

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 22 December 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 96:1-3

Opening Hymn: 308 Good Christian Men, Rejoice

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: 311 Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

New Covenant Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Sermon Title: *The Savior's Humble Birth*

Hymn of Response: 318 Angels We Have Heard on High

Confession of Faith: Q/A 1 Heidelberg Catechism (p. 872)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 322 Once in Royal David's City

PM Worship

Hymn: 314 "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen"

Hymn: 324 "Thou Who Wast Rich beyond All Splendor"

Hymn: 315 "Silent Night! Holy Night!"

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 51:1-8

New Covenant Reading: Luke 2:21-40

Sermon Title: *Consolation Has Come*

Extended Time of Fellowship – No Sunday School

Suggested Preparations

Monday (12/16) 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 verse 46, Mary says:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Mary’s song is about making much of God. But what does it mean to “magnify the LORD”? We use that term magnify in at least two different ways. We magnify something through a microscope to make something small look big. And we magnify something through a telescope, to bring into focus something that is genuinely enormous – but which had appeared small because we were not close to it.

Mary’s soul and spirit are not acting like microscopes. Instead, when Mary focuses on the LORD she is just overwhelmed by His majesty, His power, and particularly by His grace so that she simply must declare her experience of God’s majesty and grace. Look closely at the way the two clauses in these verses fit together: “My soul magnifies the LORD, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” There is a direct connection between being overwhelmed by the grandeur and majesty of God and true joy. Put simply: **The bigger your God, the deeper your joy.**

Read or sing Hymn 308 Good Christian Men, Rejoice

Tuesday (12/17) Read and discuss Read Luke 1:57–80

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him

Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (ESV)

Arthur Just writes:

What Mary proclaimed in the Magnificat in the language of pious faith, Zechariah now articulates in the Benedictus in psalm-like poetry that lends itself to catechesis. The hymn embraces both the OT and the NT by describing God’s mighty acts of salvation in the past and how John and Jesus will bring these mighty acts to fulfillment. ...

The Lord God of Israel is blessed because He visited, redeemed, and raised up a horn of salvation for His people. This results in salvation in which God does mercy, remembers His covenant to Abraham, and gives rescue from

enemies so that His people might serve Him. Thus, the motive is God's faithfulness to His promise to visit His people and redeem them from all their enemies. What begins with John, therefore, is the time of salvation, for he will be a prophet and will go before the Lord to prepare His ways. As a prophet of the Most High, John will "give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins." The link between salvation and forgiveness is a critical issue in the preparatory instruction or catechesis for baptismal initiation.

Central to this hymn is God's remembrance of His holy covenant and the oath He swore to Abraham. Surprisingly, "covenant" is used in the synoptics only at the institution of the Lord's Supper and here in the Benedictus. "Holy covenant" expresses that it is from God. This is the covenant promised to Abraham, as is confirmed in the next verse, but it also embraces the Passover, the Sinai covenant, and the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 34. "Remember" is an OT theme in which either God remembers us for salvation, or we remember His saving acts. Here it is the former. Remembrance is an important concept in table fellowship language, both at the Last Supper and in the ongoing [celebration of the Lord's Supper] in the church.

Read or sing Hymn 311 Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Wednesday (12/18) Read and discuss Isaiah 9:1–7

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
 you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (ESV)

Andrew Bartlet writes:

God always sees the bigger picture, and it comes clear to us when we “see the light.” Left to ourselves, we may look high and low for light, but we can only fumble and stumble in darkness. Sometimes the false and flashy lights of success, like the glories of the monarchy under David and Solomon, can give a deceptive sense of success, of the good life, of glitz and glamor that disappears with the first power failure. So Judah and the current royal resident of the house of David had succumbed to the ways of the world. They enjoyed plenty of wine (5:11, 22), but as the vineyard of Yahweh, they could not produce even ordinary grapes of justice and righteousness. What God had assumed they would “do,” they had not done. They had become wise in their own eyes but could not see the way of Yahweh. The king had failed as steward of the vineyard and faithful spiritual leader of God’s people.

Yet in the darkness, through the darkness, from the darkness, the God who created light by the power of His word would again bring light. He would reach back in His plan of holy history to remind His people of how dependent they are on the love and mercy, power and plan of the One who is both Creator and Redeemer. He is the Counselor who plans – and then accomplishes – a miraculous wonder. The loss of our false claims on security can serve to show us where true security is found. Even the darkness, like hosing sight and hearing, can be a wholesome means of recognizing and appreciating the true light.

In response to the failures of the house and lineage of David, God would affirm His commitment to the “throne of David” and “His kingdom.” A Child would be born. A Son would be given. The “sovereign authority” to rule as King would be put upon His shoulder, replacing the “yoke” of the oppressor, whether that of Egypt or currently, Assyria or anyone else in the future. But He would not be just another son of David. As Yahweh was acclaimed to reign supreme even over the power of Egypt, which became the slave house of the sons of Israel, so He would again come as King. But His “counsel and planning of a wonder” would encompass even more than

the sovereignty of the mighty God who is Father forever. This King would come as both God and man, as signified by the four names. The eternal Son of God humbled Himself to take on human flesh, to be born of a virgin, to live as fully a man, and even to endure the sinful fallenness of all around Him in a world gone wrong and so in need of peace. But through His rule and reign, God's true justice and righteousness would be established beyond any failed human efforts. In fact, such human efforts, which can only do so much, are inevitably doomed to fail. Now it is clear that the "zeal of [the LORD of Hosts] will do this."

