A photograph of a purple flower in bloom, likely a desert flower, against a background of a blue sky and green foliage. The flower is in sharp focus, showing its delicate petals and stamens. The background is slightly blurred, creating a sense of depth. The overall color palette is dominated by the purple of the flower, the blue of the sky, and the green of the foliage.

The  
desert  
shall  
**rejoice**  
and  
**blossom**

ISAIAH 35:1

# St. Paul's Lutheran Church

25 W. Springettsbury Ave., York, PA 17403

Church Office 717-843-8155

[www.stpaulsyork.org](http://www.stpaulsyork.org)

Email: [st.paulsyork@comcast.net](mailto:st.paulsyork@comcast.net)

[www.stpaulspreschoolyork.com](http://www.stpaulspreschoolyork.com)

Facebook: St. Paul's Lutheran Church York PA on Springettsbury & George

YouTube: St. Paul's Lutheran Church - South George St. York

**WELCOME** Thank you for being with us.

**We are a Christian church within the Lutheran tradition** (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) and we welcome people of all Christian traditions as well as people of other faiths and people of little or no faith. Christian worship has been offered to God in this congregation for 186 years. By worshipping with us today, you become part of that living tradition.

**Postlude** It is our tradition to remain seated for the postlude. If you need to leave we ask that you do so reverently. This tradition developed as a result of our livestream. We want anyone viewing to be able to listen to the postlude without unnecessary distraction. Thank you.

**Restrooms** are available off the Good Shepherd Room (Springettsbury lobby) and the narthex (George St). Baby changing stations are provided in these restrooms as well as in the nursery.

**Offerings** Monetary offerings may be placed in the basins provided at the entrances to the nave prior to the service. You may also donate via our website at [www.stpaulsyork.org](http://www.stpaulsyork.org)

**The Nursery** is accessed through the front right double doors. The 10:30AM liturgy is live-streamed into the Nursery. Currently, we are working to secure volunteer staff for the Nursery. Carrie Oberholtzer is coordinating a schedule. Please contact the office to volunteer.

## Third Sunday of Advent December 11, 2022

**Holy Communion 8:00 & 10:30 AM**

*Musical setting 1 from Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

**PRELUDE** *Zimbelstern Prelude on "Prepare the Royal Highway"* Paul Fey

*Stand turning towards the font.*

### CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*Silence for reflection and self-examination.*

Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we**



**have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen**

Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the **✝** Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

## ENTRANCE HYMN

*Prepare the Royal Highway (ELW 264)*



- 1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; the King of kings is near!
- 2 God's peo - ple, see him com - ing; your own e - ter - nal king!
- 3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen to greet your prom - ised king!
- 4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; it comes from heav'n a - bove.



Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley a lev - el road ap - pear!  
 Palm branch - es strew be - fore him! Spread gar - ments! Shout and sing!  
 Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion its trib - ute too may bring.  
 His rule is peace and free - dom and jus - tice, truth, and love.



Then greet the King of glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry:  
 God's prom - ise will not fail you! No more shall doubt as - sail you!  
 All lands will bow be - fore him; their voic - es join your sing - ing:  
 So let your praise be sound - ing for kind - ness so a - bound - ing:



Ho - san - na to the Lord, for he ful - fills God's word!

## APOSTOLIC GREETING

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.**

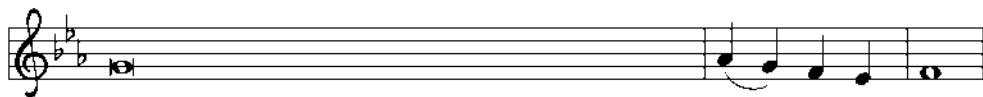
## KYRIE



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



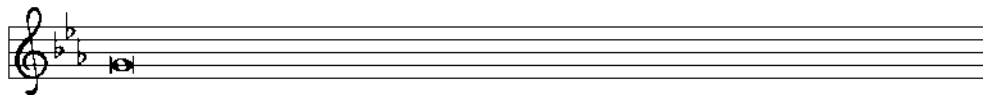
Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



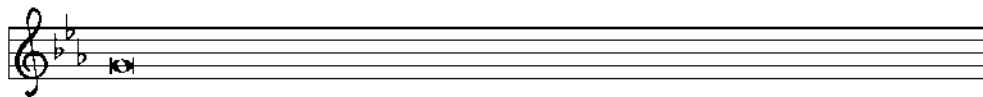
For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.



