

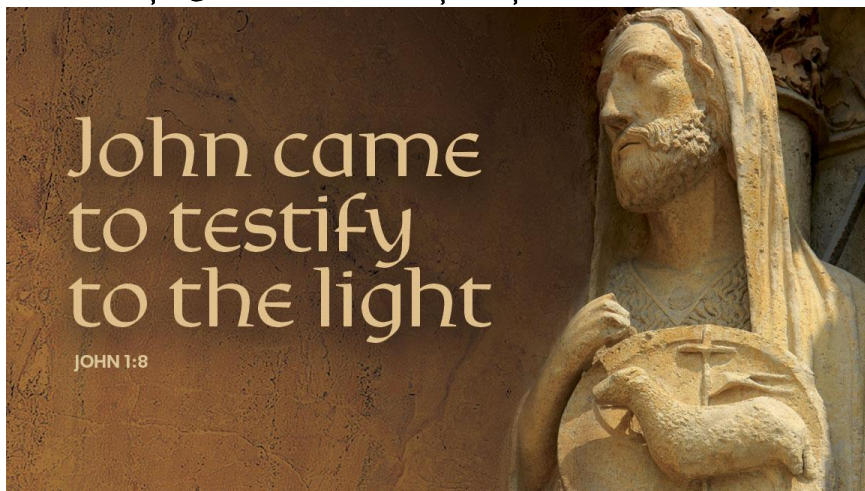
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

A congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

945 W. Round Bunch Rd., Bridge City, TX 77611

(409) 735-4573

Worshiping at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Beaumont



John came
to testify
to the light

JOHN 1:8

Sixth Sunday in Advent

December 17, 2023

PRELUDE Variations on *He Came Down* - David Lasky

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✝ one God, who opens the heavens and draws near to us with salvation. **Amen.**

God is patient and merciful, desiring all to come to repentance. Trusting this promise of grace, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Everlasting God,
you love justice and you hate wrongdoing.

**We confess the fear, greed, and self-centeredness
 that make us reluctant to work against oppression.
 We are complicit in systems of exploitation.
 We choose comfort over courage.
 We are careless with creation's bounty.
 Look upon us with mercy.
 Turn our hearts again to you.
 Make us glad to do your will and to walk in your ways
 for the sake of our waiting world. Amen.**

Hear these words of assurance: God clothes you with garments of salvation and covers you with robes of righteousness. In the tender compassion of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. God's covenant is eternal, and God's blessing rests upon us all. **Amen.**

ENTRANCE HYMN

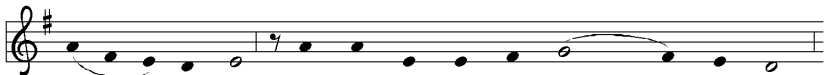
“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Stanzas 1-4, 8

ELW 257



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
 2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things
 3 O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on
 4 O come, O Branch of Jes - se, free your own from Sa - tan's



Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
 far and nigh: in strength and beau - ty come and stay;
 Si - nai's height in an - cient times you gave the law
 tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell your peo - ple save,



un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 teach us your will and guide our way. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
 in cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.
 and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave.



Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

8 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

GREETING

You that dwell between the cherubim, shine forth; **stir up your strength and come.**

Hear me, O Shepherd of Israel, you that lead Joseph like a flock. **Stir up your power and come to save us.**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

LIGHTING ADVENT CANDLE

We praise you, O God, for this circle of light that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, kindle within us the fire of your Spirit, that we may be a light shining in the darkness. **Enlighten us with your grace, that we may welcome others as you have welcomed us. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. Amen.**

KYRIE

ELW S184

Refrain

Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, on our world and on our way.

Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, ev-ry day.

For peace in the world, for the health of the church, for the unity of all, for this holy house, for all who worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord; let us pray to the Lord. REFRAIN

That we may live out your impassioned response to the hungry and the poor, that we may live out truth and justice and grace, let us pray to the Lord; let us pray to the Lord. REFRAIN

For peace in our hearts, for peace in our homes, for friends and family; for life and for love, for our work and our play, let us pray to the Lord, let us pray to the Lord. REFRAIN

For your Spirit to guide; that you center our lives in the water and the Word; that you nourish our souls with your body and blood, let us pray to the Lord; let us pray to the Lord. REFRAIN

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and **open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Please be seated.

