

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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December 16 & 17, 2023

Third Sunday of Advent

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Youth & Family Specialist		Stephanie Polasek	
Congregational Chair		Donna Maas	
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director		Briana Bedford	
Secretary		Elena Holub	
Custodian		Tomasa Rosales	
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator		DyAnn Lauzon	
Organist		Elena Holub	

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor (*Luke 10:27*)

VISION STATEMENT: We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshiping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.

* This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.

INTRODUCTION

“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)

HYMN ELW - #240 “Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah” (stanza 3)

3. Light three candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

Lift your heads and lift high the gateway for the King of glory.

Text: Wayne L. Wold, b. 1954 Music: Yiddish folk tune Text © 1984 Fortress Press

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

* CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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

C Amen.

P God is patient and merciful, desiring all to come to repentance. Trusting this promise of grace, let us confess our sin first privately then together publicly.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P Everlasting God,

C you love justice and you hate wrongdoing. We confess the fear, greed, and self-centeredness. 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.

P 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.

C Amen.

* **HYMN ELW - #242 “Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn”**

**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 loving-kindness,
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.
- Text: Marty Haugen

Music: Marty Haugen

Text and Music © 1983 GIA Publications, Inc.

- *

GREETING
- P

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C

And also with you.
- *

PRAYER OF THE DAY
- P

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.
- C

Amen.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

A Our first reading is from Isaiah, chapter 61, verses 1-4 and 8-11.
Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.

The reading begins:
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.

A

The word of the Lord.

C

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 126

A The Psalm today is Psalm 126. We will read the Psalm responsively. The congregation will please respond by reading the words in bold print.

- ¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.
- ²Then 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.
- ⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negeb.**
- ⁵Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.
- ⁶Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.**

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

A Our second reading is from 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verses 16-24.
Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.

The reading begins:
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.

A

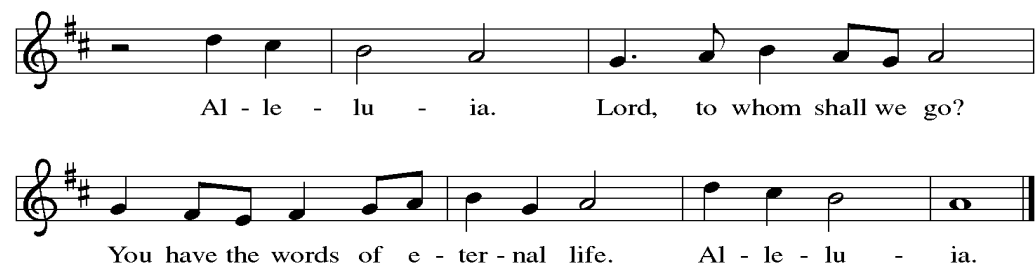
The word of the Lord.

C

Thanks be to God.

A Please stand as you are comfortable for the gospel.

* **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:** (Sung)



* **GOSPEL:** John 1:6-8, 19-28
John’s gospel describes Jesus as the “light of the world.” John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.

P The holy gospel according to St. John, chapter 1, verses 6-8 and 19-28.
C **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.

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

CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

* **HYMN ELW - #239 “Hark, the Glad Sound!”**
1. Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes, the Savior promised long;
let ev’ry heart prepare a throne and ev’ry voice a song.

2. He comes the pris'ners to release, in Satan's bondage held.
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.
3. He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.
4. Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace, your welcome shall proclaim,
and heav'n's eternal arches ring with your beloved name.

CCLI Song #3748213 Words: Philip Doddridge Music: Thomas Haweis
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* **APOSTLES' CREED (Saturday, 7:00 PM only)**
A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.
C **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.

