

# Christmas Eve Service

7:00 pm Thursday Dec 24th

Zoom: 116 359 399

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/116359399>



## The Word of God

Celebrant: Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

*People: And blessed be God's Kingdom, now and forever. Amen*

### THE COLLECT OF THE DAY (BCP p. 357)

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

## The Lessons (portions of these readings will be in the Zoom worship)

### First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness--  
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

### **The Response: Psalm 96**

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song; \*  
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD and bless his Name; \*  
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations \*  
and his wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; \*  
he is more to be feared than all gods.
- 5 As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; \*  
but it is the LORD who made the heavens.
- 6 Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! \*  
Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples; \*  
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the honor due his Name; \*  
bring offerings and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; \*  
let the whole earth tremble before him.
- 10 Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is King! \*  
he has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity."

11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;  
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; \*  
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

12 Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy  
before the LORD when he comes, \*  
when he comes to judge the earth.

13 He will judge the world with righteousness \*  
and the peoples with his truth.

### **Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

### **Gospel: Luke 2:1-14**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth 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 heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

## **Sermon**

*Pastor Steve will be delivering the sermon on zoom.*

*This is a sermon from Sermons that work from the Episcopal Church*

Mary's time had come. After the long journey, the road to Bethlehem, and the days of worry before that – what would Joseph say when he found out she was pregnant? How did this happen anyway? But Joseph had stood by her, and now the time had finally come, in a strange city, with no family there to help, and the barn would have to do. There was no room in the inn, but how could they have afforded that anyway? Money was hard to come by. The baby at last was coming, and Mary was terrified.



And the shepherds, too, were terrified. Like Mary and Joseph, they weren't sleeping inside that night: They were out in the fields, and it was cold. And suddenly this Angel of the Lord was confronting them, and this glory of the Lord was nearly blinding them, and this multitude from heaven was declaring peace on earth. There hadn't been peace for a long time; how was this baby lying in a manger going to bring peace now? It didn't make sense.

We have heard this story before, and we are probably not terrified tonight, as Mary and the shepherds were. But maybe we should be. Because if Christmas really comes, the way we say we want it to, things will have to change. The world will be reborn. The Kingdom of God will come on earth, as in heaven.

Still, like Mary, we have been waiting, and praying, and hoping for this night. When the Angel Gabriel told her she would bear God's Son into the world, Mary's response was, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Mary agreed to do this, despite the strange and unusual circumstances. She knew people would think the wrong thing and look down on her. She knew that Joseph might not understand. Even knowing how hard this would be, she said yes.

We also have a choice. We are not here merely to remember what happened so long ago on a cold night in Bethlehem. Like Mary, God is asking us: Will you bear Christ into the world? Will you carry Jesus in your heart?

Our road is different from Mary's, but it is challenging in its own way. A new baby always changes things. Your life is no longer your own. If you agree to let Jesus be born again tonight, your life will change, maybe in ways you don't expect. So be careful how you answer.

The Christmas story can so easily be lost under a sentimental blanket of snow, with cows gently lowing and stars brightly shining. This is true with the carols we sing, too. They are so familiar that we sometimes miss the real meaning.

For example: "It came upon the midnight clear." The really interesting stuff in this carol happens in verse 3. This is true of most Christmas carols, actually: The real theology happens two or three verses in. Here's the third verse of "It came upon a midnight clear":

"Yet, with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long;  
beneath the heavenly hymn have rolled two thousand years of wrong;  
and warring humankind hears not the tidings which they bring;  
O hush the noise and cease your strife and hear the angels sing."

And here's the second verse of "In the bleak mid-winter":

"Our God – heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign."

Christina Rossetti, who wrote this carol, is making a bold theological claim in this verse. When God comes – if God comes – heaven and earth will "flee away." Heaven and earth as we know them now – everything we know, everything we see – will simply stop. Vanish. And then what? What comes next? Well, what comes next – what happens when God comes – is what Rossetti wants us to think about.

Perhaps the best example of Christmas carol theology is "O little town of Bethlehem." The first couple of verses are sweet, almost cloying – all those "Christmas angels" and "silent stars." But Phillips Brooks, the famous 19th-century preacher who wrote this carol, knew what he was doing. He has given us a perfect sermon in miniature. Here is the last line:

"O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel."

The carol has gotten rather serious by this fifth verse. "Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today" – not so sweet, is it? It may be what we need – it may even be what we want, what we are praying for – but it doesn't sound easy.

"Cast out our sin" brings to mind some lines from the Magnificat, the Song that Mary sings after she hears from Gabriel that she is pregnant:

"[God] has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty."