A - men, a - men.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Almighty God, you once called John the Baptist to give witness to the coming of your Son and to prepare his way. Grant us, your people, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will, that we may witness to Christ's coming and so prepare his way; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

*Sit*

## YOUTH BELLS

*Hark the Glad Sound*

arr. Susan E. Geschke

## FIRST READING

Isaiah 35:1-10 (*back cover*)

## PSALMODY

Luke 1:46b-55

(spoken responsively by full-verse)

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup>**and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

<sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup>**for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

<sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup>**He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.**

<sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup>**he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.**

<sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup>**according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."**

**10:30 AM**

## CHANCEL CHOIR

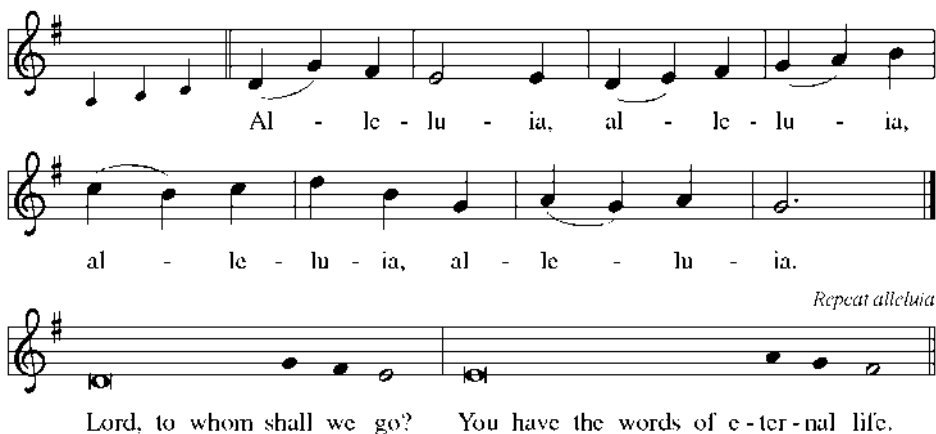
*God Fashioned Love*

Carol Muehlig

## SECOND READING

James 5:7-10 (*back cover*)

*Stand*  
**VERSE**



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia,  
al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.  
Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of e - ter - nal life.

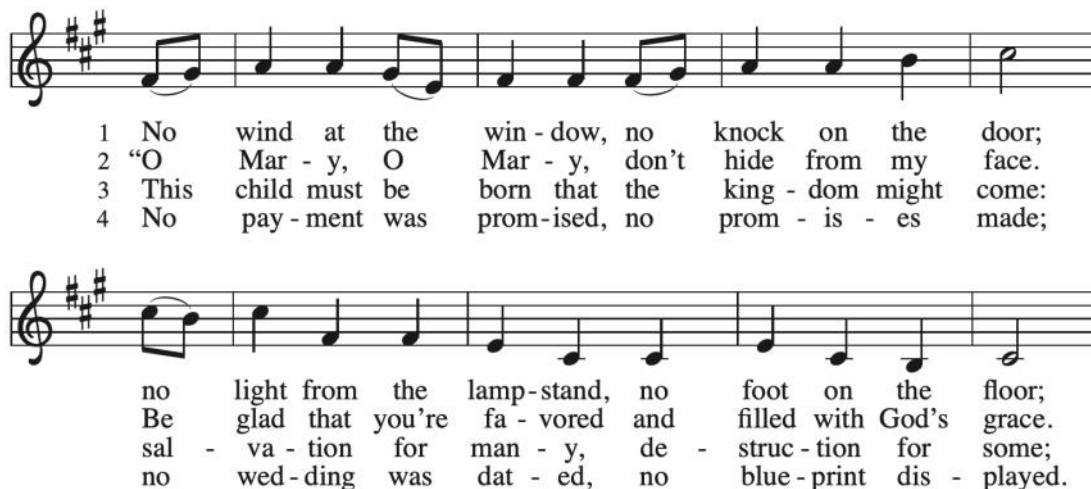
*Repeat alleluia*

**HOLY GOSPEL** Matthew 11:2-11 (*back cover*)  
The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**  
*At the conclusion of the Gospel.*  
The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

*Sit*  
**SERMON**

Pastor Stan Reep

*Stand*  
**HYMN OF THE DAY** *No Wind at the Window (ACS 906)*



1 No wind at the win - dow, no knock on the door;  
2 "O Mar - y, O Mar - y, don't hide from my face.  
3 This child must be born that the king - dom might come:  
4 No pay - ment was prom - ised, no prom - is - es made;

no light from the lamp - stand, no foot on the floor;  
Be glad that you're fa - vored and filled with God's grace.  
sal - va - tion for man - y, de - struc - tion for some;  
no wed - ding was dat - ed, no blue - print dis - played.



no dream born of tired-ness, no ghost raised by fear:  
 The time for re-deem-ing the world has be-gun,  
 both end and be-gin-ning, both mes-sage and sign;  
 Yet Mar-y, con-sent-ing to what none could guess,  
 just an an-gel and a wom-an and a voice in her ear.  
 and . . . you are re-quest-ed to . . . moth-er God's Son."  
 both . . vic-tor and . . vic-tim, both . . yours and di-vine.  
 re-plied with con-vic-tion, "Tell . . God I say yes."

