

GATHERING

Advent Candle Lighting—First Candle

Gathering (Advent Candle Lighting) Hymn—

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (verses 1 & 3) ELW 257

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

3. O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on Sinai's height in ancient times you gave the law in cloud, and majesty, and awe. *Refrain*

Text: *Psalterium Cantionum Catholicarum*, Köln, 1710; tr. Composite
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Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure and whose steadfast love endures forever. **Amen.**

Together let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires.

(Silence is kept for reflection.)

Loving and forgiving God, **we confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Restore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.**

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free—free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God. May you be strengthened in God's love, † comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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...**Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

WORD First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—²as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. ⁵You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. ⁶We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ⁷There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. ⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. ⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people. The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 (Read Responsively)

¹Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

²**In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up your strength and come to help us.**

³Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

⁴**O LORD God of hosts, how long will your anger fume when your people pray?**

⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

⁶**You have made us the derision of our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.**

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

¹⁷**Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one you have made so strong for yourself.**

¹⁸And so will we never turn away from you; give us life, that we may call upon your name.

¹⁹**Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

Gospel: Mark 13:24-37

The holy gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] ²⁴"In those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

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

Sermon PRINTED ON LAST PAGE OR PROVIDED LATER

Hymn of the Day “Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn” ELW 242

1. Awake! Awake, and greet the new morn, for angels herald its dawning. Sing out your joy, for soon he is born, behold! the Child of our longing. Come as a baby weak and poor, to bring all hearts together, he opens wide the heav'nly door and lives now inside us forever.

2. To us, to all in sorrow and fear, Emmanuel comes a-singing, his humble song is quiet and near, yet fills the earth with its ringing; music to heal the broken soul and hymns of lovingkindness, the thunder of his anthems roll to shatter all hatred and blindness.

3. In darkest night his coming shall be, when all the world is despairing, as morning light so quiet and free, so warm and gentle and caring. Then shall the mute break forth in song, the lame shall leap in wonder, the weak be raised above the strong, and weapons be broken asunder.

4. Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night, though dark the winter and cheerless, the rising sun shall crown you with light, be strong and loving and fearless. Love be our song and love our prayer and love our endless story; may God fill ev'ry day we share and bring us at last into glory.

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Nicene Creed

Let us confess our faith in the words of the Creed.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

L: God of power and might, tear open the heavens and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. *(A brief silence.)*

L: We pray for the ministry we share in Christ's name. Open our hearts to your call for justice, peace, and healing. Attune us to the needs of the world as you draw near. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

#1. We pray for this planet in need of restoration: for devastated habitats, polluted waters, thawing ice, blazing fires, swelling floods, and long-lasting droughts. Renew the face of the earth and our relationship to it. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

#2. We pray for all people who care for others in our community and around the world. Fill them with compassion and the power to respond with justice for those who are oppressed, with welcome for those who are excluded, and with relief for those who suffer. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

#3. We pray for people who are in crisis as the seasons change: for those without homes facing severe weather, for those who are unemployed or underemployed, and for those in poverty or facing food insecurity. Relieve their burdens, sustain their bodies, and ease their minds. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**



Prayers of Intercession (CONTINUED)

#4. Watch over all of Northwoods STaR Ministries, and guide each of us to bless our communities and churches. May this be our gift to you, Lord Jesus. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

L: We pray for the people in our families and congregations who live with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction, and other invisible illnesses. Ease their suffering and support them when they struggle. We pray for all those on the prayer list — James & Debbie, Dorothy, Mary, Phil & Janice, Jenny, Marcie, Donn, _____ and all those we name before you now, out loud or in our hearts. *(pause)* Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

(Other prayers added here)

L: Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING

Offering (The offering plates are near the sanctuary entrance. Please place your offering there as you depart. Thank you for your faithful support.)

Offering prayer

Let us pray...**Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.**

The 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—Announcements

Blessing

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting,
the long-expected Savior fill you with love,
the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, ✠ now and forever. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You" ELW 241

1. O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright? Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart's delight! Oh, kindle, Lord most holy, your lamp within my breast to do in spirit lowly all that may please you best.

2. I lay in fetters, groaning; you came to set me free. I stood, my shame bemoaning; you came to honor me. A glorious crown you give me, a treasure safe on high that will not fail or leave me as earthly riches fly.

3. Love caused your incarnation; love brought you down to me. Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty. Oh, love beyond all telling, that led you to embrace in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race.

4. Rejoice, then, you sad-hearted, who sit in deepest gloom, who mourn your joys departed and tremble at your doom. All hail the Lord's appearing! O glorious Sun, now come, send forth your beams so cheering and guide us safely home.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676; tr. Composite. Public Domain

Mission Statements

Northwoods STaR Ministries

“United in Christ, Sharing God's Love”

Zion Brantwood

“We are disciples of Christ: Growing in faith, sharing our faith stories, serving others.”

