

**SOLOMON'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
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*Here I am, the servant of the Lord*

*"Solomon's Evangelical Lutheran Church, following the example of Jesus Christ, seeks to live in the confidence and fullness of God's grace; to preach the Good News boldly and truthfully; to support and serve others in faith; to work in harmony with all creation."*

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**DECEMBER 24, 2023**

**December 24, 2023**  
Fourth Sunday of Advent

*God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."*

**GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**LIGHTING OF THE ALTAR CANDLES**

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

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

**Amen.**

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

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

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

## GATHERING SONG *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (ELW 257)



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



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



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



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

## 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.**

## Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (VERSE 4)



- 1 Light one can-dle to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 2 Light two can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 3 Light three can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 4 Light four can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He shall bring sal - va - tion to Is - ra - el, God ful - fills the prom - ise.  
He shall feed the flock like a shep-herd, gent - ly lead them home-ward.  
Lift your heads and lift high the gate-way for the King of glo - ry.  
He is com - ing, tell the glad tid - ings. Let your lights be shin - ing!

Text: Wayne L. Wold, b. 1954  
Music: TIF IN VELDELE, Yiddish folk tune  
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## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Praise to you, O God, who lives with us,  
sharing our flesh and bones.  
As Mary waited and Joseph dreamed,  
so we dream and wait for you.  
Bless us and let your face shine upon us,  
more radiant than these candles,  
and more dear than all else we seek.  
Restore us when we fail to refuse the evil and choose the good,  
and banish all our fears.  
We pray in the name of Emmanuel,  
your promised child and our Savior.  
**Amen.**

## CHOIR ANTHEM *Look to The Light*

### FIRST READING: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

A reading from 2 Samuel.

*Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed.*

<sup>1</sup>Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup>Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Luke 1:46b-55**



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*(sung responsively between choir and congregation, beginning with the choir)*

<sup>46b</sup>My soul proclaims the greatness | of the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup>my spirit rejoices in | God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup>**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your | lowly servant.**  
**From this day all generations will | call me blessed:**  
<sup>49</sup>you, the Almighty, have done great | things for me  
 and holy | is your name.  
<sup>50</sup>**You have mercy on | those who fear you,**  
**from generation to | generation.**  
<sup>51</sup>You have shown strength | with your arm  
 and scattered the proud in | their conceit,  
<sup>52</sup>**casting down the mighty | from their thrones**  
**and lifting | up the lowly.**  
<sup>53</sup>You have filled the hungry | with good things  
 and sent the rich | away empty.  
<sup>54</sup>**You have come to the aid of your | servant Israel,**  
**to remember the prom- | ise of mercy,**  
<sup>55</sup>the promise made | to our forebears,  
 to Abraham and his chil- | dren forever.

## SECOND READING: Romans 16:25-27

A reading from Romans.

*Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.*

<sup>25</sup>Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—<sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

*Refrain – All*



There is a long-ing in our hearts, O Lord, for you to re -  
veal your - self to us. There is a long-ing in our  
hearts for love we on - ly find in you, our God.

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## GOSPEL: Luke 1:26-38

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.*

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have

found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

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

**SERMON**      *"Close & Holy Darkness!"*

**HYMN OF THE DAY** *The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came (ELW 265)*



1 The an - gel Ga - bri - el from heav - en came,  
 2 “For know a bless - ed moth - er thou shalt be,  
 3 Then gen - tle Mar - y meek - ly bowed her head;  
 4 Of her, Em - man - u - el, the Christ, was born



with wings as drift - ed snow, with eyes as flame:  
 all gen - er - a - tions laud and hon - or thee;  
 “To me be as it pleas - eth God,” she said.  
 in Beth - le - hem all on a Christ - mas morn,



“All hail to thee, O low - ly maid - en Mar - y,  
 thy son shall be Em - man - u - el, by seers fore - told,  
 “My soul shall laud and mag - ni - fy God’s ho - ly name.”  
 and Chris - tian folk through - out the world will ev - er say:



most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.”  
 most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.”      Glo - ri - a!  
 Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy,  
 “Most high - ly fa - vored la - dy.”