BAPTISM OF Tiegan Mae Parks (Sunday, 9:00 AM only) See Insert

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A 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.*
A 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. Merciful God,
C **receive our prayer.**

A 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,
C **receive our prayer.**

- A Give us strength to pray for our world without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need, especially our brother and sisters in Tennessee. Empower us as helpers and advocates. Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in war-torn areas of Ukraine, Sudan, Niger and Israel. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your creation. Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for the family and friends of Vickie Briles. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time. Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We give you thanks and praise for the births of Waylon Ryder Gorman to Jacob and Nancy Gorman and Brooklyn Kate Richardson to Joshua and Cassandra Richardson. Bless their families as they begin new lives together. Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Shirley Trahan; Ricky Elly; Sophie Stancik; Richanne Waddle; Carolyn Kneller; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you (*Pause*). Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. (*Pause for those we are praying for.*) Merciful God,
Kristen Downing; Ashley Roberts; Traci Edman; Michael Yancey; Amanda Aramijo; Zachary Schulke; Herbie Kollatschny; Tom Russell, Jr.; Melda Coleman; Al Gene Canik; Larry Bookout; Mike Wostarek; Elizabeth Frisby; Kristina Acevedo; George Krenek; Anne Dimas; Carl Geisler; Laura Walla; Randy Wendt; Heather Deviney; Paul Casinger; Dr. Tom Hancher; Leonard Kahlden; and Bob Loy.
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for all expectant mothers and especially for:
Kyndall Beettner; Jamee Albert; Kristen O'Leary Bridges; Abegail Gatzke; Chelsea Gilstrap; Calli Guthmann; Dhara Comans; Nelma Grace Weathers; and Rosalinda Rosales that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace. Merciful God,
C receive our prayer.
- A We pray for all those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. (*Pause for those we are praying for.*) Merciful God,
Clemons Venghaus; Joey Denby; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Coy Dell Schindler; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Walter

Glaeser, Jr.; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; Lauren Lamb; and Lydia Rojas.

C receive our prayer.

- A We pray for all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel that they are protected and kept safe. (*Pause for those we are praying for.*) Merciful God,
Law Enforcement Officers: Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abbigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Zane Weido; Josh Jones; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Travis Neuendorff; Nathan Bookout; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette; and Terri Neunendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; Kevin Gonzalez; Evelyn Rojas; and Nelson Beettner.

C receive our prayer.

- A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and their Pastor Armando Capcha and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad and their leaders Pastors Gumer and Naomi Anton in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

- P Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.

C Amen.

*** PEACE**

- P The peace of the risen Lord be with you always.

C And also with you. (*Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.*)

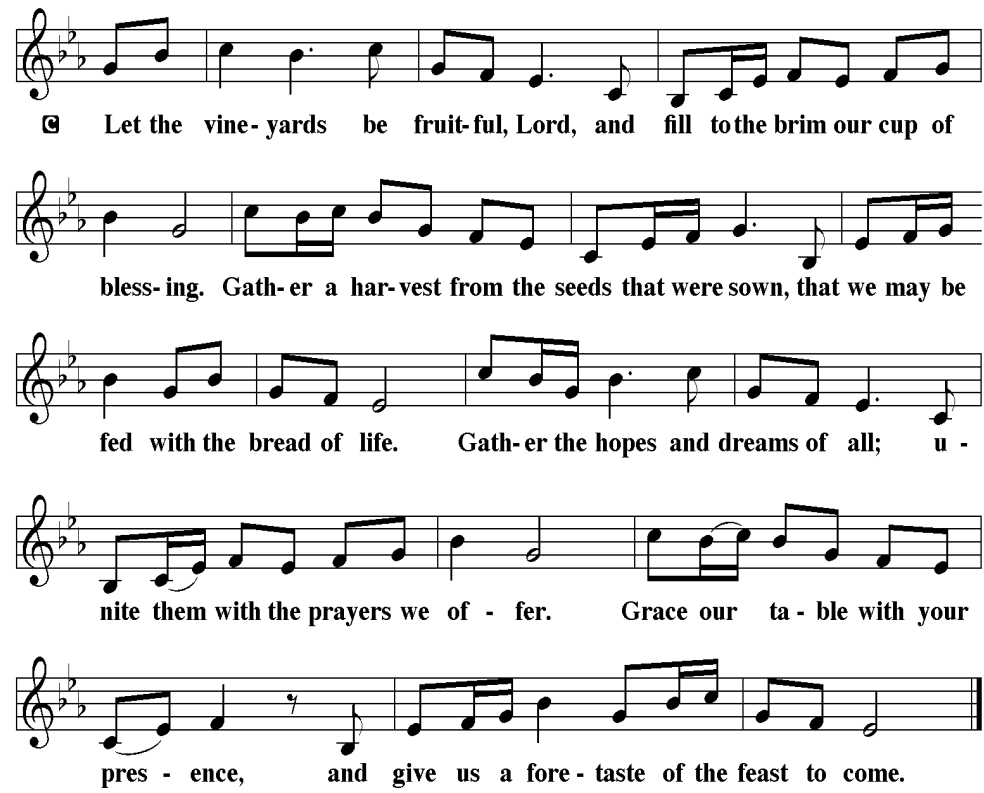
(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their

worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These “Power of One” dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

* OFFERTORY (Sung)



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be
fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -
nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

* OFFERING PRAYER

P Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

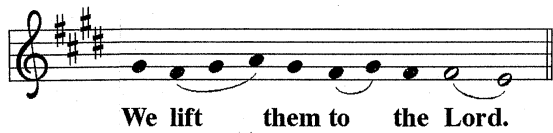
* GREAT THANKSGIVING (Responses Sung)

P The Lord be with you.



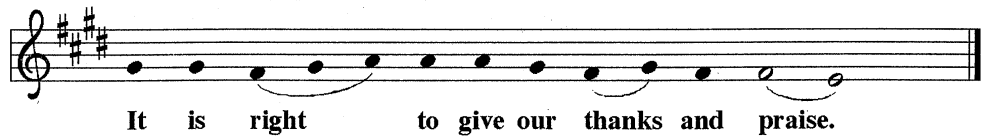
And al - so with you.

P Lift up your hearts.



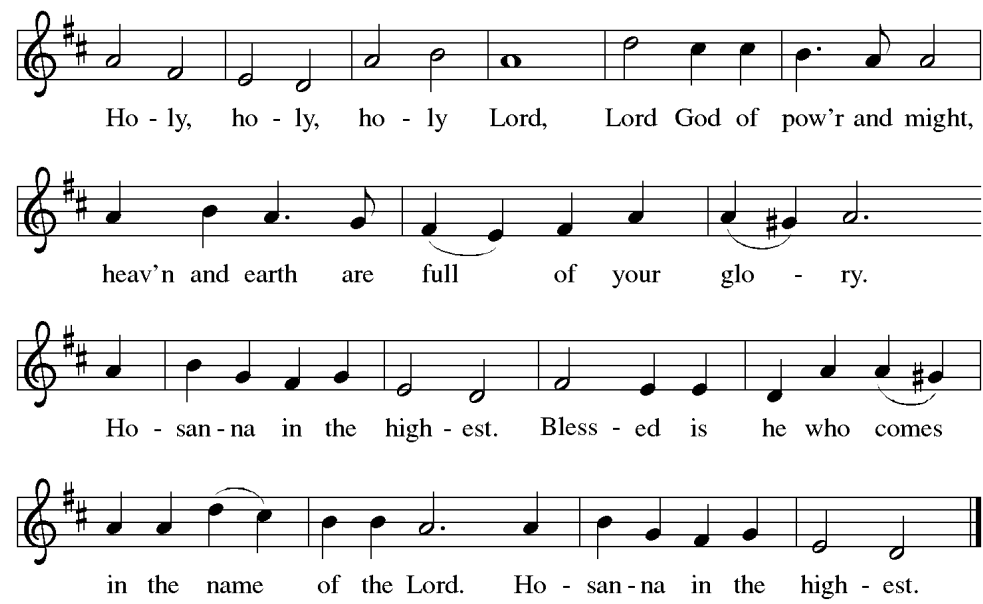
We lift them to the Lord.

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give our thanks and praise.

P It is indeed right, our duty and our joy we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might,
heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.
Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

* EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

* LORD'S PRAYER

P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.
C 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

P Come to receive Jesus, forgiveness and light.
C Amen.