## 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; by the power of the  
 Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man.**

**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 and the Son.**

**With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.**

**He 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**

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

*A brief silence.*

Gracious God, we rejoice in the gifts of your Spirit. Let the church magnify your love and peace in every land. We pray for the work of the Lutheran World Federation, ELCA Global Mission and Lutheran World Relief. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We rejoice in your creation. Revive lands we have squandered and depleted. Cleanse polluted air and water so living things may breathe, drink, and praise you. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We rejoice in your justice. End racism and oppression. Deliver all who are unjustly imprisoned or persecuted. Reconcile nations and peoples in conflict. Help us pray for our enemies. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We rejoice in your compassion. Comfort any in distress because of worry, illness, or loss (*especially June Heistand, Hugh Miller, Bill Diaczun, Kathy Ruth, Wayne Um-land, Jim Yanick, Maria Laczkoskie, Mary Buler, Marcie Walker, Bonnie Schmidt, Jim Young, Gary Bilbie, Erin Bastian, Harry Harman, Katie Guyer, Amy Hollis, Heidi Glaudel, Kristine Gross, Rachel Barnes, Courtney Snell*). Strengthen and protect health care workers, rescue teams, crisis counselors, and all who risk themselves to keep others safe. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We rejoice in your company. Give us calm and patient hearts as we gather with family and friends. Keep us mindful of those for whom this season is difficult. Console the grieving and surround them with loving support. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

We rejoice with Mary, Mother of our Lord, and with all the saints, that your mercy endures for all generations. Look with favor on those who have died and lead us to joyfully sing of your everlasting promises. God, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

## PEACE

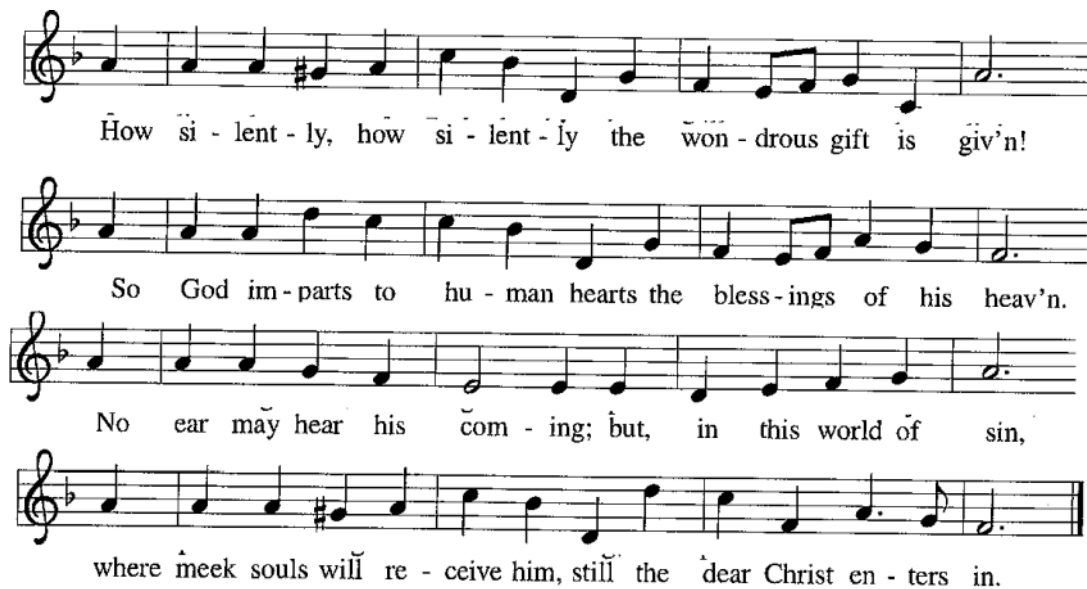
The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

*The people share signs of peace.*



## OFFERTORY

### *O Little Town of Bethlehem stanza 3 (ELW 279)*



How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is giv'n!

So God im - parts to hu - man hearts the bless - ings of his heav'n.