First Prentice

“We are Jesus' disciples: Welcoming every sinner, sharing Jesus' love and teachings, encouraging all to live Christ-centered lives.”

First Ogema

“We are called and gathered to share Christ as we minister to all, bringing an unchanging God to a changing world.”

First Westboro

“Feeding bodies, minds and spirits through Christ.”

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

Grace and peace, from the One who is coming to us— our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ.

On March 11, 2011, Japan was suddenly rocked by an earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear disaster. As the wave hit eastern Japan and countries across the Pacific rim, more than 15 thousand people were left dead in an instant.

Closer to home, we know life can take sudden turns. A heart attack, a stroke, an accident can change lives. And Covid certainly is unpredictable. Yesterday they were here, tomorrow they may be gone. It happens so suddenly. They weren't expecting it— none of us were.

Jesus said, “But that day and hour, no one knows.” Christ will come unexpectedly, like a master coming home in the middle of the night, with no warning.

Advent is a season when we're called to prepare. We often focus on preparing for Christmas— the tree, the gifts, the food. But during Advent, God also calls us to prepare in other ways. The theme for the First Sunday of Advent is always this: be ready, be alert, be ready at all times to meet God because suddenly, the end of your history is going to be here.

Today's Gospel is an invitation for you and me to live in a sense of readiness. Jesus said, “Beware, keep alert, for you don't know when the time will come.” None of us will know when to expect it. Jesus tells us to be ready— be ready at all times to meet God face-to-face. What might it be like for us to be ready to meet God face-to-face?

One example of being ready is if you're an athlete, and you've made a sports team as a sub. You have to be ready in case the starter is injured. Being prepared is the name of the game if you're a sub; you have to be just as ready as if you were on the field. The coach may need you to be ready at any moment.

Just like that coach, Jesus wants us to be ready to be with God now, in this moment, to be ready to meet God face-to-face.

Another example is a first responder or firefighter. They don't know when the alarm will go off; but they know sometime they're going to get that call. They'll be going about their regular lives— working, sleeping, spending time with their families— but suddenly they have to go. It's a matter of life and death to go immediately. They live in a state of preparation, of readiness.

Just like an emergency responder, we Christians live in a sense of readiness. Jesus calls us to be ready to meet God face-to-face any minute.



What does readiness look like for a Christian? We live knowing that each of us is a child of God. If we died today, we would know for sure, without a trace of doubt, that we will be with our Lord Jesus. We can rest, knowing that God is gracious, that God truly knows us inside and out. We know without a doubt that our salvation doesn't rest on our good behavior or what church we belong to. Those things don't matter in the end. What does matter is that we are children of God, loved by God, now and forever.

Remember the thief on the cross? Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." He was welcomed by Christ just as he was— a thief, a sinner. That's pure grace. God says that to you, too— "Today you will be with me in paradise."

You're ready to meet God face-to-face when you're a person of love. Living like you're going to meet God face-to-face tomorrow means doing loving things— for your spouse, your parents, your children, or even that person you don't get along with. We'll be more ready to meet God if we practice God's love in our own life every day.

God gives each of us many roles as servants of God. You may be a spouse, a parent, a sibling. You may have a role at work. You are a friend, a citizen of this state, this country, and God's world. There are so many ways we can serve God by helping others in this world.

When we're living with a sense of readiness, we faithfully do the many tasks that God has given us to do. We serve in a way that makes God proud. We do it so when God sees us face-to-face tomorrow, God will say, "Good job you did yesterday. Well done." Live your life in such a way that God will be proud of the way you're living your life.

The final quality of being ready to meet God face-to-face is to be loyal to the values of Jesus— to love all people as Christ loves us, to care for others less fortunate than us.

Some people believe that if you don't live right, you may be in danger of being "left behind" when Christ returns. Lutherans believe it is important how you live your life, because how we live affects others. The sin of one person affects the lives of others.

It is important that we live by Christ's values. But we Lutherans also believe that how we live doesn't affect our salvation. If we forget the values of Christ, we may hurt people. But we belong to Jesus even though we are sinners. The grace and forgiveness of Christ are stronger than sin. Jesus will not leave us behind, because the Lord is gracious and forgiving. So don't hide from God because you don't measure up to God's expectations. God will always forgive. Who is this passage of Scripture for today? It's for all of us because life changes so quickly. Not long ago, we were children. Every stage of life seems to move faster. It may seem like we have lots of time, but what if your end is tomorrow? What would you want your faith legacy to be? How would you want your friends and family to remember you?

Suddenly there was a disaster and thousands of people were gone; suddenly a health problem took a loved one; suddenly, there was an accident, and someone was gone.

Suddenly... all of life happens too suddenly, doesn't it? And Jesus said to all of us, the end may come suddenly. So live today like you are going to meet God face-to-face tomorrow. Amen