**ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH, WOODLAND, MI**

**Third Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2023**

**\*If you are listening in your car, please tune your radio to FM 87.7\***

**ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRELUDE**

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH**

**Read by: The Johnson and Hokanson families**

When God’s people were surrounded by hardship, suffering, and grief, Isaiah proclaimed, The 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; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to 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 (Isaiah 61:1-3a).

We come today as people who are also surrounded by suffering and grief. And yet, the Spirit hovers among us, tending and anointing, inspiring freedom where there is captivity, declaring blessing in places the world has cursed, and igniting fierce joy where mourning and heartache prevail.

**Congregation: We wait as people who experience hardship and pain, yet we are called to witness to the persistent joy that sustains our life as God’s people.**

We light these candles as signs of our shocking hope, just peace, and fierce joy. May our lives shine with the fierce, tenacious joy of the Light who lives in our hearts as we wait and work for the coming of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

*Light three candles of the Advent wreath.* (Verse Three)



**GATHERING**

The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord. (Henri Nouwen)

**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 know, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive 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.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of ☩ Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

**Amen.**

**Gathering Song“Joy to the World” ELW 267 Verse 1**



**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.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray together.

**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.**

**First Reading  Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

A reading from Isaiah.

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.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm Psalm 126**

1When the Lord restored the for- **|** tunes of Zion,  
  then were we like **|** those who dream.  
 2**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.”**  
 3The Lord has done great **|** things for us,  
  and we are **|** glad indeed.  
 4**Restore our for- | tunes, O Lord,**  
  **like the watercourses | of the Negeb.**   
 5Those who **|** sowed with tears  
  will reap with **|** songs of joy.  
 6**Those who go out weeping, carry- | ing the seed,**  
  **will come again with joy, shoulder- | ing their sheaves.**

**Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

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.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel Acclamation**



**Gospel  John 1:6-8, 19-28**

The holy 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.**

**Children’s Program: The 12 Symbols of Christmas**

**Evergreen Tree**

An evergreen has a very appropriate name. It is ever green – always green. It does not become dormant in the winter as most other trees do. The color green represents new life and the needles of the evergreen always point up – heavenward. It symbolizes our everlasting life with Jesus Christ. We should be as the evergreen tree – always full of life, never becoming dormant in our life with Christ as our arms are lifted heavenward.

“The bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven. He gives life to the world.”

John 6:33

**Cookies**

Making cookies is a favorite pastime for most families during the Christmas season. Cookie cutters are used to turn ordinary cookie dough into edible masterpieces. God doesn’t use any cookie cutters when He creates each one of us. He makes every one of us so special and unique that He would have to break the mold after just one use. He is the potter, and we are His clay. He wants to mold us into His masterpieces. We only need to be moldable and willing to follow His lead.

“Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”

Jeremia 18:6

**Ornaments**

Ornaments are used to decorate Christmas trees each year. People look for the perfect ones to fit on their tree. Our Christmas tree just wouldn’t seem complete without our ornaments as they symbolize the blessings in our lives. Our lives wouldn’t be complete without God’s blessings. Everything that we have is due to God loving us so much that He wants to shower us with His blessings. Just as ornaments are all different shapes and sizes, blessings are all different as well. God picks and choose each blessing for us so that it will be just right. The next time you decorate your tree, and as you put up each ornament, think of a blessing that God has given you. I think you’ll find that you’ll run out of ornaments before you can run out of blessings.

“Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.”

Deuteronomy 16:17

**HYMN “Away in a Manger” ELW 278, Verse 1**

1 Away in a manger, no crib for his 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.

**Wreath**

The wreath has its evergreen branches bent in a circle so that the ends touch, having no beginning or end just as there is no beginning or end of Jesus’ eternal love for us. Just as the wreath looks the same throughout and seems to not change, so His Word will always be the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

“Sanctify them (set them apart for holy service to God) in the truth; your word is truth.”

John 17:17

**Bell**

The bell rings out to guide lost sheep back to the fold, signifying that all are precious in the eyes of the Lord. Jesus is our shepherd and He laid down His life for us so that we may spend eternity with Him in heaven. He is calling us to follow Him through His word. Are you going to listen?

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?”