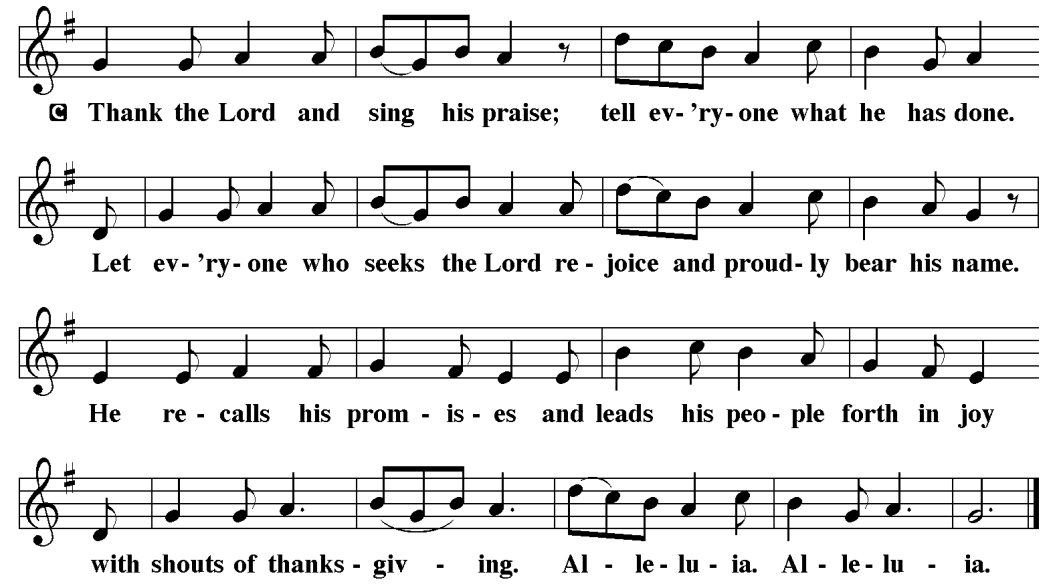
DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. **All are welcome for communion.** Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor “Gluten-free, please.” Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* BLESSING AFTER COMMUNION

P Now may the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.
C Amen.

* POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE (Sung)



☞ Thank the Lord and sing his praise; tell ev- 'ry-one what he has done.
Let ev- 'ry-one who seeks the Lord rejoice and proud- ly bear his name.
He re - calls his prom - is - es and leads his peo - ple forth in joy
with shouts of thanks - giv - ing. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

* PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P 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.
C Amen.

* **BLESSING**

P The God of peace bless you, the love of Christ sustain you in hope, and the anointing of the Spirit ☩ remain upon you now and forever.

C **Amen.**

* **HYMN ELW - #675 “O Christ, Our Light, O Radioance True”
{sing to tune ELW - #434 “Jesus Shall Reign”}**

1. **O Christ, our light, O Radiance true, shine forth on those estranged from you, and bring them to your home again, where their delight shall never end.**
2. **Fill with the radiance of your grace the wand'rers lost in error's maze.
Set free all those whose hearts and minds some deep delusion haunts and binds.**
3. **Lord, open all reluctant ears and take away the needless fears
of those who tremble to express the faith their inmost hearts confess.**
4. **Lord, let your mercy's gentle ray shine down on others strayed away.
To those in conscience wounded sore show heaven's waiting, open door.**
5. **Make theirs with ours a single voice uplifted, ever to rejoice
with wond'ring gratitude and praise to you, O Lord, for boundless grace.**

“O Christ, Our Light, O Radiance True” - CCLI Song #300383 Text: Johann Heermann; tr. composite Text ©1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress CCLI License #1729377
“Jesus Shall Reign” - CCLI Song #1510 Music: John C. Hatton ©Music: Public Domain CCLI License #1729377

* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace. Witness that others may believe. C **Thanks be to God, and we will.**

POSTLUDE

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USHERS: SAT: JoAnn Venghaus; Emily Frank; Sammy Cox

SUN: Ruth Bedford; Emily Brod

LAY READERS: SAT: Audrey Rester

SUN: David Johnson

ACOLYTES: SAT: Henry Jones

SUN: Callen Barten

STREAMING:

SUN: Janel Barten

SOUND:

SUN: Sydney Eaton

ALTAR GUILD: JoAnn Venghaus, Belle Dungen and Emily Brod

WELCOME: Welcome to what some branches of the Christian church call Gaudete, or Rejoice, Sunday. May we find joy in worshiping God and anticipating the celebration of Christ's birth.

