

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 24 December 2023

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 96:1-3

Opening Hymn: 299 Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

Confession of Sin

Most holy and merciful Father; We acknowledge and confess before You; Our sinful nature prone to evil and slothful in good; And all our shortcomings and offenses. You alone know how often we have sinned; In wandering from Your ways; In wasting Your gifts; In forgetting Your love. But You, O Lord, have pity upon us; Who are ashamed and sorry for all wherein we have displeased You. Teach us to hate our errors; Cleanse us from our secret faults; And forgive our sins for the sake of Your dear Son. And O most holy and loving Father; Help us we beseech You; To live in Your light and walk in Your ways; According to the commandments of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Romans 5:1-2

Hymn of Preparation: 319 O Come, All Ye Faithful

OT Reading: Psalm 25

NT Reading: John 1:14-18

Sermon Title: *Fullness of Grace and Truth*

Hymn of Response: 317 What Child Is This

Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed (p. 852)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 311 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

PM Worship

Hymn 299: Joy to the World! The Lord is Come

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 55:1-7

Hymn 317: What Child is This

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Hymn 324: Thou Who Wast Rich beyond All Splendor

Sermon Passage: Luke 2:1-20

Sermon: *Glory to God in the Highest*

Hymn 315: Silent Night! Holy Night!

Adult Sunday School: No Sunday school

Suggested Preparations

Monday (12/18) Read and discuss John 1:14-18

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (ESV)

D.A. Carson writes:

Jesus' is the supreme revelation. If we are to know God, neither rationalism nor irrational mysticism will suffice: the former reduces God to mere object, and the latter abandons all controls. Even the revelation of antecedent Scripture cannot match this revelation, as the epistle to the Hebrews also affirms in strikingly similar categories: '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' (Heb. 1:1-2). The Word, God's very Self-expression, who was both with God and who was God, became flesh: he donned our humanity, save only our sin. God chose to make himself known, finally and ultimately, in a real historical man; 'when "the Word became flesh", God became man' (F.F. Bruce).

Read or sing Hymn 299 Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

Tuesday (12/19) Read and discuss John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (ESV)

William Weinrich writes:

According to Augustine, Life and Light refer to the creative knowledge of God and the illumination of human reason that allow man to perceive divine wisdom in the created order. Luther rightly objected that "this interpretation is not appropriate in connection with this Gospel passage, since only the light of grace is being preached here." Luther related this passage to the preaching of the Light "to the descendants of Abraham and generations that followed." Our analysis suggests that 1:4b specifically has the ministry of Jesus in mind. Throughout the Gospel narrative, the incarnated Word is the source of Life and Light because he himself is the Life and the Light (Jn 14:6; 8:12). Yet, Luther's insight is correct. Christ is Life and Light as the Teacher/Rabbi whose teaching has himself as its sole object. He is the Way and the Life (Jn 14:6; 1 Jn 5:20). Indeed, to be a disciple of Jesus is to walk the way of Him who is the Way. The OT understanding of life involves movement and act; life is that which is lived. Therefore, life, even "eternal life," is not merely contrasted to physical life. Life is that existence that acts in accordance with the will and purpose of God.

In the Gospel of John ..., "life," is "the life by which God Himself lives." The son possesses this life from the Father and has come into the world to give life to humankind (Jn 10:10). This life is given when those who believe receive the Spirit and become children of God. Therefore, Jesus, as the Life,

is also the Way that is to be lived. Thus we can see the importance of the incarnation, which is already indicated in these verses. By becoming flesh, the Word becomes himself the human form of the divine life. The Word Incarnate is the living will of God who speaks as His Father speaks and who works as His Father wills (Jn 12:49) and therefore reveals eternal life.

Read or sing Hymn 319 O Come, All Ye Faithful

Wednesday (12/20) Read and discuss Psalm 25

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
 let me not be put to shame;
 let not my enemies exult over me.
Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
 they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
 teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are the God of my salvation;
 for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
 for they have been from of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
 according to your steadfast love remember me,
 for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;
 therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
 and teaches the humble his way.
All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
 for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

For your name's sake, O LORD,
 pardon my guilt, for it is great.
Who is the man who fears the LORD?
 Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
His soul shall abide in well-being,
 and his offspring shall inherit the land.
The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
 and he makes known to them his covenant.
My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
 for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all his troubles. (ESV)

Alec Motyer writes:

