

Home Service for December 28, 2025

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

How can we sing Christ's praise in an imperfect world? By remembering that we are lifted, carried, and redeemed by God's perfect love.

Call to Worship:

Praise the God of mercy and love. Praise God with angels in the highest heavens. Praise Christ, who came as a child. Praise Christ with all God's children, young and old alike. Praise the Holy Spirit, who calls us here. Praise the Spirit from the depths of our souls.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, we come into your presence with joy in this holiday season. But we also come with sorrow for a world struggling in pain. Bring hope to our weary world. Bring love to our hearts. Bring joy to our lives. And help us bring hope, love, and joy, as we follow your Son, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, we yearn to be merciful and gracious, as you have been merciful and gracious to us. Grant us the mercy to redeem our lives, and give us the strength to live as those who are redeemed. Help us resist the forces of evil and cruelty that kill our hope and destroy our souls. Fill us with your light and love, that we may overflow with mercy, compassion, help, and hope for our world. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

In love and mercy, God redeems us.

In grace and joy, God lifts us.

In strength and security,

God carries us all the days of our lives.

Read Psalm 148

Praise the Lord.^[a]

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for at his command they were created,
⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

⁷ Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

¹² young men and women,
old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn,^[b]
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the Lord.

Prayers of the People:

The holiday is over but the work of Christmas is just beginning. Guide us, loving God, as we follow in the footsteps of the one whose birth we celebrate. Grant us the grace to order our lives so that others might know that we have knelt in Bethlehem and worshiped the newborn king. On the threshold of this new year, let us remember to follow the star instead of the crowd. If we lose our way, help us to remember, O God, the angel songs and the gift born to us in the darkness of night and in the depth of winter that we might have life and have it abundantly.

As the light from the star guided the wise men of old, O God, so might your love shine from within us to encircle and embrace all those who have lost their way. Nowhere is the spirit of Christmas more radiantly present than in the simple faith of a child. We claim that faith as our own in the name of the Christ child, born to us this holy season.

The holiday is over but the work of Christmas is just beginning. Let it begin with us as we pray with gratitude the prayer of the one who calls us to new life, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to say when we pray together

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 and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Isaiah 63:7-9

I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord,
the deeds for which he is to be praised,
according to all the Lord has done for us—
yes, the many good things
he has done for Israel,
according to his compassion and many kindnesses.

⁸ He said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will be true to me";
and so he became their Savior.

⁹ In all their distress he too was distressed,

and the angel of his presence saved them.^[a]
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 2:10-18

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.^[a] ¹² He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises.”^[b]

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”^[c]

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”^[d]

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them,^[e] fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 2:13-23

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^[a]

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^[b]

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Message

2025 is quickly drawing to a close. The holiday season is just about over. The rush of preparation has culminated in a few hours of quality time spent with friends and family, but now that is done. The gifts have been opened; the food has been eaten. So, now what? The hectic pace of the holiday season can leave us longing for a break. It can also leave us with a sense of melancholy, a sense of sadness. The tinsel and the glitter, the lights and the decorations, the smells and the sounds of Christmas, everything is replaced now, with the mundane sameness of life. Many people struggle with the post-holiday-blahs. So, now what?

I wonder if Mary and Joseph felt some of those same things. The excitement of the Son of God being born that night, the visit of the shepherds, and sometime after that there was the visit of the Magi from the east, bringing gifts. But now what? Those things are done, they are in the past, distant memories for Mary and Joseph. Now they had to set about the task of raising a family, making a living and all the excitement of the moment is gone. I wonder if they struggle with the post-holiday blahs? God did not let them, did he? He did not allow the holy family to live a peaceful and quiet life in Bethlehem for very long. Things could not be peaceful and quiet, because the baby they were raising was the very Son of God, the Savior of the world. The evil of the world would try to assassinate the Savior. Mary and Joseph would have to be placed into what we could call God’s witness protection program for a while. Eventually, they would move back to their small hometown up north after things settled down. There was no time for Mary and Joseph to get comfortable in Bethlehem.

For you and I as Christians living at this time, the events we are looking at today have a great deal of significance. As we sit here, at the end of the year, as all the holiday type things coming to a close, and we ask ourselves, now what? God answers that question this morning, through his Word. There is much ahead, much to think about, much to look forward to, and he shows us what those things are today as we focus on these early days in the life of our Savior. Think about it for a moment, it was the middle of the night, and Joseph was sleeping, when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." The wise men from the east had just visited Jesus. They had told King Herod that they were on their way to visit the one who was born King of the Jews, and this really bothered Herod. For he was the King of the Jews, or so he thought. He wondered if this newborn child would be a threat to his throne. The wise men didn't return like he thought they would, and this really upset him. Any threat to his position of power must be eliminated. He had already killed relatives who he saw as a threat. And so very soon, maybe even the next day, Herod would send his soldiers into Bethlehem to massacre all boys under the age of two. "Get up, Joseph," the angel said. "Get out of here as fast as you possibly can." Evil was behind this whole thing and this was evil's first attempt to assassinate the Messiah. And so, Joseph got up in the middle of the night, and he and Jesus and Mary made their way to Egypt, where they stayed until the death of the original King Herod.