There's some resonance between God's tearing our sin from us and casting it out, as in the carol, and God casting down the mighty from their thrones, sending the rich away, empty. Being sent away empty isn't a punishment, you see – it's a blessing. If we allow God to cast out our sin – if we allow God to empty us out – then we will be blessed indeed, just as Mary was.

And what is it, exactly, that we need to be rid of this year? What is the sin that needs casting out, the thing that's getting in the way of God being born in us? Our desire to be important? To have all the right things? To have more than we need?

What is it that occupies your heart this Christmas? Maybe it's sadness, frustration, anger? The feeling that you're not good enough or smart enough or kind enough? Or maybe you're lonely or afraid?

Whatever is in there, God wants to be in your heart, too. And if you let God in, even just a little bit: Watch out! Cast out our sin and enter in. He has sent the rich away, empty.

It is only after we have been emptied – of all the ridiculous things, all the needless stuff that gets in the way of God's love – only when we are emptied of these worries, these desires, are we ready to be filled with the love of God. Only when we are empty can Christ be born in us.

Only when we are empty will Christmas come. We can sing the carols and put out the crèche, but unless we are willing to be emptied out, there won't be any place for God to live.

This is the inside work, the thing that must happen inside our hearts, in order for the outside work to move forward. And the outside work is the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Heaven and earth shall flee away, you see, when he comes to reign. We are being asked to bear God into the world, just as Mary did. And just like Mary, we know that this is not going to be easy, and it's going to change everything. Are we brave enough to do this, knowing that if God's kingdom really comes, our lives change forever? Are we willing to be cast down, emptied out, so that God may be raised up?

This labor, this bringing about the Kingdom of God, will not be easy. But this is Christmas; the time has come, and our call is to bear Jesus into the world, just as Mary bore him so long ago.

We are called to put flesh on the values of God's kingdom, to put hands and feet and brains and shoulders to work for peace and justice and love.

Come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. Be born in us today.

Merry Christmas.

*The Rev. Jason Cox has served as associate rector for Youth Ministries at St. Columba's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., since 2011. Prior to working at St. Columba's, he directed the Episcopal Urban Intern Program, a year-long service and discernment program for young adults, in the Diocese of Los Angeles. Before ordination, he served as an intern in the Episcopal Urban Intern Program, working with homeless clients in a transitional housing facility on L.A.'s skid row.*

## Prayers

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in Heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever.  
Amen.



### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

With angel song bursting through the heavens, shattering the stillness of this night, you have our attention, God! We praise your name, your gift of yourself, with a joyful noise.

With those who have lived before us and those who come after us, we praise you. As your Church, we are amazed at your goodness. Give your church a sense of awe and wonder as we open our hearts to receive the gift of your very self among us.

***May our lives reflect  
the joy of your good news.***

We pray for our leaders, who pass laws and make decisions that impact lives around the world. May their decisions reflect wisdom and justice and peace.

***May our relationships reflect  
the peace of your good news.***

With people around the world, we rejoice at your presence in our world. With people around the world, we weep with those who are oppressed, hungry, living in fear of violence.

***May our hearts reflect  
the generosity of your good news.***

We pray for those who live and work in our neighborhoods, who rush to our sides when we are in crisis. For those who are crying this night from pain, from broken relationships, from loneliness; with those struggling to be born and with those who are dying, we ask your healing and wholeness.

***May our prayers reflect  
the healing power of your good news.***

For those who have died and entered the larger presence of your love, we pray.

***May our lives reflect  
the hope and comfort of your good news.***

Your intercessions are invited either silently or aloud

Almighty and eternal God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully accept the prayers of your people, and strengthen us to do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING**

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks  
for all your goodness and loving-kindness  
to us and to all whom you have made.  
We bless you for our creation, preservation,  
and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable love  
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;  
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.  
And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,



that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,  
not only with our lips, but in our lives,  
by giving up our selves to your service,  
and by walking before you  
in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

## DOXOLOGY

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, ye heavenly Host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

## BLESSING

May The Peace Of God, Which Surpasses All Understanding,  
Bless You With Serenity;  
May The Love Of Christ, Which Will Never End,  
Envelop You in All Hope;  
May The Spirit Of God Enliven You  
To Do That Which You Can't Even Imagine;  
The Blessing Of God---father, Son And Holy Spirit Be With You And Remain With You This Day  
And Forevermore. Amen.

## DISMISSAL

Deacon: Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.  
*People Thanks be to God!*

**Join us by Phone or Zoom at 7:00 PM**  
**Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/116359399>**  
**Dial in to join us by phone:**  
**(646) 558-8656 Meeting ID: 116 359 399**



The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe, Bishop

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