



Shepherd's theme for 2025-26 is "Praying with an Open Heart," based on Philipians 4:6-7. Three characters from Jesus' early life prayed with open hearts, and they experienced God's peace despite the unusual circumstances in which they found themselves. Their prayers were also songs to God—faithful expressions of thanksgiving and trust—because they had learned: When anything happens, pray; trust God will always answer; thank Him!

This Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus, please join us for our Wednesday evening services as we highlight the prayer-songs of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon!

### PRAYING WITH AN OPEN HEART...

...when Life Is Unexpected: Mary's Song | Dec. 3

...with Confident Expectation: Zechariah's Song | Dec. 10

...with Gratitude: Simeon's Song | Dec. 17

### ADVENT WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE

5:15pm Soup Supper in the Parish Hall

6:30pm Worship, with Special Music, Children's Chat

### CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

Dec. 11 ELC Christmas Program | 6p in the Gym, reception following

Dec. 21 Sunday School Christmas Program | 10:45a Contemporary, in the Gym



### ✠ IN THE NAME OF JESUS ✠

**INVOCATION** *Pastor Brad Stoltenow*

**OPENING SENTENCES** *John 8:12, 1:5; Luke 24:29; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6*

P: Jesus Christ is the Light of the world,

C: **the light no darkness can overcome.**

P: Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening,

C: **and the day is almost over.**

P: Let Your light scatter the darkness

C: **and illumine Your Church.**

**ALL: Joyous light of glory: of the immortal Father; heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ. We have come to the setting of the sun, and we look to the evening light. We sing to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: You are worthy of being praised with pure voices forever. O Son of God, O Giver of life: the universe proclaims Your glory!**

### THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT

P: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen!**

### LUTHER'S EVENING PRAYER

*from Luther's Small Catechism*

**ALL: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

**HYMN** # 357:3 & 5 "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

**O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height  
In ancient times didst give the Law in cloud and majesty and awe.**

*Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

**O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.** *Refrain:*

**THE STORY AND THE BENEDICTUS** *Luke 1:57-80 p. 856 in the pew rack Bible*  
*Despite Zechariah's initial disbelief, at the naming of his son  
he praises and prays with confidence that what God says, He will do!*

**BENEDICTUS ~ SONG OF ZECHARIAH** *Please turn to p. 226 in the hymnal*

**CHILDREN'S CHAT** *Trust that God will always answer!* *Jodie Stoltenow*

**SCRIPTURE** Philippians 4:5b-7

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**MESSAGE** "Praying with an Open Heart...with Confident Expectation"

*Pastor Ben Oesch*

**OFFERING** *For giving options: [ShepherdHillsChurch.org/Give](http://ShepherdHillsChurch.org/Give)*

**VOLUNTARY** "Unto Us Is Born a Son"

*String Ensemble*

**COLLECT FOR PEACE**

P: O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen!

**THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4*

**ALL:** 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 and ever. Amen!

**BENEDICTION**

*Psalms 103:1*

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ☩ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

**ALL:** Amen!

**HYMN** # 936 "Sing Praise to the God of Israel"

**☩ TO GOD ALONE ALL GLORY! ☩**

"All people who are without Christ lack life before God [and] are dead and doomed. How indeed can they be expected to have life when they not only walk in darkness but are darkness itself? Therefore Isaiah calls Christ a Light of the Gentiles; and Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, joyfully sings in his canticle, the *Benedictus*: [Christ] appeared 'to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death' and Christ calls Himself 'the Light of the world.'"

"This true and eternal Light continues to shine out of special grace for the sake of the little flock that is to be enlightened by it." ~Dr. Martin Luther

## Benedictus

"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."

*Luke 1:68-79*

## Meditation

During the month of December, as the days become shorter and much of the natural world enters a period of dormancy, take a moment to reflect upon Zechariah's promise of light and life.

Not long before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, a priest, and gave him a wonderful promise—he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son named John, who would prepare people for the coming Messiah. John would preach judgment for sin and call people to repentance. Because he and Elizabeth had no children and were very old, Zechariah knew this would take a miracle, and he could not believe it (Luke 1:18). And because of Zechariah's disbelief, the Lord removed his ability to speak. When it was time to name his son, Zechariah could not fulfill his fatherly obligation to name the child. Instead, Elizabeth said to call him John. But their relatives were confused—why not name the boy "Zechariah," according to custom? Finally, Zechariah wrote "His name is John" on a tablet, and after this the Lord restored his speech.

What he said next is a Spirit-inspired prophecy abounding in thanksgiving and praise to God, the Redeemer. He recounts many of God's actions in redemptive history. He acknowledges John's role in preparing people for the Lord's forgiveness. He recalls God's promise of light to those enslaved by the darkness of death—"the sunrise shall visit us from on high." The prophet Malachi, to whom Zechariah refers, first spoke of this "sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2).

What a beautiful picture of the Messiah bringing light to the dark places of our lives. This promise of light finds its fulfillment in the one who referred to Himself as "the light of the world" (John 8:12). Through the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation through His Son, God offers light to those living through the darkest of circumstances, and He offers life to those walking through the valley of the shadow of death. This is good news!

© 2015 Timothy Shaw. [www.shawmusic.org](http://www.shawmusic.org). Adapted from *Behold He Comes; Advent Reflections*. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