No ear may hear his com - ing; but, in this world of sin,

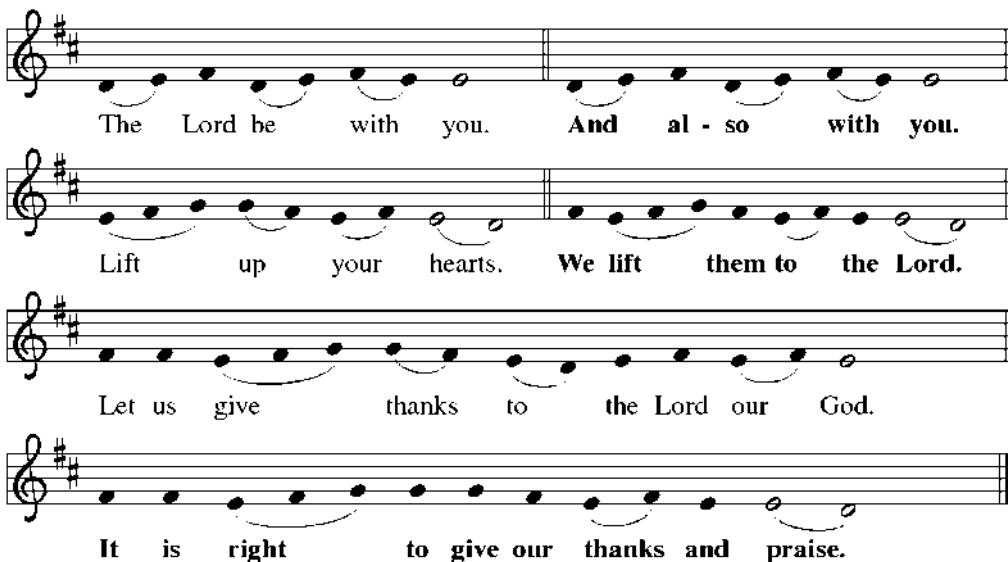
where meek souls will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.

## OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Blessed are you,

**O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

## DIALOGUE



The Lord be with you. And al - so with you.

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

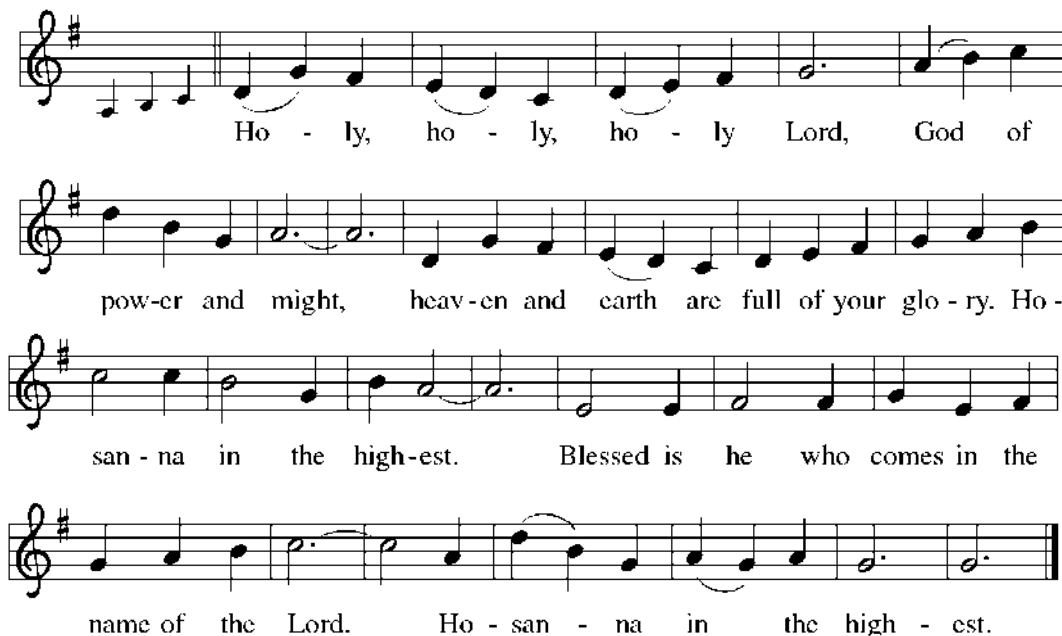
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

## PREFACE

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 choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

## SANCTUS



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. Blessed is he who comes in the  
name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

## EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

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.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

