



Broadcasted Christmas Worship service.



Welcome. My name is **Katherine Finegan** and I am the Bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Welcome to this Christmas worship service as together, though apart, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. You are invited to participate in this worship experience via the gift of modern technology. To prepare yourself, I invite you to light a candle or light your Christmas tree, and even though we are not in a church building, we gather together in this way to celebrate the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. You are welcome to participate by saying your part as you like from the words which will be on the screen and singing along with the carols and hymns. Leaders of this worship service are from our ELCA Lutheran churches across the Upper Peninsula and Northern Wisconsin and the congregational voices you hear are from the people of Bethany Lutheran in Ishpeming, having been recorded before the pandemic began.

Introduction to Call to Reconciliation- Rev. Jim Duehring, Assistant to the Bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod.

We begin this worship service with an acknowledgement of our failings and need for healing. Because the message of Jesus is at its heart, all about grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, we prepare our hearts to receive that message. And in order to feel that forgiveness, we first need to come to some awareness of how we have fallen short of being our best selves. For example, if some random stranger came up to you and said, "I forgive you," you might immediately ask the question, "What do I need to be forgiven for? Who are you to forgive me?" Jesus caused all kinds of trouble when he forgave the sins of those who had no understanding of their own guilt.

So for us to experience forgiveness, we begin by acknowledging where we need healing and reconciliation in our lives.

Call to Reconciliation –

God became one of us, so that we could see the face of love, hear the voice of peace, be touched by the hand of grace, know the heart of mercy. God comes to us, offering us forgiveness and peace.

Let us pray,

You came in weakness,	forgive our grasping for power.
You came in humility,	forgive us for wanting more than others, more than we need,
	forgive us when we think others are unworthy.
You came in poverty,	forgive us when we do not see the hungry,
	the oppressed, those in need.
You were executed by an unjust system,	forgive us when we do not seek justice for all.
You came in gentleness,	forgive us for the anger we speak and the pain we cause.

Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today: forgive us, heal us, make us new, and send us to make a difference in the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day- Pastor Nicole Hanson-Lynn of Zion and Salem Lutheran Churches, Ironwood, Mi..

Introduction: Together we pray the **Prayer of the Day** which centers us on the purpose of our time together. In this prayer we ask for the Holy Spirit of Christ to be present with you and all who are gathered, to bless this worship, and receive our prayers.

Let us pray – Almighty God, Thank you for the light of Christ that shines in the darkness of our world. Send your Holy Spirit to be with us now. Help us to believe that the one who died and rose, comes to us not only as the babe in the manger, but comes to us now, the living presence of Christ, today and always.

Amen.

First Reading – Pastor Andrea Fluegel of Prince of Peace, Eagle River, Wi.

Introduction: The prophet Isaiah lived and wrote about 7 centuries before the birth of Jesus. In the 9th chapter, Isaiah proclaims the hope that a child will be born to free the people from foreign rule. And yet, in Isaiah’s words we also hear the prophesy of the child that will be born in Bethlehem some 700 years later.

Isaiah 9: 2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Carol: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”.

Psalm – Rev. DJ Rasner - Pastor at Bethany, Amasa and United, Crystal Falls

Introduction: The book of Psalms is a collection of songs, prayers, and poetry written originally in Hebrew by various authors and used for worship, personal devotion, community travel, and more. Our Psalm for today is Psalm 96. It is a Hymn of Praise composed for community worship.

Psalm 96 – with Amanda Rasner, Director of Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

**For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.**

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

**Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.**

Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

**Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established;
it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”**

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming,

**for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and
the peoples with his truth.**

Amanda - Now we join in singing the song of the angels, who sing for joy for the coming of the Lord.

Carol: Angels from the Realms of Glory ELW #275.

Introduction: Rev. Christina Forsythe, Pastor of Porterfield and Beaver American Lutheran Churches.

