

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

2nd Sunday after Christmas

3rd January, 2021

The Triune God meets with us

The Word became flesh and lived among us,

and we have seen his glory,

the glory of the Father's only Son,

full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 comp)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

We sing the song 'As the old year passes'

1. **As the old year passes
we look back, reflect:
times of joy and promise,
times we'd best forget.
God of the ages
help us walk your way.
Help us greet your future,
seize tomorrow's day**

2. **As the old year passes
sorrow wells within:
loved ones no more 'round us,
all that could have been.
God of compassion
heal each ailing heart.
Guide us to your future
where new life may start**

3. **As the old year passes
we cry for our struggling world.
Climate ever-changing,
fighting too-often heard.
Jesus, you call us**

**to cherish all you give.
Call us to your future
where all in peace, might live**

- 4. As the new year dawns now
we would give you praise.
Faithful God, come lead us
onward in new ways.
We'll love and serve you
in the faith of Christ,
in your Spirit's future;
people of new life.**

*French melody
Arr. Lawrence Francis Bartlett 1933 -
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We confess our sins to God the Father...

We lay down our sins and burdens before God

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

**We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven,
and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our
own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and
bring us to eternal life. Amen.**

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

Amen.

Restore us again, O God our Saviour.

Do not be angry with us any longer.

Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray that the light of Christ shines in us. [silence]

Almighty and merciful God, we thank you for sending to us the light for the world, the Word who became a human being and lived among us.

**Make the light of faith shine within us and be seen by those around us. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.**

1st Reading – God speaks through his prophets

Jeremiah 31:7-14 *The Lord will gather Israel*

⁷ This is what the Lord says:

“Sing with joy for Jacob;
shout for the foremost of the nations.

Make your praises heard, and say,
‘Lord, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.’

⁸ See, I will bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the ends of the earth.

Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labour;
a great throng will return.

⁹ They will come with weeping;
they will pray as I bring them back.

I will lead them beside streams of water
on a level path where they will not stumble,
because I am Israel’s father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

¹⁰ “Hear the word of the Lord, you nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:

‘He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’

¹¹ For the Lord will deliver Jacob
and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.

¹² They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—

the grain, the new wine and the olive oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.

They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.

¹³ Then young women will dance and be glad,

young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
¹⁴ I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,"
declares the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with Psalm 147:12-20

¹² Extol the Lord, Jerusalem;
praise your God, Zion.
¹³ **He strengthens the bars of your gates
and blesses your people within you.**
¹⁴ He grants peace to your borders
and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.
¹⁵ **He sends his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.**
¹⁶ He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.
¹⁷ **He hurls down his hail like pebbles.
Who can withstand his icy blast?**
¹⁸ He sends his word and melts them;
he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.
¹⁹ **He has revealed his word to Jacob,
his laws and decrees to Israel.**
²⁰ He has done this for no other nation;
they do not know his laws.

Praise the Lord.

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

Ephesians 1:3-14 *Paul's thanksgiving and prayer*

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in

the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel Reading – God speaks through Jesus

John 1:10-18 *We saw God's glory in Jesus*

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son,

who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ, Light of the world.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for coming with grace and truth.

Lead us to know God by knowing you.

Amen

We sing the song 'On Christmas night'

- 1. On Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring;
on Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring:
news of great joy, news of great mirth,
news of our merciful King's birth.**
- 2. Then why should we on earth be sad,
since our Redeemer made us glad?
Then why should we on earth be sad,
since our Redeemer made us glad,
when from our sin he set us free,
all for to gain our liberty?**
- 3. When sin departs before his grace,
then life and health come in its place;
when sin departs before his grace,
then life and health come in its place;
heaven and earth with joy may sing,
all for to see the new-born King.**
- 4. And so from darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night;
and so from darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night:
'Glory to God and peace descend
Now and for evermore. Amen.'**

God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

Text: John 1:10-18

There can be times in a lot of people's lives when it is difficult to ask for help. Many of us have been taught from childhood that we need to stand on our own two feet, not rely on others, be self-sufficient, and learn how to handle any situation. There are many self-help plans and personal improvement programs what work on this same idea – that we should be able to handle anything that life throws our way.