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

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

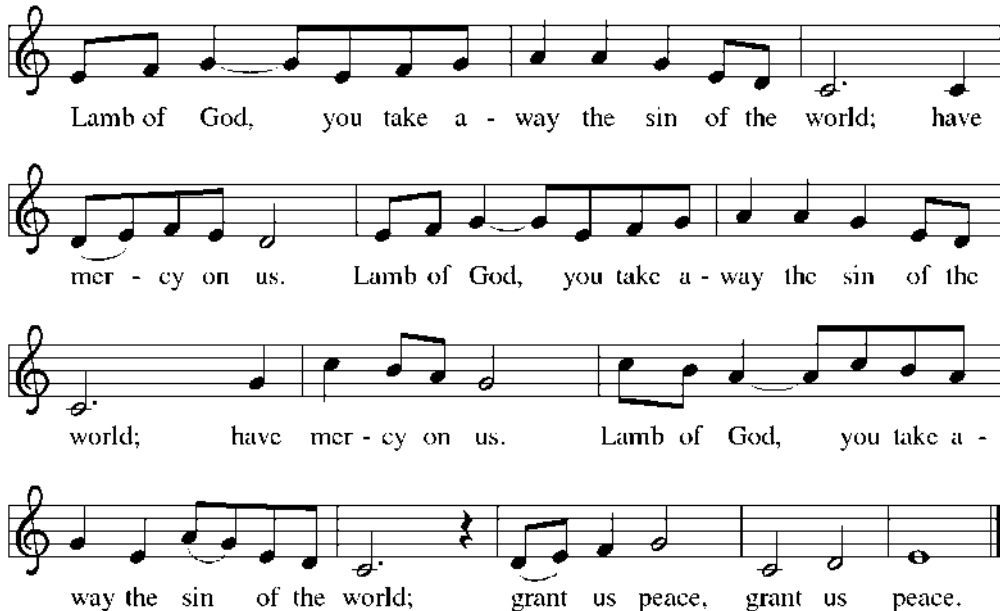
**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**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**

**FRACTION** *A brief silence is kept.*

### AGNUS DEI



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.

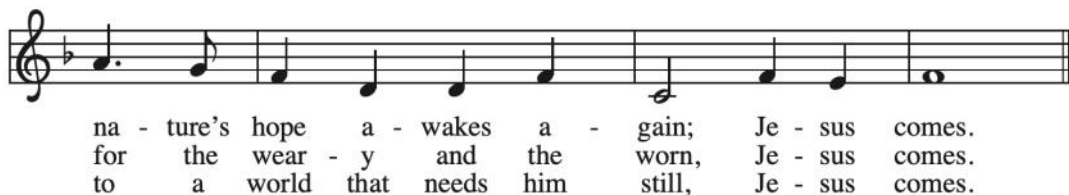
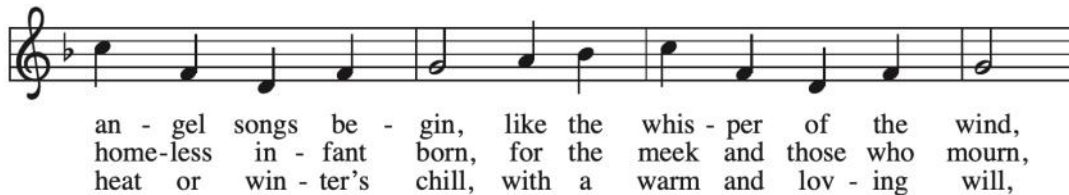
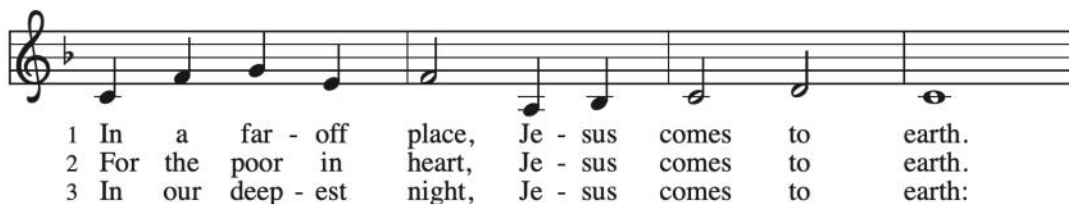
**Sit** *The pastor cleanses hands and prepares for the distribution of Holy Communion.*

## COMMUNION OF THE FAITHFUL

Our Communion is “open” to all believers who trust that the Risen Christ is present for his people in the Holy Eucharist.

1. Come to communion using the center aisle (about 10 adults per side).
2. Communion glasses are placed on credence tables at the front pews (left and right side).
3. Take a communion glass from the tray of glasses.
4. Take your place along the chancel step. The ministers will bring the bread and wine to you.
5. Extend your hands to receive the communion host.
6. Consume the communion host.
7. Hold the communion glass with both hands at chest height so that the communion assistant can easily pour the wine into the glass.
8. Consume the wine before you leave the chancel edge.
9. Place the used cup in an empty tray located on a credence table at the side aisle.
10. Return to your pew using the side aisle.