We read now from the book of Titus, which is actually a letter to Titus written as if from the Apostle Paul, but scholars agree that it was probably written by an anonymous author in the style of Paul, meant to give honor to Paul and add weight to the instruction in the letter for the church. It is suggested that this letter was written between 80-90 AD, to Titus who was leading a church on the Island of Crete.

From Titus 2:11-14 and 3: 4-7 –

¹¹The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Titus 3:4-7

⁴When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Sermon by Pastor Christina Forsythe.

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

So like many of you I had two grandmas. A grandma on my dad's side and a grandma on my mom's side. Now I think it is important to note that these grandmothers were not very similar. Every Christmas we would do the family mad dash to see them both and it was a whiplash experience because of the very different environments they inhabited.

My mother's mother was perfect. She would work so hard for so long to make her beautiful house something out of a magazine. A perfect tree, perfectly wrapped presents, food that was so beautiful you wondered if you were actually allowed to eat it. And while she worked I know she grew anxious because it had to be perfect.

And then, like a terrifying tornado, all of her grandchildren would come spilling through the door, ripping up the presents, scattering the food, being what kids tend to be; monsters. All my grandmother's hard work was gone in an instant. Left for the long cleaning of the next day.

All this being said when we gathered around the table together to share a meal and the adults who hadn't seen one another for a year, caught up, shared stories, spoke affectionately, It was all worth it. There it was the reason that we join at Christmas; Love.

My grandmother on my father's side approached things very differently. A staunch Lutheran all her life, she had really adopted that grace saves you narrative. On Christmas she didn't clean, she didn't cook. She went down the street to the Norwegian woman's house and bought a bunch of lefse. She went to the market and got deli meat. She rolled all that up, put toothpicks in it, and put it on the table along with a heaping, less than beautiful, bowl of pickled herring. My grandfather, a sweet Irish man who always wore four leaf clover suspenders, would always say "Maggie this is the best meal I ever had in my life." He grew up as a potato farmer so maybe that was true but personally I can assure you, her meals were never the best ones I have had. Despite this I bet you can guess what happened on Christmas. We would all gather around the table, catch up, share stories and laugh. We would feel loved and like we belonged there. It was wonderful.

Now here is the question; Which of these two women do you think God loved more? I bet if you have spent at least a little time in church you know that the answer is God loved them both the same. And God would have loved my mother's mother whether or not she worried about how perfect the house might be. That's what it means to be invited to Christ's table. You just come with all your messy anxious imperfections. If you are waiting until you're perfect you will never make

it. When I think about grace I think about how through that love, the Holy Spirit was always visiting both of my grandmother's tables on Christmas. I just think one of them took time to notice a bit more than the other.

There are two parts of Titus today. There is the first part, the one that says who we ought to be, self-controlled, upright, and godly. Then there is the second part that reminds us that we are saved and loved and belong no matter how we act or what we do or don't do. It's that second part that I think about at Christmas. This Christmas is going to be different for a lot of us. Many of us are alone, others are celebrating with few people. Our tables might not be as full. But while Advent is about yearning Christmas is about seeing. And if we pay attention what we find is Christ is there. Christ is always there. He was there in both my grandmother's houses and he is there with you no matter what your table looks like or doesn't look like this Christmas. We feel him in the loving kindness of the world. We feel him when we accept the fact that we are loved and that we belong no matter what. Merry Christmas and Thanks Be to God

Carol: Good Christian Friends Rejoice ELW #288

Introduction: Rev. Andrew Plocher of Messiah, Marquette, MI.

Our next reading is from the Gospel of Luke which was written sometime in the late first century. Luke takes pains to place the birth story of Jesus within historical context, giving us details that happened around the time of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2. 1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

December 24, 2020

Sermon by Pr. Andrew Plocher

An ordinary night.

They had traveled 90 miles, from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Traveling for the census, the government count, for the sake of taxes, of power, of representation.

They were both tired. Tired from the journey. Tired from nine months of anxious hope. Tired of dealing with family, friends, and everyone else asking questions. All the wondering, the whispering. Tired of trying to convince others of their truth. Trying to convince themselves of the truth.