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Michael & Donna Maas in celebration of their 35th wedding anniversary on December 16.

Congratulations to Cody & Cassidy Parks on the baptism of their daughter Tiegana Mae Parks. Tiegana is being baptized Sunday, December 17, 2023 at the 9:00 AM service. Sponsors for Tiegana are Brittani Anderson and Tyler Abke.

It's a Boy!! Jacob and Nancy Gorman are excited to announce the birth of their son **Waylon Ryder Gorman**. Waylon Ryder was born at 9:40 AM on Wednesday, December 13, 2023. He weighed 7 lbs. 11 oz. and is welcomed home by big brother Bennett. Proud grandparents are Patty and Brent Gorman, Sr., and proud great-grandmother is Doris Gorman.

It's a Girl!! Joshua and Cassandra (Thompson) Richardson are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter **Brooklyn Kate Richardson**. She is welcomed home by big sister Braylin and big brother Bentley.

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes “Power of One” dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: December 9 & 10, 2023 – 206

Contributions: Dec. 9 & 10 – \$7,886.01

Power of One: December 9 & 10, 2023 – \$59.00

Building Fund: Dec. 9 & 10 – \$523.04

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

ATTENTION: *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. After worship, **please place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.**

Thank you! ☺

**** Church Council Nominations:** If you are interested in serving on the Church Council, please email a brief bio of yourself to Elena Holub at admin@splctx.org as soon as you

can. Your bio should include, but not be limited to, how long you have been a member of St. Paul, ministry teams you have served on, the reason you want to serve and a brief background description. If you have any questions, please contact Judy Sirois (979-732-1920), Shelley Janik, Bradley Polasek, Lora Kuenstler, or Edna Bergfeld. **

++ FAMILY ADVENT READINGS: Families are encouraged to sign up for the **Family Advent Litany Reading and Candle Lighting** that will take place at the beginning of services during Advent. A family will come forward to read the Litany and light the candle for that particular Sunday in Advent. If your family is interested, **please sign up on the sign-up sheet in the narthex**. A different family is needed for each service. **The final date and time is:** Sun. Dec. 24 at 10:00 AM. A copy of the reading will be sent to you.

► **Offering Envelopes:** 2024 Offering Envelopes are ready to be picked up in the narthex (foyer). They are in **alphabetical order**. If you want a box of offering envelopes and do not see your name, please notify the church office, and we will have a box for you next week. ◀

▲ **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY:** *To all that can help – skilled or unskilled:* Something for everyone! Group efforts are invited. Contact Ruth Bedford at (281)-703-3124 for any additional information or contact information. Or, just show up! We can also use a hands-on Co-Leader to help Ruth on our Habitat for Humanity Outreach Team.

A message of request for help from the Colorado County Habitat Director, Charmaine: “We are starting construction on our 30th house Fridays and Saturdays from 8:00 AM till whenever you prefer – 12:00 PM or 2:00 PM. We need help December 15 & 16 and then January 5 & 6 and so on.” *Thank you Charmaine and Ruth for all you do for this very worthwhile endeavor of love.* ☺

🎵🎵 **THE 11TH NIGHT CONCERT:** This beautiful concert is one last chance to hear lovely Christmas and Advent music from the Lutheran churches and musicians in our area. The concert will be held at **St. Paul Lutheran Church**, 201 N. Rusk, **Fayetteville on Sunday, January 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM** and will be led by Pastor Ivy Schulz of Frelsburg/New Ulm. If any musicians are interested in participating in this concert, please select one or two of your favorite Christmas or Advent songs that you would like to perform and notify Betty Guthmann by December 20, 2023 that you would like to participate. You can contact her with that information - or if you have any questions - by calling (979)-733-4513 or email bettyguthmann@yahoo.com. A freewill offering will be collected and used to support the Turtle Wing Foundation. Light refreshments will be provided after the concert. 🎵🎵



If you will be **purchasing your own poinsettia** to place in church for Christmas, **please bring it to the church Thursday, December 21, 2023**. We ask that you do not bring it any earlier since there will not be any place to store the poinsettia or keep it watered.