### *Hymns during Distribution In a Far-Off Place, Jesus Comes (ACS 908)*



## *Comfort, Comfort Now My People*



- 1 "Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
- 2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
- 3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.  
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.  
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be-fits God's ho - ly reign.



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!  
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.  
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad.



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for-ev - er.  
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum-ble fa - vor.  
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

### *Stand*

#### **POST-COMMUNION BLESSING**

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace. **Amen**

#### **POST-COMMUNION PRAYER**

Let us pray. Almighty God, in the Eucharist you cleanse us from our sins and prepare us for the coming of your Son. Make us ready always to welcome Him into our hearts as we receive your Holy Sacrament; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

#### **BLESSING**

Almighty God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Bless you now and forever. **Amen**



# HYMN

## *Before the Ancient One, Christ Stands (ACS 953)*



1 Be - fore the An-cient One, Christ stands, en - robed in cloud and  
 2 Who was, who is, and is to come as ser - vant lived in  
 3 Now in the lat - ter days you call, O Christ, and plead the



bright as snow, five wounds im - print his side, feet, hands, and  
 hu - man sphere; com - pas - sion was his di - a - dem; his  
 prem - ise clear, that pow - er grasped is none at all, and



thorns, the gar - land on his brow. Yet thrones and  
 glo - ry was the gen - tle tear; hu - mil - i -  
 serv - ing shows your Spir - it near. As na - tions



pow'rs fall to the knee and weave a song of maj - es - ty,  
 ty, his pur - ple garb; the heal - ing hand, his roy - al orb.  
 clash and wis - dom wanes, as glo - ries tempt and greed sus - tains,



for what the world ad - mires as gain is not the es - sence  
 Such love drew ire and ire drew death, but God has proved the  
 you bid us choose in ev - 'ry hour the pow'r of love, the



of Christ's reign, and strength is his, and name and  
 tru - er strength, and through all space the host pro -  
 great - est pow'r, that love may her - ald God's do -



might, be - cause he pit - ied hu - mans' plight.  
 claims the name a - bove all oth - er names.  
 main, and you, at last, may come to reign.

# DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

# POSTLUDE

*The King Shall Come*

Michael Burkhardt

**This Week at St. Paul's**  
Church office open 7:30 a.m.—4:00 p.m. Mon—Thurs

**Sunday, December 11 Advent 3**

8:00 AM Holy Eucharist  
9:15 AM Sunday School for all ages  
10:30 AM Holy Eucharist  
11:39 AM Second Sunday Fellowship  
6:30 PM AA meeting Community Rm

**Monday, December 12**

7:00 PM Council Meeting—Christ Hall

**Tuesday, December 13**

9:30 AM Pantry  
6:00 PM Nativity play practice  
Children age 3 through grade 6

**Wednesday, December 14**

10—10:30 AM Pastor & Preschool - Nave  
10:30 AM Scripture Study—Christ Hall  
7:00 PM Vespers—Joy

**Thursday, December 15**

10—10:30 AM Pastor & Preschool - Nave  
6:30 PM Handbells—Christ Hall  
7:30 PM Chancel Choir—Music Rm

**Sunday, December 18 Advent 4**

8:00 AM Holy Eucharist  
9:15 AM Sunday School for all ages  
10:30 AM Holy Eucharist—Nativity play and  
Ringing in of Christmas  
6:30 PM AA meeting Community Rm



Flowers This Week

*The altar flowers are presented to the Glory of God in honor of Bean's 15th Birthday by Joe Kinkella and in celebration of Tyler's 21st birthday by Frank & Earline Jones.*

*Serving the Lord with Gladness*

DATE	TIME	Assisting Minister	Crucifer	Lector	Communion Assist.	Greeters	Ushers	Altar Set-up & Altar Clean-up
12/11 Advent 3	8:00 AM	Bob Reed	Denise Rider	Connie Reed		Pat Scarborough, Kathleen Lemke	Bob Reed, Norma Shue, Ken Hinkle	Kathleen Lemke, Pat Scarborough
12/11 Advent 3	10:30 AM	Aaron Jacobs	Tom Gibson	Scott Herdson	William Snyder	Jim & Nancy Bennett	Dave Kopp, Sandy Dickensheets, Steve Heistand, Dan Mays,	Pat Rudicille, Jerry Briggs

**Guidelines for Worship during the time of COVID-19**

*Wearing a mask while in worship is optional, recommended or required based on the CDC guidelines. Green/Optional, Yellow/Recommended, Red/Required. **The instruction will be posted on the entry doors. Please be sure to bring a mask in the event of required/recommended masking. Disposable masks are available at the entrance to the church nave.***

**Our COVID-19 task force** is assisting us as we remain open. Please thank Dr. Jessica Ericson, Sheridan Palmer, Deacon Harold Sargeant, Norma Shue, and Dr. Martha Thomas for their dedication and service.