They were tired of jumping through the hopes that never seemed to make the situation any better.

Angels had come to them proclaiming good news. She was bearing the son of God! They were both going to become parents.

There was so much to hope for, but amidst the exhaustion it was hard to see beyond stable floor.

You know this world, too.

Exhaustion.

Exhaustion from being alone too long. Exhaustion from trying to keep people safe, from keeping yourselves safe. Exhaustion from wrestling with the news, the facts, the fictions, the stories that have swirled and twirled in your mind. Exhaustion from worrying about our world, worrying about your community, your business, your kid's school, your church, your family. Exhaustion.

It has not been an easy nine months getting here. It has not been easy bearing the weight of the world.

It may be easier to stare at the empty chairs, the smaller meals, the stockings not hung, than the hope.

Yet Christmas is about hope.

That in the scarcity of our lives, in the exhaustion of our days, and in the brokenness of the world, God is with us. Born as child, vulnerable, crying, messy, and beautiful. Born into the space when exhaustion seems too much. Born into the ordinary. Bringing life, bringing light, bringing hope.

God comes into the ordinary because we struggle to see beyond it. There is just too much. We struggle to see that God is with us. That hope, love, and peace are with us. That we are not alone. Our exhaustion is not who we are.

We are never alone. God is with us.

God came as a child that we might be wrapped in love. That a glimpse of joy might break through the thousand-yard stare of our exhaustion. That joy might lift us and hold us. That the cry of a baby might remind us of who we are.

You are a beloved child of God. Black, brown, white, straight, gay, trans, queer, he, she, they, abled and differently abled, young, young at heart: you matter to God. Lonely, overwhelmed, energized, anxious, put-together, falling apart: you matter to God. Exhausted yet yearning for hope: you matter to God.

God loves you. God loves you.

That is the Christmas message. God so loved the world that he sent his Son. God loved us enough that she enters our ordinary. Loves us enough to enter our chaos and exhaustion.

So look beyond the stable floor. Look up and see the stars. Listen to the carols of the season. Have those cookies. Enjoy the presents, the calls, the Zooms, the cards. See the beautiful smile that God

has thrown into our now ordinary and exhausted days. Hear the cry of the Christ child. It is a cry of love, a cry of hope, a cry telling us that God is with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

You are invited to join in the singing of “O Come All Ye Faithful”.

Carol: “O Come All Ye Faithful”

Introduction: Rev. Katherine Finegan, Bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The gospel of Luke continues with a part of the story that is only in the Gospel of Luke, when the angels visit the shepherds.

Luke 2. 8-20 –

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Sermon by Bishop Katherine Finegan

What is it about Christmas that tugs at the heart so? We seem to feel more, whether it’s joy or sorrow, grief or hope, it wells up from someplace deep and gathers just beneath the surface. And now this year, all the more. I think it’s because Christmas, and everything that goes with it, draws us closer to the holy. Christmas gives us a vision of the way we think things are supposed to be. Our hope for better rises or perhaps we feel the disappointment of what is lacking more acutely. Either way, we reach for the glow and warmth of the season.

This glow and warmth of Christmas begins of course with the glow and warmth of the manger scene. There’s Joseph with his staff, offering protection to Mary as she adores the baby Jesus in the manger. Some manger scenes include shepherds, grown men usually bearded, kneeling in reverence, with a sheep or two at their feet. We look at that manger scene and we might even imagine the sweet smell of clean straw, and maybe a hint of smoke in the chilly air, from a nearby fire. The whole Christmas

story, familiar as it is, paints a beautiful picture of earnest shepherds, shining angels, and a new family resting in the glow of a child's birth.

But if we look a little closer, and think about this realistically, that's not the way it was at all. Anyone who has a stable, or works with animals, knows that the smell around a manger is anything but sweet. You have to watch where you step. And while no doubt the bodies of the animals gave off some warmth, that wasn't all they gave off.