Do you see the two things that happen here? Evil loses, and a prophecy is fulfilled. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When the prophet Hosea wrote that, he was referring to the nation of Israel, God's Son, being called out of the slavery of Egypt into the promise land. But here, the Holy Spirit teaches us in Matthew that this also applies to Jesus, just as God called the nation of Israel out of Egypt, so also God called his son Jesus out of Egypt.

So, now what? Joseph, Jesus, and Mary are living with a group of Jews in Egypt, but not for very long. Herod dies, and an angel of the Lord appears in a dream to Joseph again, and tells him that it is safe for him to go back to the land of Israel. So, Joseph and Jesus and Mary return to Israel, but something is wrong, Herod's son, was in charge now, and he was just as bad as his father. Once again, Joseph was warned in a dream to leave the area. He moves north, to the town of Nazareth in Galilee, and that is where he stayed. Once again, Evil loses, the Messiah is safe, and a prophecy is fulfilled. And so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." The prophets of the Old Testament never wrote this prophecy down, but it was understood that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene, a despised person from a small town in the middle of nowhere.

Evil went to work right after Jesus was born. But his plans did not work. Instead, he loses, and prophecies are fulfilled. Evil is still at work today, and right after Christmas, it seems that he works extra hard, especially on Christians. He wants you to not only put your decorations away, but to put your joy away, and your faith away. “You can stop being religious now,” Evil says. “You can stop being joyful now. Christmas is over.” It is time to get back to the regular things of life.” Evil attacks us with these thoughts, and unfortunately, we sometimes listen. We become melancholy, the birth of Jesus Christ fades into the past. Our desire to worship goes down with the lights. Our joy disappears with the wrapping paper.

Maybe our joy and desire disappear because we have bought too much into the world’s thinking, maybe more than we realize. Perhaps we believe the equation: happiness equals material things. If lasting happiness could be found in having material things, and in being able to indulge ourselves in whatever we wanted, then most of us in America should be delirious with joy, and happy beyond description, all the time.

Instead, we find high rates of suicide, depression, child abuse, and other personal and social problems beyond description, especially during the holidays. We find people, and sometimes even ourselves, struggling to stay joyful, because deep down inside we have been let down by the lies of the world, that happiness is found having all we want and being able to get more.

But it does not have to be that way. The Word of God for today teaches us two things, Evil loses, and prophecies are fulfilled, and this goes on even after Christmas is over. Throughout Jesus’ life, evil lost, and prophecies were fulfilled. Think about what happened about 30 years after that first Christmas, really, what was happening was the opposite of our story for today. Instead of Jesus fleeing from harm, Jesus would walk right into harm’s way. Instead of fleeing from Herod and the Roman government, Jesus would allow himself to be executed by the Roman government. Instead of God the Father protecting Jesus, God the Father would punish Jesus, the opposite of our story for today. But even there, evil loses, and prophecies are fulfilled. The prophecies that foretold that the Messiah would someday suffer and die to take away the sins of the world. All of our sins, even those moments when we buy into the lies of evil, all of our sins have been washed away by Jesus on the cross. Evil loses, and prophecies are fulfilled. That is why Jesus was born. And that is what brings us joy, and keeps our joy alive, even after Christmas is over. These two small victories of Jesus, recorded in our verses for today, are just a taste of the big victory that Jesus would someday win for us at the cross, and at the empty tomb.

And so now what? How do we respond to the grace of God? How do we say thank you? How do we glorify the God who has done all this for us? We can live our lives like Joseph lived. What was the pattern of Joseph's life? He listened, and he obeyed. The angel told him to go to Egypt, so he went to Egypt. Go to Israel, so he went to Israel. Watch out for Herod's son, so he moved to Nazareth. Joseph listened, and obeyed. He was not a self-made man, a Mr. Independence, or a I'll-do-my-own-thing-kind-of-guy. He listened, and he obeyed. That is how he responded to the grace of God. That is how he glorified the God who had sent the Savior into his very own family.

We can do the same thing. Today, God reveals himself to us not in dreams, but through his written Word. We can listen, and obey. We can be modern-day Joseph's, people who do not rely on themselves, but listen closely to the Word of God, and obey. Throughout our lives, evil will continue to lose, and God will continue to keep all the promises he has made to us, that pattern will never change. May God bless you with a joy and love for him that lasts long after the Christmas season is over. Amen.

Benediction:

Family of Christ, go now into the world in the blessing and power of the Triune God to resist the misuse of power in our world, to point to the signs of good news all around us, and to work for the empowerment and flourishing of all people, especially the vulnerable among us. Amen.