Psalm 25 is profoundly comforting. ... The holy God, who insists on His holiness as the standard, is also the forgiving God. This means that He always has other things in mind than just our sinfulness and unworthiness. According to 25:6-7, He can look back over our sin-stained past and forget what He has seen! But, compares with what He banishes from mind and memory, three things are permanent: ‘compassion,’ His solemnly ‘committed love,’ and His ‘goodness.’ He never looks at us [except] through these three windows; indeed, says the remarkable verse 8, it is actually because (‘therefore’) He is good and upright that He bothers with sinners so as to lead and teach us. How good is that! Using the great, comprehensive word ‘holy,’ we rightly tremble at the thought of standing before the holy God, and then, reading 25:8, we can say that it is because He is holy that He bothers! Verse 11 puts the same truth in another way: it is ‘for His name’s sake’ – that is to say, because He is what He is; because His ‘name’ is an accurate shorthand for His revealed nature, He pardons my iniquity, great as it is.

Sing or Read Hymn 317 What Child Is This

Thursday (12/21) Read and discuss Isaiah 55:1-7

“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

Where is God to be found? Those who “seek” Yahweh can rest assured that they will find Him where He promises to be. The Jerusalem Temple was the place where He caused His name to dwell. However, after it was destroyed, where was He located? In light of Yahweh’s advent as Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11) and His return to Zion (52:8), He invites people to seek Him where He dwells forever: in Jesus, the Servant, the Son and Heir of David. He is present in His enduring and efficacious Word. Those who search the Scriptures will find that they testify to Christ. He is the Word incarnate and the new temple. Those who seek Him in Scripture, Holy Baptism, and His Supper do find Him. The opposite is to lust after idols. He alone gives life, while false gods bring only death.

When can God be found? The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that “the day of salvation” is “today”, so do not procrastinate. Gregory of Nyssa asks: “Do you want to know the opportune time to seek the LORD? The simple answer is this: all your life.”

Friday (12/22) Read and discuss Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all

went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (ESV)

In his sermon on this passage Calvin said:

We must regard ourselves as poor, helpless souls until we are comforted and made glad by the gospel. We should not look for peace anywhere else. Woe to us if we do! For if complacency were to lull us into a false sense of security, the devil would at once overwhelm us, entangling us in his snares and nets. We would be his prisoners, enslaved to him. Here, then, is a word worth remembering: We can never really rejoice until we are sure God loves us and is favourable to us, undeserving though we are. On that foundation we must build. Otherwise, all our joys will turn to tears and to the gnashing of teeth.

The angel, however, announces not merely news of joy, but of great joy which will be for all the people. We should weigh these last words carefully. For if they were not there, we might think that what Luke records was only for the shepherds’ benefit. Instead, joy is something which will be poured out on all the people. The angel means of course the Jews, the chosen

people. Now, however, as Paul says, the partition has been broken down, and Christ through the preaching of the gospel proclaims peace to those who were once far off, and peace to those who were near. the Jews were linked by covenant to God, who adopted them in the person of Abraham and who confirmed their adoption by giving them the Law. But now God has drawn near to us who were once far from him, and has determined to make the message of reconciliation universal.

Since the angel invites us to rejoice at the coming of Christ, not in any ordinary way but with unbounded delight, let us make the most of the message. What can we say about this joy? If we involve ourselves in worldly pleasures and are wholly absorbed by our own wants, we will never rejoice in the grace of Christ. Let the shepherds instead be our example. Their earthly lot did not change, despite the fact that they had heard the angel's word and had witnessed the birth of God's Son. They went back to their flocks exactly as before; they continued to live as poor men, guarding their herds. In terms of the flesh and of this passing world they gained nothing from the privilege which we read about here. For all that, they were full of joy. Theirs is a lead we should follow. For although the gospel might earn us neither wealth nor fame, and although it might not bring us gratification or amusement, nevertheless we should be glad that we are the objects of God's favour. That is where true blessing and happiness lie, and where real rest is found.

Read or sing Hymn 311 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Saturday (12/23) Read and discuss John 1:14-18

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (ESV)

Commenting on verse 16, Martin Luther writes:

This is one of the golden texts in Saint John; it is on par with the one we have already discussed: the Son of God is "the true Light, which lights every one that cometh into the world." Therefore, whoever does not acknowledge Christ and believe in him, and does not make him his or her own, is and remains a child of wrath and of damnation, no matter what that person is called or what that person is. But if a person is to find mercy, Christ alone must be the means. He alone makes us paupers rich with his superabundance, expunges our sins with his righteousness, devours our

death with his life and transforms us from children of wrath, tainted with sin, hypocrisy, lies and deceit, into children of grace and truth. Whoever does not possess this Man possess nothing.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.