And anyone who has given birth, or witnessed a birth knows that there is blood, and pain, and fear, and sweat. In ancient days, and still today in some places, one of the leading causes of death for women is complications of childbirth. Joseph would have been more than a little worried. I imagine a man who feels in way over his head. And after delivering a child, Mary would have been sore and sweaty and exhausted. The birth of Jesus, just like any other birth then and now, was a messy, painful, scary business, complete with the rush amniotic fluid, the smell of blood and perspiration, the cutting and tying of the umbilical cord and the whole range of human emotions from fear and worry, to doubt and faith, to wonder and love. And that's just around the manger.

Add to that the messy shepherds, who sleep outside, on the ground, surrounded by smelly sheep. For the shepherds bathing is not always possible or even a priority. Sure, shepherding then, as now, is sort of an idealized profession. In ancient times, good kings are likened to good shepherds. But that doesn't mean that people want to actually invite them into their homes, much less stand too close to them. The nature of their work makes them a little stinky. Shepherds are known for being unkempt, unshaven, uneducated, and more often than not, unwelcome.

Add to that the mess of politics. Luke takes pains to tell us what kind of world Jesus is being born into. The Roman emperor Augustus is in charge. And the emperor wants to know how much money he can expect from the people he has conquered, even the poorest of the poor. So everyone needs to be registered. Never mind the expense and time and effort it will take to travel, or that the one who travels is very pregnant. This is not a world in which justice reigns. This is not a world where there are constitutional rights, or a vote, or representation in government. This is a world where the powerful dominate the powerless. This world is a mess.

And yet, Luke would have us know that this is the world into which Jesus is born, a world that is a mess of pain, and fear, and sweat, and blood, and tears and the full range of human emotion and corruption. Jesus is born into this world where the powerful oppress the powerless, where those with no voice go unheard, where not everyone is welcomed, where what should happen, so often does not.

This is Christmas in all its gritty truth, then, and today. Because the world is still a mess. The powerful still oppress the powerless. And we still feel it, deeply, when things are not as we think they should be. Maybe that's why the glowing scene around the manger captures our imagination so. Perhaps that's why we are so drawn to the Christmas story, because we want to believe that here at least, for this moment in time, this season of Christmas, things are more as they should be.

But the power of this story lies in the truth that Jesus comes not only when things are not as they should be, but because they are not as they should be. The world is a mess. God knows it's a mess,

and Jesus comes because God knows it's a mess. Jesus dives into a world full of the mess of humanity. He submits himself to the pain and violence of that mess and comes to us amidst all the things that the Christmas card doesn't show you. He comes to us, he comes to you, in order to bring to you, the presence of God in Christ Jesus. Christ brings the light that pierces the dark, the hope that fights despair, the comfort that bears the grief, and the change that becomes possible through the one who comes to make us new, and invites us to work to make the whole world more of what it could be.

So yes, at Christmas our hearts are full, and our hope rises. We feel the darkness lift as angels sing to shepherds. We see the world as it as it should be, as shepherds are welcomed at the manger, and Mary listens to them and thinks about what they say. And we give thanks that the mess of this world, and the stink of animals, and the blood of birth, and the sweat of labor, and the smell of fear cannot dim the love of God for you and the world, that shines from that manger bed.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Carol: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing".

Introduction to the Nicene Creed – Pr. Warren Geier, Pastor of Bethany, Ishpeming.

Our worship continues with a confession of faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. It is called the Nicene creed because it was formulated at a council of church leaders in the city of Nicaea in the year 325. In this season when we celebrate Immanuel, God with us, we lift up that we believe Jesus was both a human being, and also the very presence of God who lived, died, and rose again, and whose Spirit is alive today and at work in the world.

Introduction: - Pastor Melinda VanderSys, Pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran and First Presbyterian churches of Newberry, MI.