Matthew 18:12

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:11

**Present**

These days the world has forgotten the reason for Christmas. Most people seem to think that getting presents is the greatest thing about Christmas. Other people seem to think that presents have nothing to do with Christmas. Well, they are both wrong. The wise men came to visit Jesus as a young child and gave Him presents. They gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. They offered him gold, as a king, paying him tribute; frankincense, as God, for they honored God with the smoke of incense; and myrrh, as a man that should die, for myrrh was used in embalming dead bodies.

These men, these wise men, saw this baby and knew that He is a king, is God and that He would die for the sins of the world. How can anyone, with the knowledge that we have now, not believe?

“The wise men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, incense and myrrh.”

Matthew 2:11

**Candle**

When a room is full of darkness, it is dark. But, if you light a single match in a dark room, the room is light. There may be more darkness, but the light overpowers it. We are that light. We can be the single light in a world of darkness. We must share our light with the world so that the light increases.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

Matthew 5:14-15

**HYMN “This Little Light of Mine” ELW 677**



**Bows & Ribbon**

Many people spend hours wrapping their presents during Christmas time. They use ribbons, garland and bows to make sure that their presents are as beautiful as possible. What they don’t realize is that the items they use to complete the outside of their gift have more meaning than the actual gift inside. The bow ties our present with a beautiful ribbon, just as Jesus ties us as Christians together in His love. We may not be in the same family, but we are all in the family of God. Jesus is the ribbon that binds us together.

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Colossians 3:14

**Holly**

We see holly as decorations during the Christmas season. But do we really understand what the holly stands for? The leaves represent the crown of thorns that were placed upon Jesus’ head as He was being crucified. The berries symbolize the blood that He shed for us. He endured criticism, pain and embarrassment, all for you and me. The next time you see a decoration with holly on it, remember what was done for you so that He could spend eternity with you. I know that I will.

“and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying “Hail, King of Jews.”

Matthew 27:29

**Angel**

Imagine, you are a lowly shepherd watching your sheep. This night seems no different than any other. Then all of a sudden an angel of the Lord is in the sky above you, telling you of the Savior’s birth. You, a shepherd? Why did God send an angel to tell shepherds? Because the message that God had about the birth of Jesus was for all people! For everyone! God chose His #1 messenger to tell of His Son’s birth. God looks at the heart, not what the world looks at, thank goodness.

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were so afraid.”

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:9-11

**HYMN “Hark the Heral Angels Sing” ELW 270, Verse 1**

1 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 angelic hosts proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
  
Refrain  
Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn king!"

**Candy Cane**

The candy cane symbolizes multiple things. If you hold it upright, it looks like a shepherd’s crook. The shepherds were one of the few people who were able to see the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. If you turn the candy cane upside down, it looks like a “J.” Jesus starts with a “J.” The colors of the candy cane are also symbolic. The red represents the blood that Jesus shed for us on the cross and the white represents the purity of Jesus. There are candy canes with three small red stripes running around it. these stripes symbolize the Trinity – God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Who knew that this delicious simple candy was so profoundly symbolic of our Lord Jesus Christ and His simple birth?

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21

**Star**

The star is a heavenly sign of prophecy fulfilled ages ago, the shining hope of all mankind. The star led the wise men to find the baby Jesus. These wise men travelled many miles following a star in the sky. The star was their “guiding light” to the Savior. God was the wise men’s travel agent, in sorts, leading them to the greatest destination known to man – the Savior. We now have His word as our “guiding light” to lead us to be with Him in heaven. Are you going to follow Him?

“and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, til it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.”

Matthew 2:9-10

**Hymn of the Day“Children Go Where I Send Thee”**

Box and whisker chart

Description automatically generated

Two for Paul and Silas

Three for the Hebrew children

Four for the four that stood at the door

Five for the gospel preachers

**CREED**

Joining with church in all times and places, let us affirm our faith.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,**

**creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,**

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

**born of the virgin Mary,**

**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**

**was crucified, died, and was buried;**

**he descended to the dead.\***

**On the third day he rose again;**

**he ascended into heaven,**

**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,**

**and the life everlasting. Amen.**

\*Or, “he descended into hell,” another translation of this text in widespread use.

