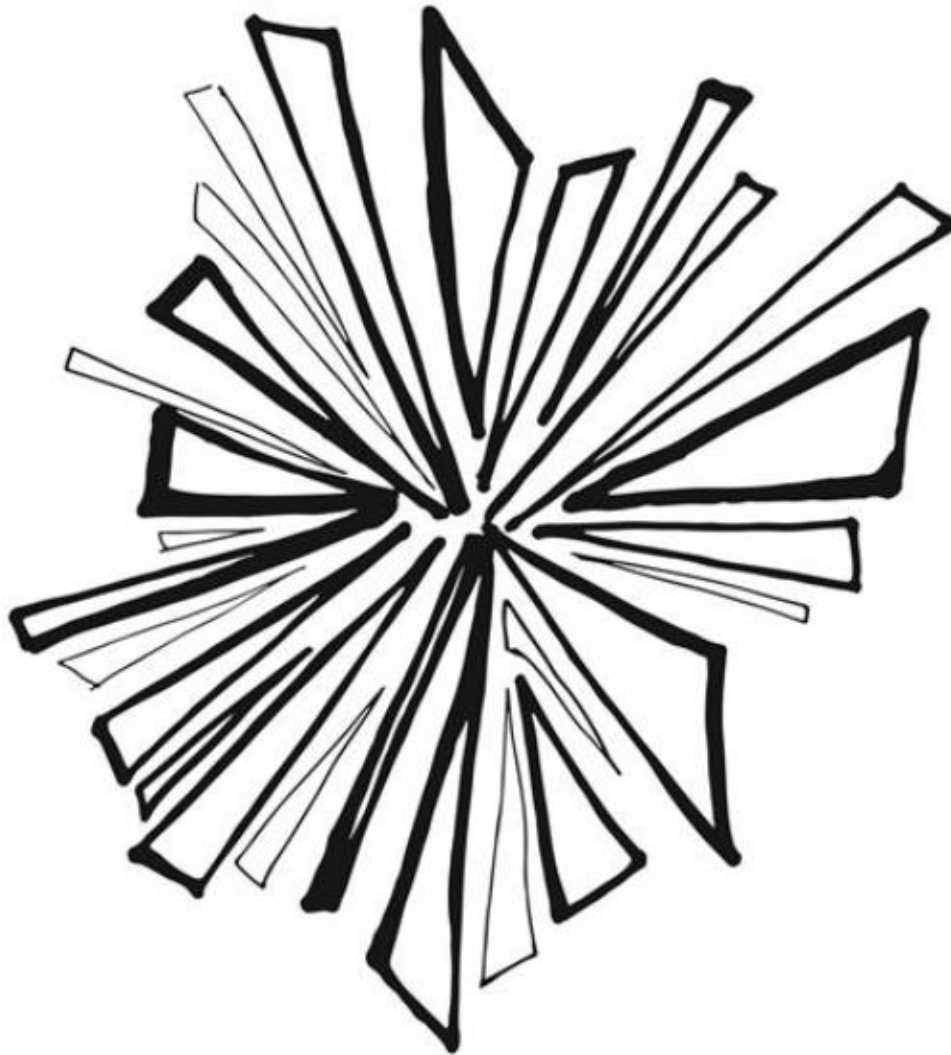




# Covenant Lutheran Church, ELCA



*We celebrate gathering together this  
first Sunday of Christmas!  
As always, all are WELCOME here!  
December 31, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.*

The People of Covenant are called to:

**Gather, Grow and Go Serve**

...With God's Love!

# Welcome

**Thank you for joining us for Worship today!**

**WORSHIP ORDER – Sunday, December 31, 2023 – 9:30 a.m.**

*Congregation participation in bold in bulletin*

*ELW=Evangelical Lutheran Worship Hymn Book*

*\*=please stand*

## GATHERING

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.*

### Prelude

### Welcome

### Dialogue

Jesus, the bright Morning Star, shines light in the world.

**By day and night he shines for all to see.**

Jesus was born in the midst of injustice and poverty

**that the world may see the justice and richness of God.**

God so loved the world that God sent Jesus,

**so that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life.**

Jesus is the light of the world.

**Jesus is the light of our lives.**

Sing to God a new song!

