

Christmas Eve 2020
The Greatest Gift

SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

Our worship this evening is an adaptation of the *Lessons and Carols* service traditionally held at King's College, Cambridge, England, on December 24th every year. *Lessons and Carols* was first held on Christmas Eve, 1918. It was planned by Eric Milner-White, who at the age of thirty-four had just been appointed Dean of King's College after experience as an army chaplain.

WORSHIP THEME

Welcome to worship this Christmas Eve. We trust that God will bless you in this service of lessons and carols/hymns. Our focus, "The Greatest Gift," is found in every lesson and song. The progression of lessons and songs gradually reveals more and more about this greatest gift. Imagine yourself as someone who over centuries is trying to figure out the nature of God's gift. Or, if the readings are not familiar to you, let the meaning of God's gift become clearer and clearer to you as you hear each lesson and sing each song.

Tonight we see God's gift, in the words of the first hymn, "in that poor, lowly stable, with the oxen standing by." By trusting what God's gift means for us, we look forward to seeing that gift in heaven where God's "praise will sound" for all eternity!

LECTORS

Those reading the lessons tonight are:

Genesis 3:8-15	Mark Mueller	Congregational Chairman
Isaiah 11:1-9	Anthony Perry	School Principal
Micah 5:2-4	James Blount	Elder
Luke 1:26-38	Ronald Feinauer	Head Elder
Matthew 1:18-25	Michael Valus	Elder
Luke 2:1-7	7th & 8th Grade Students of Salem Lutheran School	
Luke 2:8-20	Kindergarten - 8th Grade Students of Salem Lutheran School	

WELCOME

HYMN

Once In Royal David's City (CW 50)

Salem School Grades 1& 2:

*Once in royal David's city Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby In a manger for his bed;
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.*

*He came down to earth from heaven Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable, And his cradle was a stall;
With the poor and mean and lowly Lived on earth our Savior holy.*

Congregation:

*But our eyes at last shall see him Through his own redeeming love,
For that child, so dear and gentle, Is our Lord in heav'n above,
As he leads his children on To the place where he is gone.*

*Not in that poor, lowly stable With the oxen standing by
Shall we see him, but in heaven, Set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars his children crowned, All in white, his praise will sound.*

EXHORTATION AND PRAYER

M: Beloved in Christ: In this Christmas season it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us, the Christ-child, lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the story of the loving purposes of God from the first days after our fall, and into the birth and glorious redemption brought to us by this Holy Child. Let us hear how peace was lost, and how peace is restored.

But first, let us pray, for this is good and right.

Heavenly Father, we pray for ourselves and all people who worship you and your Son this holy night. By your holy Word, lead us to say with the angels,

C: Glory to God in the highest!

M: We pray for your blessing upon the people of our city, our state, our nation, and our world.

C: Glory to God in the highest!

M: We pray for the poor and helpless, the cold and hungry, the sick and sad, that you would give them the joy of your salvation and the comfort of your presence.

C: Glory to God in the highest!

M: We pray for unbelievers and enemies of the Church, that through your Law and Gospel you would lead them to recognize your Son as their only hope for eternal life.

C: Glory to God in the highest!

M: Finally, we remember before you all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light and beauty than we, that multitude which no one can number, who died in faith, and now praise you in your heavenly temple. We confess that we are united with them and with one another.

C: Glory to God in the highest!

M: We humbly offer up these prayers and praises in the words that Christ himself taught us.

C: 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

GOD PROMISES A NEEDED GIFT

FIRST LESSON

Genesis 3:8-15

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

HYMN

Now Sing, We Now Rejoice (CW 34:1,3)

*Stanza 3 speaks of the need for God’s gift and the ultimate “opening” of that gift:
“Death was reigning o’er us...till he opened for us a bright eternity.”*

Pastor:

*Now sing we, now rejoice, Now raise to heav'n our voice;
He from whom joy streameth Poor in a manger lies;
Not so brightly beameth The sun in yonder skies.
Thou my Savior art! Thou my Savior art!*

Congregation:

*Now through his Son doth shine The Father's grace divine.
Death o'er us had reigned Through sin and vanity;
He for us obtained Eternal joy on high.
May we praise him there! May we praise him there!*

GOD'S GIFT IS DESCRIBED

SECOND LESSON

Isaiah 11:1-9

- 11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- ² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

HYMN

Joy to the World (CW 62)

*This familiar hymn echoes thoughts from the lesson
as we jubilantly sing about God's gift.*

Salem School:

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry 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.*

Congregation:

