

Advent 4, December 20, 2020, Order of Worship

Greeting In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Confession and Forgiveness for Advent

Let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires. *Silent reflection.*

Loving and forgiving God, we confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Retore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen. (from *Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 24)

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free—free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God. May you be strengthened in God's love, comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn ***Savior of the Nations, Come*** (public domain) LBW 28, ELW 263

Note: Sing to *Take My Life, That I May Be* (LBW 406, ELW 685)

***Savior of the nations, come; show the glory of the Son!
Every people, stand in awe; praise the perfect Son of God.***

***God the Father is his source, back to God he runs his course;
Down to death and hell descends, God's high throne he reascends.***

***God the Father's precious Son girds himself in flesh to run
For the trophies of our souls, longer than this round earth rolls.***

***Shining stable in the night, breathing vict'ry with your light;
Darkness cannot hide your flame, shining bright as Jesus' name.***

The Kyrie In peace, let us pray to the Lord. For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord. For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. For all these things we pray: Lord, have mercy. Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day **Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, so that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.** (Do you recognize the phrase *Bear your redeeming love to all the world?* It's from our baptism service.)

A reading from Second Samuel, the 7th chapter (7:1-11, 16) Note: Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed (*Sundays and Seasons*, 2021, p. 39)

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you." But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle (portable sanctuary). Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not build me a house of cedar?" Now therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; and your throne shall be established forever. Word of God, word of life.

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26 *I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one (what we just read in 2 Samuel), I have sworn to my servant David, 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" . . . Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him; my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted. I will set his hand on the sea (the Mediterranean) and his right hand on the rivers (Tigris and Euphrates). He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'"* Word of God, word of life.

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A reading from Romans, the 16th chapter (16:25-27) Note: Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity (which we've just read in 2 Samuel and the psalm). Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the *obedience of faith* among all nations (*Sundays and Seasons*, 2021, p. 39) This version is from Eugene Peterson's interpretation of the Bible, *The Message*. (If you wonder why I chose this, check it out in the NRSV or NIV, where the entire passage is one sentence.)

All of our praise rises to the One who is strong enough to make you strong, exactly as preached in Jesus Christ, precisely as revealed in the mystery kept secret for so long, but [which is] now an open book through the prophetic Scriptures. All the nations of the world can now know the truth and be brought into obedient belief. [They can carry] out the orders of God—who got all this started—down to the very last letter. All our praise is focused through Jesus on this incomparably wise God! Yes! Word of God, word of life.

Alleluia *Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia!*

The holy Gospel according to Luke, the 1st chapter (1:26-38), Sermon (page 6)

Hymn of the Day Mary's hymn of praise when she visits her cousin Elizabeth after the angel Gabriel announced to her the Lord's favor. Note: For this gospel passage there are no public domain hymns in our hymnals. Today I invite you to simply read these words of the mother of Jesus, from the NRSV (St. Stephen's Bible) according to Luke, the first chapter (Luke 1:46b-55):

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (The same promise we read about in II Samuel and Psalm 89)

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers (from *Sundays and Seasons*, ELCA worship guide)

God of power and might, fulfill your promise and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

Gracious God, all generations call you blessed. In this holy season we pray for our neighbors of other denominations and faiths, especially our Jewish and Muslim neighbors. Inspire the faith of their people. Cultivate understanding among us and strengthen us in love and service to all our community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creator God, you scatter the proud. Everything we have belongs first to you. Bless and protect the seas, mountains, plains, forests, skies, and soils that surround us. Give us humility as we tend them. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, you humble the powerful and lift up the lowly. We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they hear the voices of people in need. Guide all people entrusted with leadership to create societies in which everyone can flourish. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, you fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. Nourish those who lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Bless the work of advocates, community organizers, and food pantries. Encourage others to provide for their neighbors in need. Thank you for the generous response of your people of St. Stephen and St. John in their collection of goods and funds for those who have not. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Healing God, you pour out mercy to all who cry out to you. Surround with your tender love everyone in need of healing in body, mind, or spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of the powerful and the helpless, you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit upon our congregations and empower us to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your church a place of refuge and healing for all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, you are faithful to the promises you made to our forebears. We give thanks for the ministry of all our ancestors who organized, planned, dreamed, encouraged, and reached out as they served you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying **Our Father**

Closing Hymn

Joy to the World (public domain)

***Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive its King;
Let every heart prepare him room
And heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.***

***Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.***

***No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.***

***He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
The glo-ries of . . . his right-eous-ness
And wonders of his love, and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.***

Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace. Amen.