in indescribably difficult circumstances today? To those living in Gaza and Ukraine, in Sudan, in the homes of immigrants in this country who fear deportation? To starving children here and across the globe? How dare we wish them "Merry Christmas"?

"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'" (Luke 2:10-11). Joy. Not happiness that is transient and human-made, but joy, given by God, that is deep and strong and unshakable.

Joy is a sign of the reign of God. The root word for "joy" in Greek is the same as that for "grace." "Gift" also comes from the same root, as does "thanks." All of this points to the nature of true joy. It is gift. It is grace. It is thanksgiving. Our word "eucharist," a name for Holy Communion, ties this all together in the sacrament where Jesus' body is broken for us and Jesus' blood is poured out for us. In the eucharist, Christ invades us with God's joy. We are intimately connected to the source of joy and grace in this gift.

Perhaps that is why, in the middle of the night, to terrified shepherds outside of a small town, God chose to send the angels to announce the birth of Jesus. No distraction. No interference. Just the simple, deep, profound gift of true and lasting joy. A joy that comes from God, from the essence of God, depending only on God, that no earthly power can take away.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton

Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Christmas Eve

December 24, 2024

Worship Leader
Pastor Rebecca Sullivan

Music Leader
Betsy Murray

LAM
Bill Hughes

Reader
Polly Morrison

Acolyte
Alex Johnson

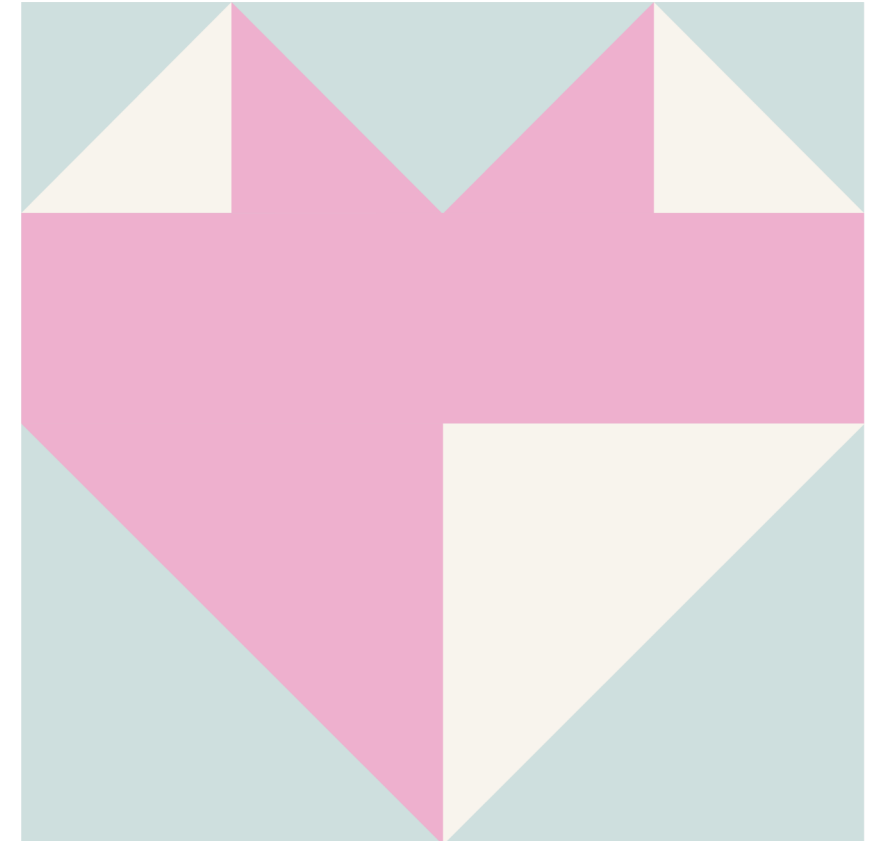
Communion
Kathy Felix
Bonnie Jackelen

Ushers
Scott Tradup
Michele Murray

AV
Craig Carlson
Mike Stepan

Altar Guild
Cathy Carlson
Stephanie Clapper

Hospitality
Polly Morrison,
Terry & Peggy Keohen,
Joe Danielson,
Mike Wallace



WORDS
FOR THE BEGINNING
— LOVE KNOWS YOUR NAME —

1660 Birch Lake Avenue, White Bear Lake, MN 55110

**Please stand as you are able.*

PRELUDE	“O Holy Night,” <i>arr by K. McChesney</i> “Ding Dong Merrily on High,” <i>arr by C. Dobrinski</i> “Dona Nobis Pacem,” <i>arr by K Buckwalter</i>	Joyful Noise Bells
CALL TO WORSHIP		Screen
CHRIST CANDLE LIGHTING	“I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve,” <i>ELW 271, v 1 (Cranberry Book)</i>	Screen
*CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS		Screen