Text: Basque carol; para. Sabine Baring-Gould, 1834–1924  
 Music: GABRIEL’S MESSAGE, Basque carol

## **CREED**

**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.**

## **PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH** *(Please respond.)*

*P: Merciful God, C: receive our prayer.*

## **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.  
**And also with you.**

## **OFFERTORY**     *Melody to Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*

*(Sung in Unison)*

King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
as of old on earth he stood,  
Lord of lords in human vesture,  
in the body and the blood,  
he will give to all the faithful  
his own self for heav'nly food.



## **OFFERING PRAYER**

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

## **GREAT THANKSGIVING**

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

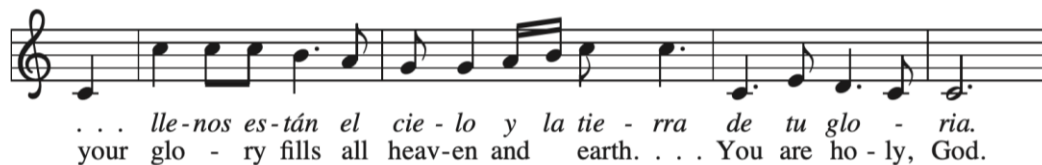
Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them to the Lord.**

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

## **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:

## HOLY, HOLY, HOLY



Text: Traditional; English text, hymnal version  
Music: ARGENTINE SANTO, Argentine traditional  
English text © 2020 Augsburg Fortress

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## THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

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.

## LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

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

**Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

## INVITATION TO COMMUNION

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

## COMMUNION

*Continuous - Please continue down center aisle at the direction of the usher. After you receive the bread, you may take a cup of red wine or white grape juice from the tray. Please place your empty communion cup in the basket. Gluten free wafers are available, ask the Pastor when you come forward. Notify the Head Usher if you would appreciate receiving Communion at your seat rather than walking up to the altar, the Pastor and Communion Assistant will be happy to bring Communion to you.*

## COMMUNION SONG (sung twice)



Text: Dennis Jernigan, refrain of "You are my all in all"  
Music: ALL IN ALL, Dennis Jernigan

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## HYMN DURING COMMUNION *Unexpected and Mysterious* (ELW 258)



1 Un - ex - pect - ed and mys - te - rious is the gen - tle  
2 In a mo - men - tar - y meet - ing of e - ter - ni -  
3 We are called to pon - der mys - t'ry and a - wait the



word of grace. Ev - er - lov - ing and sus - tain -  
ty and time, Mar - y learned that she would car -  
com - ing Christ, to em - bod - y God's com - pas -



ing is the peace of God's em - brace. If we fal - ter  
ry both the mor - tal and di - vine. Then she learned of  
sion for each frag - ile hu - man life. God is with us



in our cour - age and we doubt what we have known, God is  
God's com - pas - sion, of E - liz - a - beth's great joy, and she  
in our long - ing to bring heal - ing to the earth, while we



faith - ful to con - sole us as a moth - er tends her own.  
ran to greet the wom - an who would rec - og - nize her boy.  
watch with joy and won - der for the prom - ised Sav - ior's birth.

Text: Jeannette M. Lindholm, b. 1961  
Music: ST. HELENA, Calvin Hampton, 1938-1984  
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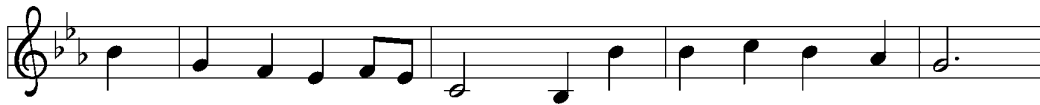
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## COMMUNION BLESSING

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

## POST COMMUNION



1 O Lord, now let your ser - vant de - part in heav'n-ly peace,  
2 Then grant that I may fol - low your gleam, O glo - rious Light,



for I have seen the glo - ry of your re - deem - ing grace:  
till earth-ly shad - ows scat - ter, and faith is changed to sight;



a light to lead the na - tions un - to your ho - ly hill,  
till rap - tured saints shall gath - er up - on that shin - ing shore,



the glo - ry of your peo - ple, your cho - sen Is - ra - el.  
where Christ, the bless - ed day - star, shall light them ev - er - more.

