

Perley Lutheran Parish
November 29, 2020
First Sunday in Advent



Opening Hymn: Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

Wake, awake, for night is flying. The watchmen on the heights are crying. Awake Jerusalem at last

Midnight hears the welcome voices, and at the thrilling cry rejoices; Come forth, you maidens! Night is past.

The bridegroom comes! Awake; your lamps with gladness take! Alleluia!

Prepare yourselves to meet the Lord, whose light has stirred the waiting guard.

Welcome & Announcements

Invocation:

P In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

P Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

C Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!

P Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!

C Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

P Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created.

C And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

This morning, we light the first candle, the candle of hope. This candle reminds us that God's promises give us reason to be filled with hope – hope for unity in a world of division, hope for healing in a world of pain, and hope for peace in a world filled with anger and strife. We remember that Christ is our light and the source of our hope.



P: In this season of Advent, we long for God's presence.

C: Christ is our light and the source of our hope

P: In this season of Advent, we search God's truth

C: Christ is our light and the source of our hope

P: In this season of Advent, we seek God's guidance

C: Christ is our light and the source of our hope

P: In this season of Advent, we remember God's promise.

C: Christ is our light and the source of our hope

Confession and Absolution

P Let us confess our sins to God and ask his forgiveness.

C Almighty God, we confess to you that we daily turn from your will to follow our own sinful desires. Instead of listening to your Word, we listen to the tempting voices of the world around us. We do not love and serve others as we should. Have mercy on us and forgive us for the sake of Jesus our Savior.

P God has had mercy on us. He sent his Son to be our Savior. Jesus suffered and died so that our sins can be forgiven. He rose up from death to give us eternal life. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

C Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for the promises of your Word and for the gift of your Son, our Savior!

Prayer of the Day

Heavenly Father, you fulfill all of your promises of your Word. Through the decree of a pa-

gan emperor, you brought Mary and Joseph to the city of David, to Bethlehem, where the Savior, according to your decree, was to be born. The Child of Bethlehem, our Lord Jesus Christ, would later issue his decree commanding us to preach the Gospel to all nations. Make us bold witnesses as we follow our Lord's command. We pray that your Spirit would be at work through our witness so that others will come to know and worship Jesus as Lord. Amen.

Children's Message (*calculator*)

Let's count some people today! First, I'm going to count all of you who live in North Dakota and watch our services. Let me enter that number in the calculator. Next, I'll count the people who live in Minnesota (*count any acolytes or assistants in the chancel*). Now I have to add that number. We should count all the people that are here in the church right now – that would be three—but well, maybe this is going to take too long because I really can't know exactly how many people are where and if they are watching now or later..... it's difficult.

When the time came for Jesus to be born, an emperor—like a king—named Caesar Augustus ruled the country where Joseph and Mary lived. The emperor decided to count all of the people in his kingdom. He didn't use a calculator, but to organize the counting, he gave a decree, a command, that all of the men in the kingdom had to go back to their hometowns to be counted. But that emperor didn't know that hundreds of years before he lived, God had already made a more important decree! God decreed that his Son, our Savior Jesus, would be born in Bethlehem.

So, because Joseph was descended from the great King David, he traveled back to the place that was called "David's city." It was the town of Bethlehem. Joseph took along his wife Mary, who would soon have her baby. And when Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her son, the baby Jesus, and laid him in a manger. God wanted his Son to be born in Bethlehem and so, according to his plan, the emperor's decree sent Mary and Joseph to the town where God's Son would be born. What God wants to happen will always happen, exactly as he plans! You can count on it! Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, just like you planned all along. Amen.

Old Testament Reading, Micah 5:2-4

P But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of

the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

Epistle Reading, 1 Peter 1:17-21

P And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Gospel Reading, Matthew 28:16-20

P Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Message: A Decree Went Out

P It seems that kings and other rulers like to count things, especially their money and sometimes their people, their subjects, perhaps to make sure that everyone is paying their taxes so there is more money to count. The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, was no exception. He decided to count his subjects, maybe for tax purposes or maybe just for the sake of good administrative order.

The familiar account of Jesus' birth from Luke 2 places the events firmly in human history. This is no make-believe story, no fairy tale. Luke writes, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria." All of these events happened at a real time in real human history, just as Luke records it, at a time when these particular Roman rulers were in power.

According to Caesar's decree, for this registration, or census, the people of Palestine were to return to their ancestral hometowns to register. Because he was a descendant of King David, although no one of that royal line was ruling anymore, Joseph of Nazareth had to return to David's town, the town of Bethlehem. Joseph's promised wife Mary was expecting a child and she would travel with him. Her child was not Joseph's child, but the Son of God, who yet

unborn was subject to the decree of a pagan emperor.

What that pagan emperor did not know was that his taxation decree was overshadowed by the decree of a greater Lord. Hundreds of years before Augustus came to power in Rome, God had decreed that a ruler would be born in David's town, the little, unremarkable village of Bethlehem. The Bethlehem-born King would be a shepherd for his people, like his famous ancestor David, but this King would be far greater than his ancestor. The rule of this Son of David would extend, not merely to the boundaries of the Roman Empire, but to the ends of the earth.