*GATHERING HYMN	“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” <i>ELW 270</i> Brass Players: Joe Moore, Scott Freburg, Trip Sullivan Timpani: Beth Tradup Snare & Drum Set: John Murray	Screen
*PRAYER OF THE DAY	Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, we always long for you, but on this night, on this holy Christmas eve, we long for you to feel as close as possible. Awaken in us your love, which is bigger than the sky, and as close as our very breath. Amen.	Screen
SPECIAL MUSIC	“Go, Tell it on the Mountain,” <i>arr by H. Helvey</i>	King’s Choir
LESSON	Isaiah 9:6, <i>p 555 NRSV</i>	
PSALM	Psalms 96 (<i>read responsively</i>) <i>p 479 NRSV</i>	Screen
*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION	“O Come, All Ye Faithful,” <i>ELW 283, v 1&2</i>	Screen
*GOSPEL	Luke 2:1-20, <i>p 832 NRSV</i>	
CHILDREN / YOUTH TIME		Pastor Rebecca
SERMON		Pastor Rebecca
*HYMN OF THE DAY	“Love Has Come,” <i>ELW 292</i>	Screen
RESPONSIVE READING	“Let the Stable Still Astonish”	Bill Hughes

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Liturgy by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org*

*PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

After each petition:

Leader: . . . Come Lord Jesus, come...

All: ...in this place.

Leader: We commend these prayers to you, O God, trusting your grace made known to all, through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

All: Amen.

OFFERING	“Creation Will Be At Peace,” <i>by Williams, Page</i>	King’s Choir
*OFFERTORY	“Lord of All Good,” <i>by B. Beebe Tradup</i> (sung to the tune of “Joy to the World”)	Screen
*OFFERING PRAYER	God of heaven and earth, from the beginning, you have called forth life, in which you take delight. The trees, the fields, and the seas sing for joy. Bless now these gifts, received from your bounty, that we may join the chorus of creation to tell of your salvation from day to day. Amen.	Screen
*THE GREAT THANKSGIVING		
*SANCTUS	Holy, Holy, Holy,” <i>ELW p. 108 setting 1</i>	Screen
*WORDS OF INSTITUTION		
*THE LORD’S PRAYER		Screen
DISTRIBUTION	“Lamb of God,” <i>p191, setting 8</i> “Away in a Manger,” <i>ELW 277</i> “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” <i>ELW 279</i>	Screen
POST-COMMUNION BLESSING & PRAYER		
*CANDLE LIGHTING	“Christmas Starlight,” <i>by E. Lorenz</i> “Silent Night, Holy Night,” <i>ELW 281</i>	Betsy Murray Screen
*BLESSING		Screen
*SENDING HYMN	“Joy to the World,” <i>ELW #267</i>	Screen
*DISMISSAL		Screen
POSTLUDE	“Carol of the Bells,” <i>arr by W. Simon</i>	Betsy Murray

Thank you for worshiping with us! Merry Christmas!