Text: Ernest E. Ryden, 1886–1981, alt., based on the Nunc dimittis  
Music: KUORTANE, Finnish folk tune  
Text © 1925 Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, admin. Augsburg Fortress

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## PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

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

## BLESSING

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

## SENDING SONG *Joy to the World* (ELW 267)



1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re -  
2 Joy to the earth, the Sav - ior reigns! Let all their  
3 No more let sin and sor - row grow nor thorns in -  
4 He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the



ceive her king; let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare him  
songs em - ploy, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and  
fest the ground; he comes to make his bless - ings  
na - tions prove the glo - ries of his righ - teous -



room and heav'n and na - ture sing, and heav'n and na - ture  
plains re - peat the sound-ing joy, re - peat the sound-ing  
flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is  
ness and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his



sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and na - ture sing.  
joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.  
found, far as, far as the curse is found.  
love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674–1748

Music: ANTIOCH, English melody, 18th cent.; arr. Lowell Mason, 1792–1872

## SENDING IN SERVICE

Go in peace. Keep awake.

**Thanks be to God.**

## EXTINGUISHING THE CANDLE/SILENT PRAYER

## POSTLUDE

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## SERVING TODAY

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Head Usher .....	Janice McEntire
Acolyte .....	Norm Kuykendall
Lector.....	Patricia Yetter
Securing Offering .....	Janice McEntire & Ron Coldsmith
Communion Set-Up.....	Peggi & Wayne Norman
Communion Clean-Up .....	Peggi & Wayne Norman
Communion Bread .....	Peggi Norman
Communion Assist .....	Peggi Norman & Becky Mull
Attendance last Sunday.....	49

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**The altar flowers** this morning are placed to the Glory of God in loving memory of J. Austin and Nellie Hess given by Susie, Sally and Randy and their families.

**Welcome Visitors!** We welcome you to our worship service. We hope your visit with us will be a time of blessing. If you have any concerns, please talk to the Head Usher. We invite you to worship with us again!

**Prayer requests for the following:** *Tim Tweedy, Missy Moreui, Becky Ensinger, Ron Bunting, Rose Wishard, Bobby Seilhamer, Sam Mull, Lilly Chiado, Bernie Harris, Phyllis Brehm, Catherine Plummer, Bonnie Hudson, Marty Wenger, Virginia Detwiler, Callie Mummert, Matthew, Lexi and Brooke Bowen, Jim & Carole Darr, Beth Floyd, Sarge and Barb Weaver, Tina Smith, Patricia Yetter, Nancy Marshall, Darrell Veilleux, Linda Wepking, Bill and Jane Brindle, Esther Gift, Jean Jackson, Marjorie McMullin, Joe Mock, Ina Shreiner, Genny Grant, Frances Kramer, Linda Russ, Carol Locke, Betty Amt, Ukrainian Nation, Peace for the World.* If anyone has a prayer request, please call Janice McEntire. **Please Be Aware: If you would like to remain listed on the next month's list, or if you would like to have your name removed from the list before the end of the month, please call the office.**

### **Weekly Calendar Reminders:**

- December 24 - Candlelight Service 7:30PM (Special Music 7:10pm)
- 28 - Choir Practice 7PM
- 31 - Christmas Cantata 10:15AM

**If you are not taking your altar flowers home,** please let Kathy Bowen know to whom or to where you would like them donated. Thanks.

**Thank you, Doug!** Because next Sunday will be Doug Mummert's final Sunday leading the music for our worship services, there will be a basket in the Sunday School room for cards and well wishes, . in appreciation for his many years of dedication to Solomon's worship life.