## News and Updates December 11, 2022

**Children's Nativity Play, 10:30 AM Next Sunday, December 18** During the service the children of the parish will present a Nativity Play. Please support the children of the parish through your participation on December 18<sup>th</sup>. We are blessed with an incredibly talented group of children and a gifted director for our children's choirs.

**The Ringing in of Christmas, 10:30 AM Next Sunday, December 18** Bells have been rung throughout the centuries to mark both solemn and joyful occasions. At the conclusion of the liturgy on Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> the members of the Handbell and Children's Choirs will join forces to ring in the joyful season of Christmas at St. Paul's. We will add our voices joyfully singing together *Joy to the World* with our thoughts focused on the birth of our Savior.

**Christmas Decorating Tuesday, December 20 at 6:00 PM** The Worship and Arts Committee invites anyone able and willing to help with the church decorating this year on Tuesday December 20<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM. We will work with fresh evergreens and fruit so that our decorations are at their peak for our Christmas services at the end of the week. If you are able to help decorate please notify the church office. Thank you.

**3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Grades Sunday School Class's Mission Project**—The class looks forward to selecting farm animals they can purchase with your contributions of quarters for the "quarter tube" in Good Shepherd Hall or your Advent offerings. In the past, their purchases have included animals as small as chicks to as large as cows to support family farmers globally.

**Advent Vespers**—Every Wednesday we will gather at 7:00 PM for the beautiful service of Evening Prayer. We are host for collaborative services with Grace York, St. Peter's N. York, and Christ Manchester.

**2023 Church Offering Envelopes** are ready for you to pick up in the Good Shepherd Room.

**2023 Calendars** are available for a requested donation of \$20.00. They make wonderful Christmas gifts! All proceeds go towards the construction of a canopy for the Food Pantry.

**Advent Resources** are available in the Good Shepherd Room for all ages. Check it out!

***Thank you to all those who helped to make the York College Concert a success last Sunday!***

**Food Pantry—Winter Items needed:** Rice, beans, Tomato sauce, pasta, mashed potato mix, gravy and stuffing mix for the holidays. We also need paper grocery bags with handles and plastic bags. Anyone able to help can contact Teresa Rohrbaugh, Patty Snyder, or Janet and Larry Moore. Money donations are gratefully accepted. Please place cash or check in a "special" envelope marked "Pantry".

STAFF		
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Youth Director	Kelly Moore-Spencer	kmoorespencer.stpaulsyork@comcast.net
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## **Christmas Worship Schedule**

**Please note the alternate service times throughout the Christmas Season**

### **Sunday December 18 – The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

8:00 AM, The Holy Eucharist

10:30 AM, The Holy Eucharist

*The Children's Nativity Play*

*The Ringing in of Christmas*

### **Wednesday December 21 – The Fourth Wednesday of Advent**

7:00 PM, Candle Light Vespers

*Piano, Flute, Handbells*

### **Saturday, Christmas Eve, December 24 - The Nativity of Our Lord**

4:00 PM, The Holy Eucharist (liturgy sung)

*Youth Handbells, Organ, Children's Choir*

7:00 PM, The Holy Eucharist (liturgy sung)

*Handbells, Organ, Chancel Choir*

### **Sunday December 25 – Christmas Day**

10:30 AM, The Holy Eucharist

*German Chorales*

### **Sunday January 1 – Holy Name of Jesus**

10:30 AM, The Holy Eucharist

### **Sunday January 8 – The Baptism of Our Lord**

8:00 & 10:30 AM, The Holy Eucharist

*With Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism*

There are a lot of images recorded in the pages of scripture. Some are painful and gruesome, while others are life-giving and beautiful. This morning we have an array of images from the beauty of Isaiah's restorative vision; for vitality and health, peace and wellness for plants and animals and people complete with joy and singing, to the imprisonment of John the Baptist and his looming demise, head on a platter.

Following scripture study this week I took note of the blossoming crocus and the leaping deer recorded in Isaiah chapter 35. At our house the deer eat all of the spring crocus blooms and then don't leap away fast enough! They meander along grazing on any other early blooms and blossoms that might be springing up as a sign of hope after a long dreary time we call winter. But even so the painterly side of my being is still enamored with the images put forth from the prophet. Images that do in fact bring joy because deep within each one there is hope.

If the deer don't chomp off the flowers and foliage, then I might get a crack at gathering them in a vase and using them for a still life water color painting. Leaf through the 2023 calendar and take note of the image for September. A better title might have been "the roses that the deer didn't eat!" Last season it was a bit of a struggle; the deer seemed to eat the greatest blooms and flowers leaving me with the least, the less desirable ones to paint.