What happens, though, when we find that we just can't do what we think we should be able to do? Where do we go when it all gets to be too hard and we can't cope? When life gets too difficult and the stresses, demands or difficulties are too much for us, what happens then?

There are a range of ways in which people can understand the biblical idea of grace, for example in passages such as John 1:14. It's a word that Christians can use a lot, but when we stop and think about it, what do we mean when we talk about grace?

One of the ways we can understand God's grace is that God does for us what we can't do for ourselves, and then God gives us the benefits of what he has done so they become our own.

We read in John 1:14, and again in verse 17, that when Jesus was born into our world, he came to us 'full of grace and truth'. The way we can understand grace here is that Jesus came into the world to do for us what we are not able to do for ourselves so we can live in relationship with God as our heavenly Father. In Jesus, God entered into human existence to accomplish for us what we are unable to achieve because of our flawed and broken humanity.

For example, people often say that we need to be able to love ourselves before we can love others. This sounds like it makes sense, but what happens if, for some reason, people can't love themselves? The good news of God's grace to us in Jesus is that he does for us what we can't do for ourselves. God loves us in

Jesus enough to be born into the world, go to the Cross and die for us. Whether or not we feel like we are able to love ourselves, this love from God in Jesus remains true. God shows us grace by loving us even if we find it hard to love ourselves or if we don't think that we can be loved. This grace actually makes us lovable people and gives us the capacity to love others in the same way.

Another example is forgiveness. Again, people often say that we need to forgive ourselves before we can forgive others. Maybe we have known people for whom this has been impossible, or maybe we find it hard to forgive ourselves for something we have done in the past. For a range of reasons, sometimes we can find it almost impossible to forgive ourselves or other people. That's when the grace of God in Jesus becomes so powerful as God does for us what we can't do for ourselves. Because of Jesus' birth and life, his death and resurrection, God has already forgiven us. Jesus has carried everything that needs to be forgiven to the Cross and nailed it there so we are free from it. By pointing people to the grace of God, who has forgiven us even when we find it hard to forgive, we can find the freedom that comes through the forgiveness he gives us in Jesus, as well as the ability to extend his grace to others by forgiving them in the same way.

There are many ways in which God continues to do for us what we can't do for ourselves as displays of his grace for us in Jesus. God is patient with us when we are impatient with ourselves or others. God is kind towards us when we find it difficult to be kind to ourselves or others. God is compassionate towards us when we are unable to show compassion to others. God is gentle with us even when we are rough on ourselves or others. God sets us free, even when we can't liberate ourselves from those things in our lives that bind and control us. Whatever we need, whatever our lives are lacking, God's grace means that in Jesus he does for us what we can't do for ourselves, and then he gives to us what he has done for us as a free gift so it becomes ours.

God's grace for us in Jesus gives us the freedom to be honest with ourselves and live in the truth. We don't need to pretend to be anything we're not. We don't have to aspire to be anything different than what we are or maintain a façade of perfection or flawlessness. We can be truthful and honest with ourselves, with God, and with each other about our struggles and our weaknesses, our flaws and our mistakes. We can trust that whatever we've done, whatever we might be struggling with, or whatever might be weighing us down, God gives us grace in the person of Jesus. As the living, breathing body of Christ in the world, we can show God's grace to each other as we forgive each other, as we love each other,

as we are kind, compassionate and gentle with each other, just like he is with us. We can extend God's grace to each other in Jesus, just like he extended grace to us when we needed it.

When Jesus was born, he didn't enter the world to give us a new set of rules to live by. He didn't come as a self-help guru to teach us a multi-point plan to achieving everything we hoped for in life. Jesus was born to show us grace, to do for us in his life, death and resurrection what we can't do for ourselves, and then to give us the benefits of what he's done.

Not only does God give us his grace as a free gift, but he also gives us the means by which to receive his grace. We do not need to return 2000 years in Bethlehem to receive this grace. The Word made flesh comes to us here today through his powerful word. As we read and hear the Scriptures our Heavenly Father pours out the Holy Spirit through Jesus to create and sustain faith, that we might cling to God's promises and receive everything he says he will give and do.

Jesus was born to give us grace and truth, so we don't have to pretend any more, but we can rely on him and trust in the grace he gives.