CHILDREN'S MOMENT

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the LORD love justice,

I hate robbery and wrongdoing;

I will faithfully give them their recompense,

and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations,

and their offspring among the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge

that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,

my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,

and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,

and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,

so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise

to spring up before all the nations.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM 126

All worshipers are invited to join the choir in singing the refrain as indicated below. The choir will chant the psalm text.



*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. **REFRAIN***

*Restore our fortunes O Lord, like the watercourses of the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves. **REFRAIN***

SECOND LESSON

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Word of God, Word of life. Thanks be to God

Please stand if you are able.

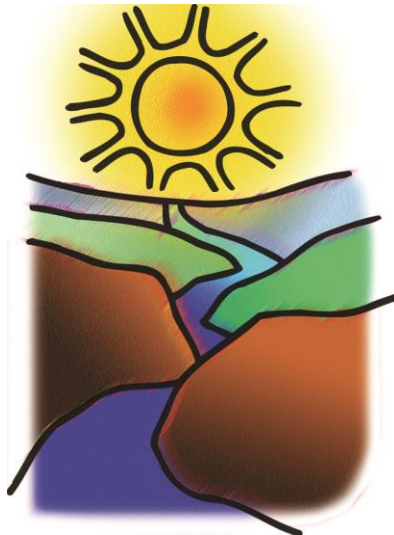
GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Worshippers are invited to sing the refrain; the choir will sing the verse.



Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

I am sending my Messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you.



GOSPEL

John 1:6-8, 19-28

The gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.”

²²Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ!**

Please be seated.

SERMON

Please stand if you are able.

HYMN OF THE DAY “We Are Waiting for Jesus”

ACS 905



1 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
2 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.



We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.



Sun of jus - tice, shine up - on us; we are trust - ing in your prom - ise.
Lov - ing Shep - herd, walk be - side us; stir our hearts, and gent - ly guide us.



We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.

THE NICENE CREED

Let us profess our faith, using the words of the Nicene Creed.

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give your church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You love justice and promise your favor to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and incarcerated. Grant wisdom and compassion to those who work for public safety and all who work within prisons, jails, and courts, that mercy may increase and violence wither away. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Give us strength to pray for our world without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need (*especially*). Provide for all without adequate housing, food, employment, or access to health care. Empower us as helpers and advocates. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Open our hearts to those who serve as truth-tellers in our church and in our society. Bless leaders in church and society in their task of proclamation. Amplify voices of peacemakers, advocates, and especially those whose voices are ignored or marginalized. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

With gratitude we rejoice in the saints who witnessed to your life in all circumstances, in whom your Spirit was not quenched, even in death. Through them, teach us always to hold fast to what is good. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy. **Amen.**

SHARING THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

Please be seated.

RECEIVING OUR OFFERINGS

ANTHEM

“There’s a Voice in the Wilderness”
arr. Anne Krentz Organ

OFFERING PRAYER *Those who are able shall stand.*

Let us pray. God our provider, by your merciful hand abundance springs up from the earth. **Receive and bless these gifts of your own bounty. Let them be a sign of your steadfast love and faithfulness for all people, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