Greatest and least are categories that present themselves this morning too. The scriptures report Jesus using them frequently during his earthly ministry, especially when he is teaching his followers. This morning "greatest" and "least" are heard in the context of the kingdom of heaven. Heaven language seems a rather odd choice against a back drop of John the Baptist's incarceration.

John is now in prison. King Herod has obviously had enough of his preaching and enough of his proclaiming the power and might and authority of the one who is coming. But the word quickly spread (even to John while he is in jail) of what Jesus is doing. John sends a message to clarify the person of Jesus. "Are you the One?" asks John. "Or should we keep on waiting?" And what John receives back from his followers is an activity report:

The blind receive sight.

The lame are now able to walk.

The lepers are cleansed.

The deaf are able to hear.

The dead are raised.

The poor receive a message that is good news.

After John's followers take the activity report back to the prison to share it with John, Jesus begins speaking to the crowds.

A series of rhetorical questions guides the listener in the direction Jesus wants them to follow. "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at; a reed shaking by the wind?" John spoke with boldness and conviction. "What did you go out to see; someone dressed in soft robes?" John wore camel's hair and a leather belt. "Did you go out to see a prophet?" Well, Jesus says, as a matter of fact yes. And we hear again of the messenger who prepares the way.



Jesus elevates the prophetic messenger John, elevating his stature even while he is weighed down with imprisonment by King Herod. Jesus proclaims his status “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” For those listening, for those following, for those who trust; something astounding is being made known through Jesus.

Greatest and least are categories not limited to Bible use and religious conversation. In the art world it seems that there have always been some who are considered to be greatest and some who are considered to be least. Among the impressionists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vincent Van Gogh didn’t rank well. He was often over looked and over shadowed by his peers. You might even say that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century he was least among artists “born of women.” During his lifetime he sold only one of his paintings. And it was sold to a curator of a local gallery for what is reported to be a very modest sum. At this point in time I would be honored to have even the “least” of one of his paintings.

At an art auction this November, last month, a Van Gogh landscape depicting a blossoming orchard in springtime appeared in the catalog of paintings up for bid. It is one of those pictures that radiate vibrant spring color and its joyful movement across the canvas. It is the kind of picture that makes you smile especially if you have been through a wintry season of life, something a kin to winter; cold, bleak, lonely, closed off and withdrawn. It was part of a series of paintings he did inspired by Japanese cherry blossoms. The starting bid for the blossoming orchard in springtime painting was set at \$80 million. Mind you this was for a picture painted by the least of the impressionists; not a Cezanne, Monet, or Seurat. The Van Gogh fetched \$117.2 million. The least is greatest when viewed and valued by one who appreciates, loves, and can pay the price for such art work.

Jesus is the one who views, values, appreciates, loves and pays the price for us. We are not always the image of a blossoming orchard stretching out ready to bear fruit for for the kingdom. But somehow Jesus sees beyond the wintriness of our lives. Jesus recognizes your worth and mine. He is not put off by the seasons that stretch us thin and wear us down and draw us away from him. This morning he announces to us, his followers, our worth and value through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Here God’s Word coupled with earthly water claimed you, made you an heir of the kingdom and promised you the forgiveness of sins and a place eternally with God; elevating you from the least to the greatest. Through Christ Jesus taking up the cross and its suffering and pain and giving himself fully to redeem the human condition, we are given a value that is beyond human understanding. He did not calculate the cost but willing bore the weight of sin and death for us.

The joyful image for us to ponder is the priceless treasure made known to us in Christ Jesus; envisioned by Isaiah, born of the Virgin Mary, announced by John, and proclaimed through Apostles, saints and martyrs. Christ is the one who sustains us when life is painful and gruesome and when it is beautiful and life-giving. For with him the least become greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:1-10**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
 the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
 like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly,  
 and rejoice with joy and singing.  
 The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
 the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
 They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
 the majesty of our God.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
 and make firm the feeble knees.

<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
 "Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,  
 with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you."

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
 and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
 and streams in the desert;

<sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool,  
 and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
 the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
 the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there,  
 and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
 the unclean shall not travel on it,  
 but it shall be for God's people;  
 no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
 nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
 they shall not be found there,  
 but the redeemed shall walk there.

<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
 and come to Zion with singing;  
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
 they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

**Psalm 146:5-10**

or Luke 1:46b-55

**SECOND READING: James 5:7-10**

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup>You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup>Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! <sup>10</sup>As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 11:2-11**

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
 who will prepare your way before you."

<sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

**Next Sunday's Readings:** Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.

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