**A song of hope, joy, and peace around the world.**

### \*Gathering Song

*Angels from the Realms of Glory*

ELW 275

### 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.**

Let us pray. **Gracious God of heaven and earth, you have thrown a lifeline to us in our darkness— a beam of light that shines through Jesus. Though born in a manger, he is the firstborn of all creation. Though crucified on a cross, he is the Lord of life. Fill us with the wonder and joy of his presence in the world and in our hearts. Amen.**

## First Reading

Genesis 3: 8-19

*A reading from Genesis, the third chapter.*

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.' To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it", cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' The word of the Lord, **Thanks be to God.**

**\*First Carol**

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

ELW 270

## Second Reading

Isaiah 11: 1-9

*A reading from Isaiah, the eleventh chapter.*

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with

righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. The word of the Lord,  
**Thanks be to God.**

**\*Second Carol**

*Still, Still, Still*

Grace Notes

**Third Reading**

**Matthew 1: 18-25**

*A reading from Matthew, the first chapter.*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. The word of the Lord, **Thanks be to God.**

**\*Third Carol**

*O Little Town of Bethlehem vs 1,2*

ELW 279

**Fourth Reading**

*A Reflection on Mary*

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Mary, grasped and seized by the Spirit

Speaks of God's coming into the world,  
Of the advent of Jesus Christ

For she knows better than anyone else what it means to wait for Christ.  
She waits for him in a way unlike anyone else.

She awaits him as his mother.

She knows about the mystery of his coming,  
about the Spirit that is at play here,  
about the almighty God who works his wonders.

She experiences in her own body  
that God's ways with humans are wonderful,  
that he isn't bound by human standards,  
that he doesn't follow the path that humans like to lay out for him-  
that his way is  
beyond all understanding,  
beyond all proof,  
free, and  
with a mind of its own.

**\*Fourth Carol**

*What Child is This? vs 1*

ELW 296

**Fifth Reading**

*"In the Middle of the Night"*

Dom Helder Camara

In the middle of the night,  
When stark night was darkest,  
then You chose to come.  
God's resplendent first-born  
sent to make us one.  
The voice of doom protest:  
"All these words about justice,  
love, peace –  
all these naïve words  
will buckle beneath the weight of a reality  
which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter."  
It is true, Lord, it is midnight upon the earth,  
moonless night and starved stars.  
But can we forget that You,  
the Son of God,

chose to be born precisely at midnight?

**\*Fifth Carol**

*In the Bleak Midwinter vs 2*

ELW 294

**Sixth Reading**

*“The Plastic Angel”*

Amy Weems  
(*Kneeling in Bethlehem*)

Our crèche set came complete with stable  
and a plastic angel.

Small, not at all to scale,  
the white-garbed creature with uncertain wings  
was obviously an afterthought,  
thrown in to complete the set,  
otherwise ceramic and hand-painted...

Unless, of course, this angel was a last-minute substitute  
for one which was irresistible to the packer.

In that case, somewhere I have an irresistible ceramic angel,  
dressed gloriously in red,  
kneeling or flying on somebody else’s coffee table  
even now

as I unwrap the plastic angel.

If I could ever bring myself to throw away an angel,  
it would be this one, this one with no redeeming features.

And yet, each year as I unwrap the plastic angel,  
I hesitate again to pitch this celestial messenger.

I’m reminded of my own lack of glory,  
my own plastic attempts at celebrating Christmas,  
my own feeble annunciations,  
and once again I place this bit of plastic  
over the stable.

If the plastic angel can get this far,  
perhaps there’s a place in Bethlehem town for me.

**\*Sixth Carol**

*Angels We Have Heard On High vs 1,3*

ELW 289

**Seventh Reading**

*God in in the Manger*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
(*a letter to his fiancé in 1943*)

I think we’re going to have an exceptionally good Christmas. The very fact  
that every outward circumstance precludes our making provision for it will

show whether we can be content with what is truly essential. I used to be very fond of thinking up and buying presents, but now that we have nothing to give, the gift God gave us in the birth of Christ will seem all the more glorious; the emptier our hands, the better we understand what Luther meant by his dying words: “We’re beggars; it’s true.” The poorer our quarters the more clearly we perceive that our hearts should be Christ’s home on earth.

**\*Seventh Carol**

*Once in Royal David’s City vs 2,3*

ELW 269

**Eighth Reading**

**John 1: 1-14**

*A reading from John, the first chapter.*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a Father’s only son, full of grace and truth. The word of the Lord,  
**Thanks be to God.**

**\*Carol**

*I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light vs 1,2*

ELW 815

**Responsive Prayers**

Let us pray. It is you, loving God, who lights our path with truth.

**Your Word, Jesus, is truth.**

In his light, draw all to the manger

**to gather in wonder with the shepherds.**

In his light, draw all to the manger  
**to worship and offer our gifts with the wise ones.**

In his light, draw all to the manger  
**to sing for joy with the angels.**

In the brightness of his life  
**cast away the darkness of injustice, poverty, and hunger in the world.**

It is you, loving God, who meets us on our way.