*No more let sins and sorrows 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 glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.*

GOD REVEALS WHERE HIS GIFT WILL APPEAR

THIRD LESSON

Micah 5:2-4

²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

³Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem (CW 65)

*Not to a palace in a city does God send his gift, but to an obscure village.
"How silently the wondrous gift is given" (stanza 2).*

Salem School Grades 7 & 8:

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep And dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears Of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary,
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, The angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing To God the King
And peace to all the earth.*

Congregation:

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts To human hearts
The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming,
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin And enter in;
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, Abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!*

GOD'S GIFT COMES THROUGH A MIRACLE

FOURTH LESSON

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

HYMN

Of the Father's Love Begotten (CW 35:1-3,5)

God's gift is born of the virgin Mary but begotten by the Father from eternity. Note how this hymn comments both on Mary (stanza 2) and the many prophecies from earlier centuries (stanza 3).

Soloist:

*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.*

Congregation:

*Oh, that birth forever blessed When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving, Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world's Redeemer, First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore.*

Soloist:

*This is he whom heav'n-taught singers Sang of old with one accord;
Whom the Scriptures of the prophets Promised in their faithful word.
Now he shines, the long-expected; Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.*

Congregation:

*Christ, to you, with God the Father, And the Spirit ceaselessly
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving And unending praises be,
Honor, glory, and dominion And eternal victory
Evermore and evermore.*

THE GIFT IS “GOD WITH US”

FIFTH LESSON

MATTHEW 1:18-25

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

HYMN

Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel (CW 23)

As God's people in ancient times longed for his gift to come, we long for the ultimate fulfillment of that gift. Through the gift of a restored relationship with God, the way to our heavenly home is wide open, and the path that leads from this life's misery to that home is safe and certain (stanza 4).

Salem School Grades 5 & 6

*Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!*

*Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free
Your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save,
And bring them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!*

*Oh, come, O Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!*

GOD'S GIFT ARRIVES

SIXTH LESSON

Luke 2:1-7

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

HYMN

Away In A Manger (CW 63)

This simple children's song, from late 19th century Philadelphia and Louisville, expresses the confidence that God's gift gives us: "And take us to heaven to live with you there."

Salem School Grades 3 & 4:

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And take us to heaven to live with you there.*

GOD'S GIFT IS CELEBRATED

SEVENTH LESSON

Luke 2:8-20

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

HYMN

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (CW 61)

We celebrate the gift of Christ Jesus to rescue this world from sin and death, to bring ultimate meaning into our lives. The well-known hymn emphasizes our rescue with these words: peace, reconciled, righteousness, life, healing, second birth.

Salem School Grades 5 & 6:

*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all you nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th' incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

Congregation:

*Hail, the heav'nly Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, Ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth, Born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

THE GREATEST GIFT

OFFERING/LIGHTING OF CANDLES

During the offering, acolytes will come to your pew and light the candle nearest the aisle. Please then light the candle next to you until all the candles are lit in your section. When all the candles are lit, the lights will be dimmed. Remember to tip the unlit candle and leave the lit candle vertical.

The members of this congregation have joined together to do the Lord's work in this community and around the world. Visitors need not feel obligated to participate in this offering which supports our ministry.

PRAYER

M: O God, who makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ; grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, so may we also behold him with sure confidence when he shall come to be our judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

BLESSING

M: May he who by his incarnation gathered things earthly and heavenly into one, fill us with such joy that comes with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

And the blessing of God Almighty—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit— be upon you and remain with you always.

C: **Amen.**

Salem School Kindergarten

Jesus Loves Me

Salem School 3rd & 4th Grades

Sleep, Baby, Sleep

HYMN

Silent Night (CW 60)

*Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heav'nly hosts sing, Alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!*

*Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.*

Following the final stanza of Silent Night, you may remain in the sanctuary a moment to reflect on the wonderful gift of your Savior. When you are finished, please extinguish your candle carefully and return it using one of the collection boxes near the exits. God bless you as you return to your home comforted and encouraged by his Word and promises!

GIFT BAGS

Add Christmas for Kids kits to your gifts for the kids in your life! Gift bags from our Christmas for Kids event are available at no cost for anyone who would like to take one home. The bag includes Christmas candy, a craft, and a card explaining how to access the virtual program on our website. Since it is virtual, anyone can participate at any time. Don't forget the Christmas story activity sheet that accompanies the bag, either! Activity sheets are available in three different reading levels. Our ushers will be handing bags and sheets out as you leave today. Share the good news of Christmas that you heard here in this fun way!