2023 Christmas Eve Worship Services: There will be no worship service Saturday, December 23. **Sunday, December 24** there will be a **CONTEMPORARY Christmas Eve service at 10:00 AM**. Traditional candlelight services will be at 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM. Be sure to make note of these times!

**** ATTENTION!! ANNUAL REPORTS of various Ministry Teams and organizations are due in the church office by Wednesday, January 3, 2024!!** These need to be compiled for our regular congregational Annual Report for our annual meeting to be held January 28, 2024. **

- The **Noon Bible Study group that meets on Tuesdays** in the church library is taking a **brief winter break**. They will resume on Tuesday, January 9, 2024. Have a safe and happy holiday season! •

ST. PAUL QUILTERS: The St. Paul Quilters are taking a brief winter break as a group to relax and rejuvenate for next year. **They are taking off all of December and will resume quilting as a group Tuesday, January 9, 2024**. The quilters meet the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month in the Lighthouse. If anyone is interested in getting fabric to cut blocks at home or to sew quilt tops at home during that time, please contact Carol Lighthill at 832-371-3308. She will be happy to meet you and get you the fabric you need.

- ♦ The **Adult Bible Study group that meets on Fridays** in the church library will take a brief winter break and resume in January, 2024. Everyone is welcome! ♦



NOTICE!! We are **looking for a person** to take over the business of the **rental of the Lighthouse**. That person will be responsible for checking what dates are available, handling the paper work and collecting fees & deposits, contacting the custodian, and contacting the person who would open and close the Lighthouse for an event, as well as training additional members to open and close. If you are interested, please contact the church office at (979)-732-2423.

► **The Mowing Team is looking for more people to help mow the interior church lawn.** Typically it takes an hour and a half, or less, to mow and edge. Please call John Brasher at 979-253-1448 if you are interested or if you have any questions.

🎵🎵🎵 **Musicians Wanted for Praise Band!!** The St. Paul Praise Band is in need of a keyboard player. They would also like to add at least one guitarist, a bass guitarist and singers. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact Tracy Baker at 713-516-8017. 🎵🎵🎵

- **Women of JOY Bible Study:** The Women of JOY Bible Study group meets on Mondays to cook and have interesting Bible study and discussions. The **first Monday** of the month we **meet in the Lighthouse to cook** for BLAST. The **2nd and 4th Mondays** of the month we meet in the

high school room (old choir room) for Bible Study. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Gerri Hackfeld at 979-732-4711.

♥ **Grief Support Group:** The Grief Support Group is for anyone who has lost a loved one, either recently or a few years ago. We share and support each other. Come join us and get support from others walking this journey. We meet at **5:30 PM** in the youth room (formerly the choir room) the **third Thursday of the month.** **NOTE:** You do not have to share or talk until you are ready! If you have questions, please contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Mon., Dec. 18 – 1:00 PM – Nursing Home Team to TLC
6:00 PM – Church Council

Tues., Dec. 19 – 10:00 AM – Pastor to Columbus Oaks
5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)
6:00 PM – CLA Board

Wed., Dec. 20 – 9:00 AM – Morning Circle (library)
10:00 AM-1:00 PM – Seniors Together (Lighthouse)

Thurs., Dec. 21 – 5:30 PM – Grief Support Group (old choir room)

Sat., Dec. 23 – **No worship service!**

Next Sun., Dec. 24 – **10:00 AM –** Contemporary Christmas Eve Service
4:00 PM – Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship
7:00 PM – Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship

Next Mon., Dec. 25 – **No worship service!**

Dec. 25 – Jan. 1 – **Office Closed! (Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!)**

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Wednesday, December 20, 2023 Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, died 1552

Born to an impoverished nobleman, Katie eventually took vows as a nun, but around age twenty-four she and several other nuns who were influenced by the writings of Martin Luther left the convent. Six children were born to Katie and Martin.