Read or sing Hymn 318 Angels We Have Heard on High

Thursday (12/19) Read and discuss Isaiah 51:1-8

"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the LORD:
look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him,
that I might bless him and multiply him.
For the LORD comforts Zion;
he comforts all her waste places
and makes her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

"Give attention to me, my people,
and give ear to me, my nation;
for a law will go out from me,
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.
My righteousness draws near,
my salvation has gone out,
and my arms will judge the peoples;
the coastlands hope for me,
and for my arm they wait.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;
but my salvation will be forever,
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

"Listen to me, you who know righteousness,

the people in whose heart is my law;
fear not the reproach of man,
nor be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool,
but my righteousness will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.” (ESV)

Alec Motyer writes:

A man who figures so prominently throughout the Bible demands our close attention. For Paul Abraham exemplifies for us how a true faith rests without wavering on the promises of God; Hebrews finds in him the steadfastness of faith under trial; and, to James, Abraham is evidence that real faith proves itself in consequent works. Big lessons. Isaiah’s point about Abraham is that, on the one hand, being a single, solitary individual is of no significance, and on the other hand, that the single, solitary individual is of great significance. Our solitariness imposes no limitation on the LORD; our faithfulness as single individuals is of the utmost importance to Him. Well, just suppose Abraham had said: ‘What’s the point of my emigrating from Ur? I’m just one, childless, person! What can I do or how can I matter?’ No fulfilment of divine promises, no people of God, no messianic line into which Jesus can be born, no worldwide salvation and blessing! All this may be classed as ‘humanly speaking’ for the Sovereign Lord has His own ways of achieving what He wants, but, humanly speaking, it’s true. Like when the LORD called Ananias to go to Paul: He told him Paul was expecting a man named Ananias. The ‘Ananias Plan’ was the only plan! No one else would ‘do.’ The unknown man – the man we have not heard of before and will not hear of again – is the only one who can set the great world-missionary on his feet! And, take Abraham, he must have spent many years – if not most of his life – wondering what it was all about. He had to wait thirteen years for the birth of Isaac, and even after Isaac was born there was no great flurry of divine activity, was there? Hebrews picks out that aspect of Abraham – the ‘what’s it all about? When will it happen?’ aspect – by saying he looked for a city and lived in a tent. But he mattered! My word, how he mattered!

Friday (12/20) Read and discuss Luke 2:21-40

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this

man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. (ESV)

David Garland writes:

The obedience of Jesus' family to the law is mentioned three times in this passage. The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in directing Simeon's meeting with the family, which is followed by his hymn of praise and prophecy. Luke goes out of his way to show the continuity between the old and the new – the law, prophecy, and the gospel. This narrative illustrates Paul's statement: “But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Gal 4:4-5).

This undercurrent in the infancy narrative that shows Jesus' family as being obedient to Caesar and faithful to the Mosaic law fits the defense of Christianity personified in the trials of Paul in Acts. Paul was accused of being a rabble-rouser, intent on causing social unrest throughout the world as an enemy of Roman law and order. As with one voice, the officials ruled that Paul had done nothing to merit prison or death under Roman law. Paul also was charged with religious disloyalty: teaching against the law, the

Jewish people, Jewish customs, and the temple. These charges were proven false. He was not a renegade Jew but was in chains because of his dedication to “the hope of Israel.” Christianity and its first followers were rooted in God’s law, but the coming of Jesus brought a transformation to something new. As Songer avers:

The reality of this revelation is causing the regularity of the cult and the significance of the law to pale into subordination before the loftier divine plan; yet there remains those who are unable to perceive the new reality and who will in their devotion to the old patterns ultimately oppose the new as irregular and even destructive. Luke points out, however, that the old patterns are carefully observed because it is out of the divinely appointed cult and law that the new movement emerges; and this emergence is God’s will – a circumstance which implies that the old has served its function and is fulfilled by the new which should replace it.

Read or sing Hymn 322 Once in Royal David’s City

Saturday (12/21) 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)

David Garland writes:

The sentimental Christmas may be popular as a religious holiday for some because it can come off as celebrating the birth of a helpless baby. Jesus lies in a manger to be gazed upon and adored, but not to be heard and heeded. A speechless babe wrapped tightly in swaddling cloths seems more obliging in allowing people to tailor their religious beliefs however they see fit. ...

True, many hear only the Christmas bells of cash registers ringing, accompanied by mawkish seasonal, secular music. Churches do not always help by competing for the entertainment spotlight. One church I know of boasts of their Christmas program's "pageantry, marvel, magic, and awe," and emphasizes that they have been "entertaining and inspiring audiences ... for more than 25 years."

The story of Christmas celebrates the fulfillment of God's promises and the incarnation of God in human flesh. That meaning is memorably captured by John 3:16. God loves, and God gives in order to save. Luke's birth narrative portrays the nature of divine power that gives itself to save. God does not appear as an all-powerful despot but as a vulnerable child. Paul blazons this profound paradox in Phil 2:6-8. For Christ, equality with God meant emptying himself, taking the form of a slave, who had no rights and owed obedience, humbling himself and dying a slave's death on the cross. It meant giving rather than getting, and Christ gave until he was empty; but his obedience led to an empty tomb and ultimate vindication that will culminate when throngs in heaven and on earth and under the earth, not just a host of angels, will bow down and sing glory in the highest to the One whose name is above every name.

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