We hope that you've been enjoying this Christmas service sponsored by TV 6 and the Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Most worship services have a time set aside to collect an offering. People, by nature, are generous, especially when they see the needs of their fellow human beings. This year the needs of our neighbors have increased with the challenges of our current pandemic. I invite you to be generous as we welcome your donations to Feeding America which provides food for the hungry across the Upper Peninsula and Northern Wisconsin. Your donation will be put to good use feeding the hungry in your area. Perhaps you have seen their big semi-trucks in a parking lot in your own community distributing food to needy people.

Donations of any amount are appreciated. \$1 donated can be leveraged to help feed a family of four.

Wisconsin residents can donate online at:

www.feedingamericawi.org



Or mail your check to :

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin

2911 E Evergreen Dr

Appleton, WI 54913

U.P residents can donate online at:

www.feedwm.org



Or mail your check to:

Feeding America West Michigan

864 West River Center Drive NE

Comstock Park, MI 49321

Thanks for your generosity and Merry Christmas!

Introduction: Rev. Bucky Beach, Pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Houghton, Mi and Lutheran Campus Minister at Michigan Tech University.

Our Worship service continues with a time of prayer. While we may of course lift up individual needs and personal concerns, this time of prayer is when we join together to pray for the human family, creation, and the world. Each prayer will end with “Lord in your mercy” and you are invited to respond with, “Hear our prayer.”

Prayers of Intercession -

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

A brief silence.

The shepherds sing, “Jesus Christ is born!” Let all those who dare to believe throughout the world proclaim this good news, over the hills and everywhere. Unite the voices of all your faithful people in songs of praise and rejoicing. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Heaven and nature sing, “Joy to the world!” Give respite to flocks, fields, and those who tend them. Come near to us in the beauty of nighttime, the shining of the stars, and the hush of a

world at rest. May our wonder at your creation rouse our care for all the earth. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

The angels sing, "Peace on earth!" Come quickly to still the strife of this world. Hush the noise of war and violence in places of unrest. Inspire leaders of nations to seek lasting peace and sustainable provision for all in their care. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Mary sings melodies of comfort to her newborn child. Bring rest and reassurance to those facing struggles. Shelter travelers and those without homes. Console those who lie awake due to pain or anxiety. Heal those who are sick or hurting, especially those we name aloud or in our hearts before you. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Love sings through the sound of a new baby's cry. Bless new parents and expectant parents. Comfort those who long for children, especially those running out of hope or options. Surround families of every shape and size with your love and care. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

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.

Amen.

Please pray with me the prayer our Savior taught us – Pastor Bucky Beach

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.

Please join me in singing Silent Night – Pr. Bucky Beach

Carol: Silent Night

Closing Remarks – Bishop Katherine Finegan

I hope you have enjoyed this broadcasted Worship service. Whether or not you are familiar with Lutheran worship rhythms or are missing gathering in a beloved sanctuary with family and friends, even so in these strange times, Jesus still comes to you and invites you into a relationship of hope and promise. Gathered in this way, we celebrate that the presence of God with us does not depend on church buildings or traditions, it's not about singing the right song or praying the right prayer. It's about what God does in order to reach you. In Jesus,

God stretches God's own self to earth, so you would know that God loves you, that God is with you, and that this loving, active, and living God does not leave you to face your challenges alone.

I sincerely wish you a Merry Christmas, God's blessings for you and your family, and a Happy and Healthy New Year. Please join in singing our final hymn as we celebrate that God is with us, here and now, in the gift of Jesus to the World.

Carol: Joy to the World

Sponsorship remarks Rev. Jim Duehring

This production is a result of a partnership between the Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and WLUC-TV.

We thank all who helped make this worship service possible, and we thank you for joining us.

If you are looking for a faith community to connect with in your area, please go to the website:

www.churchisgood.org



There you will see a map of our various churches and contact information.

To learn more about the work and ministries of our Northern Great Lakes Synod, please check out our synod website at:

www.nglsynod.org



And you can find us on Facebook at Northern Great Lakes Synod page.

Thanks again for joining this Christmas service and Merry Christmas to all!