**Prayers of Intercession**

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. We pray especially for Bethany Lutheran Church in Kaleva and Rev. Zachary Nelson. 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. We pray especially for all those affected by gun violence, Ukraine, Sudan, Turkey, Syria, and the Middle East. 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.**

**Peace**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**Offering & OFFERING SONG**

The joy of the Lord is my strength,

The joy of the Lord is my strength,

The joy of the Lord is my strength,

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

**Offering Prayer**

Let us pray. Blessed are you, O God, ruler of heaven and earth. Day by day you shower us with blessings. As you have raised us to new life in Christ, give us glad and generous hearts, ready to praise you and to respond to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Thanksgiving for the Word**

Let us pray. Praise and thanks to you, holy God, for by your Word you made all things: you spoke light into darkness, called forth beauty from chaos, and brought life into being. For your Word of life, O God,

**we give you thanks and praise.**

By your Word you called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts: freedom from captivity, water on the desert journey, a pathway home from exile, wisdom for life with you. For your Word of life, O God,

**we give you thanks and praise.**

Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness: forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death, the way of your self-giving love. For your Word of life, O God,

**we give you thanks and praise.**

Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us: renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**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.**

**Sending**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**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 SonG “Go Tell It on the Mountain” ELW 290 Verses 1 & 2**



**Dismissal**

Go in peace. Share the good news.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**Thank you to all who served in worship today!**

**Presider: Jolene Griffin**

**Musician: Martha Yoder**

**Acolyte: Levi Griffin**

**Elder: Jolene Griffin**

**Trustee: Jerry Engle**

**Offering Counters: Jerry Engle & Mike Johnson**

**Safety Person:**

**PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

With thanks for all God’s blessings and his love for all people. Our Bishops, Craig Satterlee Elizabeth Eaton, and the congregations of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. **Bethany Lutheran Church in Kelava, and Rev. Zachary nelson**

Prayers for our friends, for all who are sick or hospitalized and for all health care workers who care for them. We pray especially for all those affected by gun violence, Ukraine, Sudan, Turkey, and Syria All those members of Zion’s family traveling; all those homebound or in frail health; all those suffering with quiet, unknown needs or worries.

For those who serve on our behalf: public safety, utility workers, medical personnel, military personnel. For those who might be forgotten.

**This week at Zion:**

* Women’s Circle, Fireside lounge, 1 PM Tuesday, December 19
* Men’s Coffee, 8 AM Wednesday, December 20
* **Next Sunday, Christmas Eve, Worship ONLY at 7 PM**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

* **Door Locking Policy:** Our door locking policy relies on having a volunteer(s) each Sunday to serve as the Safety Person of the Day. On Sundays where no one has volunteered, if someone arrives at church and is willing to be the Safety Person of the Day, we will follow the door locking policy. If no one steps forward to serve as the Safety Person of the Day, the doors will not be locked as there will be no one to monitor the church cell phone and let late arrivals into the church. Please consider volunteering for this important duty
* **Benevolence Fund:** Please prayerfully consider giving to the Benevolence fund. Through November, we are $1,414 short of our 2023 budget approved commitment of $4,200. If the commitment is not achieved, the balance will come out of the church's general fund. If you have any questions, please feel free to see Karen Heise or a member of council. Thank you.
* **Church Musician Opening**: We have an opening for the position of church musician for two Sundays a month starting in January 2024. The musician would play liturgy and hymns for our Sunday worship services. If you are aware of anyone who may be interested in sharing their musical gifts with Zion, please contact Buffy Meyers. It is a paid position.
* **Call Committee Update:** The Call Committee continues to meet and research candidates from the synod. Please pray for wisdom and patience for the Call Committee and the congregation.

**LAKEWOOD COMMUNITY COUNCIL CHRISTMAS PROJECT 2023**

Here is information about the annual Christmas Basket project, sponsored by the Lakewood Community Council. A Thrivent Action Grant has been granted for $250 and will be used to purchase the children’s gifts and some socks, hats, and gloves/mittens.

The schedule is as follows:

* Tuesday, December 12 from 9 AM-noon: receive and organize food from Feeding America. Set up tables and make up boxes.
* Wednesday, December 13 from 9 AM-noon: Distribute food into boxes.

\*If needed, 6 PM-9 PM: Finish packing food into boxes.

* Thursday, December 14 from 9 AM-noon: Pack letters, meat certificates, seal boxes, number boxes, and tape information to side of boxes.
* Friday, December 15 from 9 AM-noon: Match up gift bags with boxes, sort boxes into communities, set up for distribution.
* Saturday, December 16 from 9 AM-noon: Deliver boxes to families.

Questions should be directed to Claude Smith.