**If you are in need of pastoral care,** please notify Pastor Mike Allwein at 717-357-3814.  
**Sunday Morning Bible Study** - Pastor Mike 's Bible study is held every Sunday, beginning at 9:00am. We conclude at 9:50, in order to prepare for worship. We look at one of the Scripture texts for the following Sunday. If you cannot join us every week, please join us when you are able! The Bible is our Book of Faith!

**Copies of today's sermon can be found in the office room at the rear of the worship space.** Pick one up before service if this will be helpful in hearing the sermon; or, pick one up to take home if you wish to use it reflect on throughout this upcoming week.

**There are still copies of Pastor Mike's book of "*Musings.*"** If you have not yet gotten one, please pick one up from the Sunday School room before leaving church this morning.

**Immediately following worship on December 31, which includes our Christmas Cantata during worship time, we will enjoy a family dinner in the Fellowship Hall.** This will be a time to be together on the final day of 2023, a time to give thanks for the many gifts bestowed upon this congregation this past year! Please plan your schedule to be able to join together as one faith community for this fellowship meal together!

**Thanks to the families of Solomon's, that graciously consented to purchase new candelabras with money from their loved one's memorial.** The new candelabras will be used for the first time on Christmas Eve.



**DECEMBER 24, 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

*Mary finds favor through God's love.*



**DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Luke 1:26-38</b>	<b>The birth of Jesus foretold</b>
<b>Monday</b>	<b>2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16</b>	<b>The Lord's message to David</b>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Romans 16:25-27</b>	<b>Paul's closing prayer</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 13:1-13</b>	<b>The gift of love</b>
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Psalm 36</b>	<b>Wickedness and God's goodness</b>
<b>Friday</b>	<b>1 John 4:16-21</b>	<b>God is love</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26</b>	<b>God's promise to David</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Luke 2:22-40</b>	<b>Jesus presented in the temple</b>

**SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK**

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." Luke 1:30-31 (NRSV)*

**PRAYERS AND BLESSING**

**A Prayer for the Week:**

Everlasting God, your ways are unsearchable and your love never ending; give us the faith to trust in your Son, child of Mary, and Savior of the World. Amen.

**Mealtime Prayer:**

Dear God, we thank you for this gift of food; give us faith and courage to speak of your steadfast love to all generations. In Jesus' name, amen. (Psalm 89:1)

**A Blessing to Give:**

May God's grace bless you with faith and love.

**CARING CONVERSATIONS**

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- If an angel appeared and told you something, would you believe it? Why or why not?
- How does God's love influence your life?

## HYMN OF THE WEEK

*Love Has Come*



## DEVOTIONS

*Read:* Luke 1:26-38.

When God's love showers down upon us, it can really turn our lives upside down. That's certainly what happened to Mary. The angel Gabriel announced that she was favored by God and would bear a son who would inherit the throne of King David. Mary was given promises that would seem hard to believe, let alone understand. She was perplexed, to say the least. She had no husband. In her community bearing a child without a husband was nothing less than shameful. Bearing a child in those days was one of the most dangerous events that could happen to a woman. Being ostracized by her neighbors, looking at the prospect of pain, and the possibility of death does not seem like divine favor. This is a story filled with risk, danger, confusion, extreme drama, and surprise. Amid it all, Mary responds with her own act of trust and love and says, "[L]et it be with me according to your word" (v. 38). Mary is the embodiment of a faithful disciple, one who trusts the amazing love of God for her and for all.

*Discuss:* Do you think Mary's response to Gabriel is surprising?

*Pray:* **All knowing God, help us to receive your undeserved kindness with courage and love through Jesus Christ, child of Mary, your Son and our Savior. Amen.**

## SERVICE

Jesus calls us to serve our neighbor in love. Based on the Daily Bible Readings and theme for this week, how can you share the good news of Jesus' birth with someone?

## RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

The scripture readings during Advent point to Jesus. This week we light all four candles on the Advent wreath. The fourth candle is the candle of love. Psalm 89 is a praise song to God for all creation: *"I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations."* Think or talk about the ways we respond to God's great love for us through Jesus.

Light the first candle of hope, the second candle of peace, the third candle of joy, and the fourth candle of love and say: ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."*** (John 1:5)