Still another decree, a far more ancient decree, preceded Caesar's decree and the prophet's announcement of the ruler to be born in Bethlehem. (Did Caesar Augustus think he was in control of these events? He would not have been happy to learn he was a minor player in a much bigger plan.) Centuries upon centuries before Rome came to power, God issued a decree in the hearing of only two people—there was no need for a census in Eden at that point—two people who had rebelled against the God who created them.

The Roman Empire was known to suppress any and all rebellion with brutal force. Rebel leaders and their followers, and most likely quite a few innocent bystanders too, quickly received a sentence of death. God's great decree in Eden came in answer to a more devastating rebellion. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, had rebelled against their Creator. They did not trust his Word and they disobeyed his command, eating the fruit forbidden to them. Their sin and rebellion, like an inherited disease, was passed down through every following generation, to our own day. We follow daily in the footsteps of our first parents, rebelling against God our Creator in our thoughts, words and actions.

Those two early rebels—and all of their descendants after them, down to our day and beyond—received a sentence of death. The death was not immediate, at least not physically, but it was immediate spiritually, as their sin ruined their relationships with their Creator, with one another and with the world around them. Adam was created from dust, and in death, according to the decree, he and all his descendants would return to dust. Yet within this decree of suffering and death another death was foretold, the death of the one who would come to save us. A child of the woman would come one day and, in dying, would crush the head of the serpent who had tempted Adam and Eve and brought about the rebellion. This child of the woman would take the decree of death onto himself. Being sinless himself, he would die in the place of sinners.

It was under Augustus' decree that the long-promised child of the woman was born in Bethlehem, a lamb of sacrifice born, appropriately enough, in a stable. It was a plan to save us from death, a plan made before Augustus was born, a plan decreed and established before the world was created.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Son of God and Mary's son, was a greater King than his royal ancestor David, greater than any Roman emperor. But he was a King who was crowned, not with gold, but with thorns. He was nailed to cross—a Roman cross—and there he suffered the penalty of death decreed for us, the penalty of death that we earned for ourselves through our rebellion against our Creator. The price was paid in the blood of Jesus. The Savior, who was once wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger in Bethlehem, was taken down from the cross, wrapped in burial linens and laid in a tomb. But on the third day after his death, Jesus was raised up from death, overcoming it for us. The sentence of death decreed so long ago has been lifted and in its place we have the hope and promise of eternal life.

Our risen Lord Jesus has given us another decree—a command: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” His Spirit is at work in the proclamation of that good news, bringing others into the kingdom of our Lord. The Child of Bethlehem, the crucified and risen King of kings, reigns now and forever over a worldwide kingdom, far greater than anything Caesar Augustus could ever imagine. It is a kingdom whose subjects even Augustus would be unable to count. It is a kingdom in which “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” will one day stand in victory before the heavenly throne, crying out in joy and praise: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Caesar Augustus no doubt enjoyed his power as a king and lord. In those days he issued a decree to count his subjects, not knowing that one of those subjects would be the Lamb born in Bethlehem, our crucified and risen Savior who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Come Thou Long, Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus. Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Prayers: (P: King of kings and Lord of lords, **C: Hear our prayers and accept our praise.**)

P Jesus, Son of David and Lamb of God, long before the Roman Empire existed and long before the decree of Caesar Augustus was announced, your birth was foretold. When the time was right, you were born among us as one of us to be our Savior. King of kings and Lord of lords, **hear our prayers and accept our praise.**

P Jesus, Son of David and Lamb of God, you took onto yourself the penalty of death that we earned for ourselves through our rebellion against our God and Creator. You, the sinless Son

of God, stood in the place of sinners, in our place. Through your death and resurrection we receive forgiveness and eternal life. King of kings and Lord of lords, **hear our prayers and accept our praise.**

P Jesus, Son of David and Lamb of God, work through our witness as we follow your command to make disciples of all nations. Give us opportunities to speak of your love and sacrifice so that others will come to know and worship you as Lord. King of kings and Lord of lords, **hear our prayers and accept our praise.**

P Jesus, Son of David and Lamb of God, even when we walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve us, deliver us, and fulfill your purpose for us. According to your steadfast love, grant healing and wholeness to those who are mourning as they deal with tremendous loss, we ask that you continue to send healing to those dealing with illness and recovery. We lift up those within our congregation and those that have reached out to us for prayers, Samantha & Sophie, Jeff, Kirk, Brent, Paxley, Brian, Vern, Veronica, Lisa and all of those that we now name silently in our own hearts. King of kings and Lord of lords, **hear our prayers and accept our praise.**

Lord's Prayer

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. 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

Blessing

Sending Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
O come, O come, Immanuel and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel, shall come to you O Israel.

Dismissal: Go in peace, prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Mark Your Calendars:

Wednesday, December 2nd – Devotion @ 7PM Live Stream on Facebook.

Sunday, December 6th - 9AM Facebook Live Stream from Nora. Nora Council meeting @9:45am

Wednesday, December 9th – Devotion @ 7PM Live Stream on Facebook.

Sunday, December 13th - 9AM Facebook Live Stream from Kirkebo. Kirkebo Council meeting @9:45am

Service adapted from *In those Days Advent Series* written by Carol Geisler. © 2018 Creative Communications for the Parish. All rights reserved.

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