And the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven,

**and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence 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.**

** 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

We sing the hymn 'Song of thankfulness and praise'

- 1 Songs of thankfulness and praise,
Jesus, Lord, to you we raise;
you were shown by heaven's star
to the wise men from afar;
branch of royal David's stem
in your birth at Bethlehem:
songs of praise to you alone,
God in human form made known.**

- 2 You were shown at Jordan's stream,
prophet, priest, and king supreme;
in your Godhead you were shown,
at the wedding feast made known;
you were shown in power divine,
changing water into wine:
songs of praise to you alone,
God in human form made known.**

- 3 You were shown in making whole
crippled limbs and troubled soul;
you were shown in valiant fight,
quelling all the devil's might;
you were shown in gracious will,
always bringing good from ill:
songs of praise to you alone,
God in human form made known.**

- 4 Sun and moon will darkened be,
stars will fall, the heavens will flee;
Christ will then like lightning shine,
all will see his glorious sign,
all will then the trumpet hear,**

**all will see the judge appear:
then to all will you be shown,
God in human form made known.**

**5 Grant us grace to see you, Lord,
mirrored in your holy word;
grant that we may be like you,
pure, as you are pure and true;
may we then your glory see
at your great epiphany,
praise and worship you alone,
God in human form made known.**

*G.J Elvey 1816-1893 (1858)
Christopher Wordsworth 1807-85,
revised David Schubert (1998)
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We give of ourselves

Thank you, Lord, for sending your Son into the world to become a human being and to show us your love.

Help us to praise your glory in our words and in our lives, by giving of ourselves in service to you and to our fellow human beings.

Amen.

We pray for others

By his birth as a human being, Jesus has made the Father known to us. Let us therefore pray to our Father in heaven.

Almighty God, You sent Your Son into our human flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, so that we might become your children. Help us to always remember this calling so that the way we live brings glory to your name.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all parents as they care for the children you have entrusted to them. Give them wisdom that they might know how to raise their children in godliness and surround them with your love. Let the light of your word shine in our homes.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Father, open the door of understanding to all who are instructed in the faith that they might learn to trust your promises and rejoice in your steadfast love. We pray that your word is preached in it's purity throughout your church on earth so

that all who hear it may come to know Christ.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Grant your blessings to the congregations of the LCA, our pastors, and all our church workers, and help them to grow in love for you.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Remember with compassion all those who call to you in any time of need. At this time we pray especially for (insert names here). Surround them with your mercy, defend them against every danger, and keep them steadfast in the faith. Bring your peace and comfort to those who mourn.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Giver of every good and perfect gift, we thank you for the seasons, for the rain and sunshine which have brought us another harvest. Let your blessing rest on agriculture, commerce and industry; our arts and culture, our rest and leisure. Protect those who travel at this holiday time.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Let your word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path as we journey through the New Year ahead. Give us wisdom to see what must be torn down and what must be built up; when to speak and when to keep silent. Give us courage to throw away the things we no longer need and to gather in the things we need to keep close and dear.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, you revealed yourself through your only Son, Jesus Christ. In his name, hear our prayer, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil. *Matt 6:9-13*

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

Christ the Son of God give you joy and peace by his presence with you;

And the Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favour and give us peace.

Amen.

We sing the song 'Joy has dawned'

1 Joy has dawned upon the world

Promised from creation

God's salvation now unfurled

Hope for every nation

Not with fanfares from above

Not with scenes of glory

But a humble gift of love

Jesus born of Mary

2 Sounds of wonder fill the sky

With the songs of angels

As the mighty Prince of Life

Shelters in a stable

Hands that set each star in place

Shaped the earth in darkness

Cling now to a mother's breast

Vulnerable and helpless

3 Shepherds bow before the Lamb

Gazing at the glory

Gifts of men from distant lands

Prophesy the story

Gold a King is born today

Incense God is with us

**Myrrh His death will make a way
And by His blood He'll win us**

**4 Son of Adam Son of heaven
Given as a ransom
Reconciling God and man
Christ our mighty Champion!
What a Saviour what a Friend
What a glorious mystery
Once a babe in Bethlehem
Now the Lord of history**

*Keith Getty, Stuart Townend
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Announcements