

Christmas 2, 2021, Order of Worship

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

Call to Worship (Psalm 147:12-20) *Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly (remember, *In the beginning* God spoke all of creation into being). He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like crumbs—who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances (remember, the “laws, statutes, and ordinances of God” are a *blessing*, not a burden). **Praise the Lord!***

Confession and Forgiveness for the season of Christmas

Let us honestly and humbly confess our sins to God. *Silent reflection.*

God of goodness and lovingkindness, we confess that we have sinned against you and our neighbors. We have turned away from your invitation to new life. We have turned away from the lowly and downtrodden. In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins, those we know and those known only to you, for the sake of the one who came to live among us, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen. (from *Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 48)

Hear the good news of peace and salvation! God forgives us all our sins, not through our own work, but through Jesus Christ, made known to all people. With all who have come to the manger, rejoice in this amazing gift of grace. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn *Angels We Have Heard on High* (public domain)

*Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.*

Refrain: *Glo.....ria in excelsis Deo; glo.....ria in excelsis Deo.*

*Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heav’nly song? Refrain*

*Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn king. Refrain*

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 O God our redeemer, you created light that we might live, and you illumine our world with your beloved Son. By your Spirit comfort us in all darkness, and turn us toward the light of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A reading from Jeremiah, the 31st chapter (31:7-14) (God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God's gifts of livestock and food. Young women will express joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.)

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back. I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel. Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." For the Lord has ransomed Jacob (Israel), and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion (Jerusalem), and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

Word of God, word of life.

A reading from Ephesians, the 1st chapter (1:3-24) (In Jesus, all of God's plans and purposes have been made known as heaven and earth are united in Christ. Through Jesus we have been chosen as God's children and have been promised eternal salvation.)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also (you people of Ephesus) were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Do you recognize these underlined words as part of our baptismal liturgy? *You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.*) Word of God, word of life.*

[Paul's writings in Greek are wordy and long and difficult to translate into English. Below is an interpretation, not a translation, of the above passage from the *New Century Version* of the Bible.]

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people—people without blame before him. Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children, through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace, which he has given to us so fully and freely! God, with full wisdom and understanding, let us know his secret purpose. That was what God wanted and he planned to do it through Christ. His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head.

In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. We are the first people who hoped in Christ, and we were chosen so that we would bring praise to God's glory. So it is with you. When you heard the true teaching—the Good News (gospel) about your salvation—you believed in Christ. and in Christ, God put his special mark of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit that he had promised. That Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive what God promised for his people until God gives full freedom to those who are his—to bring praise to God's glory. Word of God, word of life. (Please let me know if this version is easier for you than our NRSV; if it is, should I do it again?)

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

The holy Gospel according to John, the 1st chapter (1:1-18), Sermon (page 6)

Hymn of the Day *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (public domain)

Note: This is probably an unfamiliar tune; you may read it as a poem.

*Of the Father's love begotten ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see
evermore and evermore.*

*This is he whom seers in old time chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long-expected; let creation praise its Lord
evermore and evermore.*

*Let the heights of heav'n adore him; angel hosts his praises sing;
Pow'rs, dominions, bow before him and extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent, every voice in concert ring
evermore and evermore.*

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.

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*, p. 63)

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Glorious God, fill your church with joy. Let your faithful people live as beacons of your redemption. Give wisdom and courage to your church that it may speak with boldness and confidence, even when words of mercy are met with scorn. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

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Show us your faithfulness in the rising and setting of the sun. Place wonder into the hearts of those who search the skies and explore the heavens, and all who longed to see the “Christmas Star” last week. Curb waste and pollution, that all might have clean air to breathe. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Bring all nations and rulers to the splendor of your dawn. Raise up advocates who champion the cause of exploited and vulnerable people. Inspire leaders to be generous and even-handed, that all people might live in stability and freedom. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Come quickly with your healing power to all who seek love, support, and restoration. Dispel fears and shadows. Restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. Bring relief to those who are sick or struggling; and bless all who put themselves in harm’s way in order to provide care to all who suffer from the brokenness of this world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of exiles and wanderers, you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm. Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Keep watch over all who journey during this pandemic. Guard refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers. Protect all who flee conflict in their homelands or abuse in their homes. Tend to those who have no place to lay their heads. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to the boundless riches of Christ, you draw all your saints, from the least to the greatest, to your heavenly places. As you created all things, make all things new again in the splendor of your glory. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying **Our Father . . .**

Closing Hymn *The Bells of Christmas* (public domain)

Sing to *Just As I Am* or *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*

The bells of Christmas chime once more; the heav’nly guest is at the door.

He comes to earthly dwellings still with new year gifts of peace, good will.

Now let us go with quiet mind, the swaddled babe with shepherds find,

To gaze on him who gladdens them, the loveliest flow’r of Jesse’s stem.

Oh, join with me, in gladness sing, to keep our Christmas with our King,

Until our song, from loving souls, like rushing mighty water rolls!

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.