**In the light of Jesus, show the world the way of life.**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

*A brief silence.*

Give hope and stamina to leaders who work tirelessly for the sake of the most vulnerable. We pray especially for organizations working on behalf of children to provide basic needs, to protect from abuse and neglect, to address trauma, and to rescue from trafficking. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

We pray for anyone living with cancer or chronic illness, all people who are in physical rehabilitation or addiction recovery, and those experiencing complications from long COVID. We pray especially for Jean, Norm, Ana, Janine, Jennifer, Reggie, Lynda and Family, the family of David and those we name out loud or silently in our hearts. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Let this community of faith be a joyful and welcome place for all ages and generations. Teach us to honor the wisdom of children, the inquisitiveness of youth, the thoughtfulness of adults, and the knowledge of elders. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for all the beloved who lived with expectation and departed this life in peace. Sustain us in joy until we join them around your throne. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace. **Amen.**



## Passing of the Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

*Let us share a sign of peace safely with one another.*

## Announcements

## Offering Prayer

God of abundance, receive and bless these gifts we have offered. Join our hearts with the song of the angels, and gather us at your table of celebration. Strengthen us to share with all the world the abundance of your grace upon grace, poured out in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. **Amen.**

## MEAL

*God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.*

## Liturgy of Holy Communion

## 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.**

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.

*Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as our Lord taught us:*

## The Lord's Prayer

**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. Save us**

**from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

## **Invitation to Communion**

In this meal, righteousness and peace meet together.

Come, take your place at the table.

## **Communion Hymns**

*Of the Father's Love Begotten*

ELW 295

*Let Our Gladness Have No End*

ELW 291

## **Post Communion Blessing**

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

## **Prayer after Communion**

God our redeemer, you have fed us at this table with gifts of grace, truth, and life. As you have gathered us in joy, send us forth as messengers of your peace. Make us shine with the good news of your glory, born to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## **SENDING**

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

## **Blessing**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

**Praise God, all creatures here below!**

You are the shepherds telling the story.

**We tell it in the streets and across the land.**

You are the wise ones worshipping with thanksgiving.

**We worship with gifts of song and service, talents and treasures.**

You are the angels announcing peace.

**We live with joy and go now in peace.**

May Almighty God, Creator, + Christ, and Holy Spirit, bless us now and forever.

**Amen.**

**Dismissal**

Go in peace. Christ is with you! **Thanks be to God.**

**Postlude**



*Care to contribute to our Church and ministries?*  
Scan this QR Code to give digitally with Vanco Online Giving.  
Or visit [www.covluth.org](http://www.covluth.org) and click 'On-line Giving'!



## Announcements:

- ✝ The office will be closed Monday Jan 1<sup>st</sup> for the Holiday- A safe and gentle season to you!
- ✝ **Lunch Bunch- 1<sup>st</sup> Wed of the Month at 11:30am Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>** *Join at BBJack's in Cottage Grove*
- ✝ Safe Surrender information/orientation meeting planned for **Jan 7<sup>th</sup> afternoon** more to come!
- ✝ Join Book Group **Jan 11<sup>th</sup>** discussing *The Last Supper Club* Meeting at 1pm in Gateway room
- ✝ Feed the Hungry at St. Marks in Madison, 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month **Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 10:30a-1:30p**
- ✝ **Social Action meets January 15<sup>th</sup>** - work on inclusion here at Covenant with them
- ✝ Budget Listening Session Scheduled for **Jan 21<sup>st</sup>** join to hear the hard work discussed for 2024
- ✝ The American Red Cross reports major blood shortages- Give Blood at Covenant **Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>**
- ✝ Annual Congregational Meeting planned for **Jan 28<sup>th</sup>** Member voting required & appreciated!
- ✝ Thank you to Grace Notes: Angie Kettner, Meghann Proper, Donna Tarpinian, accompanist Michelle Osterhaus for offering *Still, Still, Still* by Ken Berg

## WORSHIP NOTES

**Pastor:** *Pastor Wendy Moen;*

**Acolyte:** *Logan Angerhofer;*

**Assistant Minister:** *Kathy Andrusz;*

**Lector:** *Kimberly Currie;*

**Greeters:** *Jack and Helga Cope;*

**Communion Worship Assistants:** *Karen Hanson and Bill Cook;*

**Organist/Pianist:** *Michelle Osterhaus;*

**Ushers:** *Karl Nissler, Larry Olson, Thor Anderson, Larry Grefsheim;*

**Sound/projection:** *Lars Forde, Amanda Burian;*

**Altar Guild:** *Norm and Jean Sime;*

**Communion Prep:** *Jean and Norm Sime;*

**Altar Flowers:** *A great way to celebrate any occasion with your church family!*

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