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SERVICE OVERVIEW: GIVE WITNESS AND REJOICE

The third Sunday of Advent - also known as Gaudete (rejoice) is one in which the church has rejoiced as the advent of the Messiah draws nearer. Today's texts echo this rejoicing, this "*we're almost there*" excitement, in a multitude of ways. If the story sounds familiar – it is! We heard about John the baptizer in last week's gospel from Mark. What's the difference? Today's story goes deeper into the backstory: prophecies and expectations. Today's reading from Isaiah contains rich imagery of restoration and healing that Jesus will quote in Luke's gospel when he begins his ministry. The textual crossovers reinforce what we already know, that God's people in every generation long for restoration, repair, and new life.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

It is the third week of Advent, and we light three candles on the Advent wreath. While our society goes crazy with Christmas preparations and the northern hemisphere grows darker each day, we gather to wait for God to bring us into peace and light. Welcome to worship! Join John the Baptist to make a pathway for Christ. Come to the table for strength to focus on justice and mercy.

In his own way, John the Baptist calls for rejoicing by his acknowledgment that he is *not* what we are waiting for. John, like us, has a mission to bear witness, but when he says "I am not," we hear a clear contrast to all the ways Jesus will soon identify himself with the Father: "I am the bread of life." "I am the resurrection." "I am the good shepherd." Jesus will be all these things for God's people, but John's job (and ours) is simply to bear witness to the light.

How do we bear witness while still waiting? Can our joy in the midst of waiting be that very witness? In Advent we are not called to act as though we do not know how this story ends, as though Jesus' birth and life, death and resurrection, are still before us. What we *do* know is that sense of longing for God's salvation to be fulfilled, and the temptation to believe we have to save ourselves instead of waiting for God's purposes to be worked out in God's time. John reminds us that there can be joy in taking our proper place, pointing to Jesus without needing to *be* Jesus.

The second reading advises, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." For anyone struggling with grief, anger, and doubt, this advice can feel shallow and cold. Receive the invitation to accept the comfort of God's presence, even in painful situations. It is always God's desire to be with us. The Gospel of John points to Christ as the light and we embrace that hopefulness. The proximity to the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere also invites us to embrace the imagery of God's presence in our times of spiritual and literal darkness.

KID STUDY:

Do you notice all the Christmas lights around this time of year? They are a beautiful reminder as we prepare for the birth of Jesus that he is the light of the world. How do those lights work? What makes them light up? They have to be plugged in. One neat thing about Christmas lights is that if one string is plugged into an outlet, another string can be plugged into that first string to provide more and more lights.

Today we hear about John the Baptist. He was like the first string of Christmas lights. John was the first person to tell other people about Jesus, the Light Of The World. He told everyone to prepare a way for Jesus. When we share Jesus by being his hands and feet, we are like extra strings of Christmas lights that come to life when we are connected.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

It is interesting that the calculation theory of the origin of Christmas places the feast at the winter solstice in relationship to biblical accounts of the birth of the Baptist. The festival of the nativity of John the Baptist is on June 24, the old date for the summer solstice, which is the time of the

greatest light in the northern hemisphere. But as the world’s light wanes towards the time of greatest darkness at the winter solstice, we come to the feast of the true Light, brighter than the sun, given in the midst of our darkness. Advent is like John when its continuing decrease of light is made to bear witness to the coming of God’s grace in the midst our need. John is present in our Advent when we know this about our observances and our days: They are not the light. But it is not that we simply turn toward the still coming One. Advent is not playacting, pretending to be the people waiting for the Messiah. Every Sunday assembly, even and especially during Advent, is a gathering in the power of the Spirit and in the presence of the risen Christ before the revealed face of God. “Waiting” is our human condition. This text heightens our waiting, turning us toward God and connecting us to the darkness that at every time of the year and in all religious systems waits for the transcendent one. - Gordon Lathrop [Gordon W. Lathrop, Advent/Christmas, Proclamation 4, Series B (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 28-29]

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Next Week's Theme (Dec. 24): Great news that will come to all people Luke 2:1-20

Next Week's Scriptures (Dec. 24):

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7
“Light shines: a child is born for us.”

Psalm: Psalm 96
“Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.” (Ps. 96:11)

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14
“The grace of God has appeared.”

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]
“God with us.”