

Christmas Eve Worship Service
Sunday, December 24, 2023
7:00 pm

Welcome to worship! May we all come to know God's love for us through the birth of Jesus, as we offer our hearts, voices, and songs to God this Christmas Eve. If you don't have a home church, consider this church your family of God and worship with us again on Sundays. We would love to welcome you further to this community of faith!

“*” Asterisk means, “Please Stand”
P—means Pastor
C—means Congregation

Prelude:

“O Little One Sweet” - Harmonized J.S. Bach
“O, Holy Night” Barbara Johnston, Soprano
Placide & Cappeau

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Pastor James P. Lapp

P: May God be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Let us pray. Gracious God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that we may walk in the light of the presence of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath & Christ Candle

P: On each of the last four Sundays, we have lifted up the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love as we lighted our Advent wreath.

C: We have lived in the hope of your coming to us.

P: Your promise is fulfilled in the gift of Jesus Christ

C: We have longed for peace in our hearts and in our world

P: You have come to us as the Prince of Peace

C: We shout for joy at the story of your birth

P: You have given the world an eternal celebration

C: We are renewed by your love shown to us

P: Come Holy Spirit! Lift our hearts to praise!

*Opening Hymn:

“Joy to the World”

Red #267

1. **Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive its King;
Let ev’ry heart prepare him room
And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.**
2. **Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
While fields and floods,
rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy**
3. **No more let sin and sorrow grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found
Far as, far as, the curse is found.**
4. **He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, and wonders of his love.**

Responsive Reading: (please read parts in bold)

P: The bright Morning Star, shines light in the world.

C: By day and night the light shines for all to see

P: Jesus was born in the midst of injustice and poverty

C: that the world may see the justice and richness of God.

P: God so loved the world that God sent us the One of Love

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

P: God has sent the light of the world.

C: God has given us the light of our lives.

P: Sing to God a new song!

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

Hymn: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" Red #279

1. **O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.**
2. **For Christ is born of Mary,
And, gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the king,
And peace to all the earth!**

3. **How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming;
But, in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.**

4. **O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.**

Responsive Reading: (please read parts in bold)

P: It is you, loving God, who lights our path with truth.

C: Your Word, Jesus, is truth.

P: In God's light, draw all to the manger

C: to gather in wonder with the shepherds.

P: In God's light, draw all to the manger

C: to kneel in reverence with the wise ones.

P: In God's light, draw all to the manger

C: to sing for joy with the angels.

P: In the brightness of Christ's life

**C: cast away the darkness of injustice, poverty, sickness,
and hunger in the world.**

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

**C: In the light of Christ, show the world the way of life.
Amen.**

Hymn: *"The First Noel"*

Red #300 vs. 1 & 2

1. **The first Noel the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.**

REFRAIN

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the King of Israel.

2. **They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.** **REFRAIN**

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

Celebrate pg. 1

Hymn:

"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" vs. 1 & 4 Red # 282

1. **It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
From heav'ns all gracious king."
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.**
4. **For lo! The days are hast'ning on,
By prophets seen of old,
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold,
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And all the world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.**

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14

Celebrate pg. 3

*Hymn: *“Go Tell It On The Mountain”*

Red #290

REFRAIN

**Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and ev’ry-where;
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!**

**1. While shepherds kept their watching
O’er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.**

REFRAIN

**2. The shepherds feared and trembled
When, lo, above the earth
Rang out the angels chorus
That hailed our Savior’s birth. REFRAIN**

**3. Down in a lonely manger
The humble Christ was born;
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn. REFRAIN**

*Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:1-20

Celebrate pg.3

*Hymn: *“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”*

Red #270

**1. Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all you nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”**

REFRAIN

**Hark! The Herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn king.”**

(Hymn continued)

2. Christ, by highest heav'n adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come,
Off-spring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, incarnate deity!
Pleased as man with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel! **REFRAIN**

3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Ris'n with healing in his wings,
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth,
Born to give us second birth. **REFRAIN**

Children's Message

Pastor James P. Lapp

Hymn: *"Away In A Manger"*

Red #277

1. Away in the manger, no crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.
2. The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.
3. Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care
And fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Homily

Pastor James P. Lapp

1. **What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!**

2. **Why lies he in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary!**

3. **So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
Come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation bring;
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The babe, the son of Mary!**

Offering Responsive Reading

P: For so long God has hoped for a righteous leader,

**C: Who would break down the walls dividing the peoples,
That all on earth might live in God's love and peace.**

P: For so long we have seen the visions;
for so long the dreams have been dreamed.

**C: But now the vision has found its life,
and the dream has come to pass—
here is the One for whom we have waited!
Let us open our treasures and offer our gifts,
Signs of our whole lives given in gratitude. Amen.**

Offering Please place in offering plates near you.

Offering Music

“He Shall Feed His Flock” from Handel’s Oratorio—Messiah
Lydia Abler, Soprano

*Offering Prayer

P: Let us pray,

**C: Good and loving God,
We rejoice in the birth of Christ.
He came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace.
As you have blessed us with your gifts,
Let them be a blessing for others,
Signs of your gracious love for all of creation. Amen.**

*Prayers of the Church

Celebrate pg. 4

*Lord’s Prayer

**C: 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**

Candle lighting– Please pass your candlelight to those next to you.

Closing Hymn

*“Stille Nact Heilige Nact”
Silent Night, Holy Night!”
Joseph Mohr & Franz Gruber*

Red #281

- 1. Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.**
- 2. Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly host sing, Alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior is born!**
- 3. Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from your holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth. (Hum an additional verse)**

Benediction/Dismissal

P: May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Go in peace. Share the good news.

C: Amen

(Please extinguish your candle)

Serving tonight

Reader: Kirstin Csik

Ushers: Sofia Bartee & Jeanette Dawson

Join us for Joyful & meaningful worship

Every Sunday 10am!

Livestream & recordings at ststephenslutheran.org

**Zoom Bible Studies with Pastor Jim
on Thursdays at 11am & 7:30pm.
Check your email on Wednesday for the ZOOM link.**

Our Mission Statement

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, and invite people to share the joy of the Spirit.

Reconciling in Christ

“We welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us. Our unity is in Christ.”

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Ministers: The People of St. Stephen's
Pastor: Rev. James P. Lapp
Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp
Church Musician: Gary Roberts
Sunday School: Leslie Lapp
Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens
Custodian: John Hopping