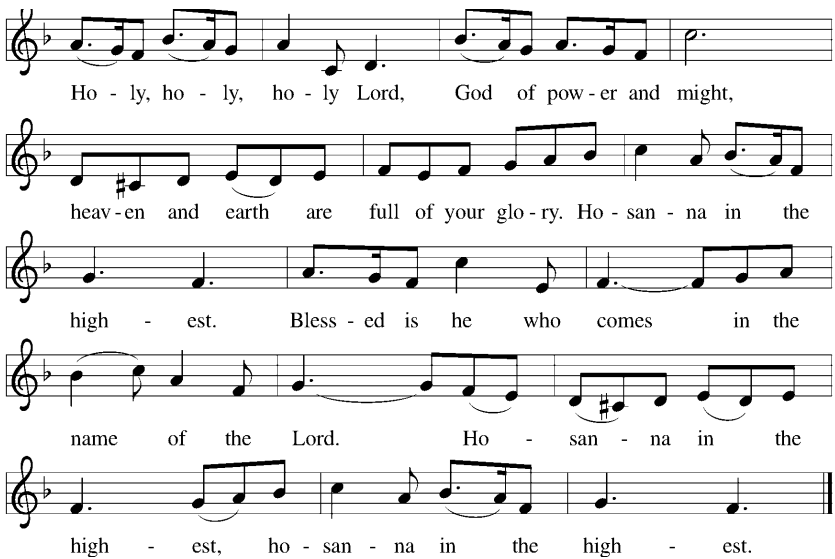
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You comforted your people with the promise of the Redeemer, through whom you will also make all things new in the day when he comes to judge the world in righteousness. And so, with all the saints, with the choirs of angels and all the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

SANCTUS

ELW 193



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er and might,
heav - en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the
high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the
high - est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life: Blessed are you for the birth of creation. Blessed are you in the darkness and in

the light. Blessed are you for your promise to your people. Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams. Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will. Blessed are you for your Son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

With this bread and cup we remember your Word dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection. We look with hope for his coming.

All praise and glory are yours, Holy One of Israel, Word of God incarnate, Power of the Most High, one God, now and forever.



THE LORD'S PRAYER

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

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.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

In this meal, righteousness and peace meet together. Come, take your place at the table.

Please be seated.

LAMB OF GOD

ELW 195

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on
us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

COMMUNION PRAYER *Please stand if you are able.*

Let us pray. Generous God, in bread and cup you have revealed your glory for all people to see together. **Nourished by this meal, send us out to proclaim your good news of liberation and release, brought to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN

“He Came Down”

ELW 253



- 1 He came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love;
- 2 He came down that we may have light; he came down that we may have light;
- 3 He came down that we may have peace; he came down that we may have peace;
- 4 He came down that we may have joy; he came down that we may have joy;



he came down that we may have love;
he came down that we may have light; hal - le - lu - jah for - ev - er - more.
he came down that we may have peace;
he came down that we may have joy;

DISMISSAL

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

POSTLUDE

“As the Dark Awaits the Dawn”

- David Lasky

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Worship Opportunities at Good Shepherd Church, Bridge City



Sunday, December 24, Advent 7

9 am only

Sunday afternoon, December 24, Christmas Eve

4:30 pm – contemporary

6 pm – traditional candlelight with Holy Communion

Sunday, December 31, Christmas

9 am and 11 am

Patterns of Grace

People who sew often use patterns to guide their creations. To make a skirt, suit, or quilt of a certain size, one cuts out the pattern, pins it to fabric, and then cuts along the pattern to get pieces of cloth that are the right sizes and shapes to be sewn together.

In today's gospel reading we find a pattern that is repeated throughout the biblical narrative: a person of faith does something that draws the attention of others, which gives them an opportunity to share the story of their faith. The prophets often performed public actions that led to them speaking the word of the Lord. It is not surprising that the conspicuous work of John the Baptist at the Jordan River caused the priests and Levites to wonder if he was "the prophet."

Early in the Gospel of John we are told that John the Baptist was a witness who would testify to the light that is Jesus. John's answer to the religious leaders' queries continues with the language of testimony, as he confesses that he is not the Messiah. We see the pattern at work here: John's actions are a proclamation all their own, but those actions draw others' attention, and that gives him an opportunity to testify, to share his story of God's way.

This pattern keeps going with us today as God continues to stitch grace into the world. Whose actions of faith have drawn your attention? How have their stories of faith been a comfort or challenge to you? Our actions need not be as ambitious as baptizing a whole community in the river for people to take notice. Our following the way of Jesus will draw people's attention, and their curiosity then gives us an opportunity to testify, to share our stories of transformation, faith, hope, and love.