

Second Sunday after Christmas
Sunday, January 4, 2026
Esther Lutheran Church, ELCA

Introduction:

Within the gospel reading's profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, the waters of new birth, and the bread and the wine. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.

PRELUDE

BELL

WELCOME

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God

Please stand as you are able

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

P: The light shines in the darkness,

C: And the darkness has not overcome it.

P: The Word became flesh and lived among us,

C: And we have seen his glory.

P: The law was given through Moses;

C: Grace and truth come through Jesus Christ.

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Incarnate God,

C: You have given us the most precious gift of all: yourself. And yet we live as if there is nothing extraordinary about being your children. We forget, ignore, or devalue your blessings of grace and forgiveness. We undermine ourselves and others, and refuse to seek help when it is available. Show us your mercy and forgive our stubborn ways, for the sake of Jesus.
Amen.

P: Immanuel is here. Fear has been banished. Hear the words of your redemption in the angels' chorus and see your salvation in the real person of Christ on earth. We are forgiven, and we are never alone.

C: **Amen.**

***GATHERING HYMN: "*The Bells of Christmas*" (ELW 298)**

- 1** The bells of Christmas chime once more;
the heav'nly guest is at the door.
He comes to earthly dwellings still
with new year gifts of peace, good will.
- 2** This world, though wide and far outspread,
could scarcely find for you a bed.
Your cradle was a manger stall,
no pearl nor silk nor kingly hall.
- 3** Now let us go with quiet mind,
the swaddled babe with shepherds find,
to gaze on him who gladdens them,
the loveliest flow'r of Jesse's stem.
- 4** Oh, join with me, in gladness sing,
to keep our Christmas with our king,
until our song, from loving souls,
like rushing mighty water rolls!
- 5** O patriarchs' Joy, O prophets' Song,
O Dayspring bright, awaited long,
O Son of Man, incarnate Word,
great David's Son, great David's Lord:

- 6 Come, Jesus, glorious heav'nly guest,
and keep your Christmas in our breast;
then David's harp strings, hushed so long,
shall swell our jubilee of song.**

Text: Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, 1783-1872; tr. Charles Porterfield Krauth, 1823-1883, alt.

***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.

***KYRIE** **(ELW pg. 203)**

- 1 Have mercy on us, Lord, and hear our solemn prayer.
We come to hear your living Word; it saves us from despair.**
- 2 Have mercy on us, Christ, and wash away our sin.
Pour out your grace and make us whole, that new life may begin.**
- 3 Have mercy on us, Lord; make sin and shame depart.
Renew us with your saving pow'r; create in us new hearts!**

***CANTICLE OF PRAISE “Glory Be To God In Heaven”** **(ELW pg. 204)**

- 1 Glory be to God in heaven;
peace, goodwill to all the earth.
Mighty God of all creation,
Father of surpassing worth:
we exalt you, we adore you,
we lift high our thanks and praise.
Saints and angels bow before you;
here on earth our songs we raise.**
- 2 Glory be to Christ forever,
Lamb of God and Lord of love.
Son of God and gracious Savior,
you have come from heav’n above;
on the cross you died to save us;
now you reign at God’s right hand.**

Hear our prayer; restore, forgive us;
in your promise firm we stand.

3 Holy One we now acclaim you;
Lord alone, to you we call;
Holy One in faith we name you,
throned on high, yet near to all:
Jesus Christ, with God the Spirit,
in the Father's splendor bright.
For the peace that we inherit,
glory be to God on high!

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

P: Almighty God,

C: You have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Please be seated

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song

FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 31:7-14

God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God's gift of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.

⁷ Thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." ⁸ See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹ With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back; I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path where they shall not stumble, for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my

firstborn. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him and will keep him as a shepherd does a flock." ¹¹ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹² They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³ Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴ I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord. Here ends the first reading.

PSALM: 147:12-20

*Congregation reads the **BOLD***

Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. (Ps. 147:12)

¹² Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion,

¹³ **who has strengthened the bars of your gates and has blessed your children within you.**

¹⁴ God has established peace on your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat.

¹⁵ **God sends out a command to the earth, a word that runs very swiftly.**

¹⁶ God gives snow like wool, scattering frost like ashes.

¹⁷ **God scatters hail like bread crumbs. Who can stand against God's cold?**

¹⁸ The Lord sends forth the word and melts them; the wind blows, and the waters flow.

¹⁹ **God declares the word to Jacob, statutes and judgments to Israel.**

²⁰ The Lord has not done so to any other nation; they do not know God's judgments. Hallelujah!

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 1:3-14

In Jesus, all of God's plans and purposes have been made known as heaven and earth are united in Christ. Through Jesus, we have been chosen as God's children and have been promised eternal salvation.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. Here ends the second reading.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: "Alleluia"

(ELW pg. 205)

Alleluia! Lord and Savior: open now your saving word.

Let it burn like fire within us; speak until our hearts are stirred.

Alleluia! Lord, we sing for the good news that you bring.

GOSPEL READING: John 1:[1-9] 10-18

John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.

[¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. The Gospel of the Lord... **Thanks be to God!**

CHILDREN'S TIME & SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: *"Word of God, Come Down on Earth"* (ELW 510)

- 1** Word of God, come down on earth,
living rain from heav'n descending;
touch our hearts and bring to birth
faith and hope and love unending.
Word almighty, we revere you;
Word made flesh, we long to hear you.
- 2** Word eternal, throned on high,
Word that brought to life creation,
Word that came from heav'n to die,
crucified for our salvation,
saving Word, the world restoring,

speak to us, your love outpouring.

- 3 Word that speaks God's tender love,
one with God beyond all telling,
Word that sends us from above
God the Spirit, with us dwelling,
Word of truth, to all truth lead us;
Word of life, with one bread feed us.**

Text: James Quinn, SJ, b. 1919

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Prayer Response "Oh Lord, Hear My Prayer"

(ELW 751)

- L:** Empowered by the news of Christ's birth, let us pray boldly for the church, creation, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

- L:** O God, you reveal yourself wherever two or three are gathered in your name. Be with us now, not only in the infant Jesus and resurrected Christ, but in the beloved people of this assembly. Hear us, O God,

C: **Your mercy is great.**

- L:** You reveal yourself in the waters of the womb; in brooks, ponds, and oceans; and in the waters of baptism. Grant us wisdom to tenderly care for the earth as a garden watered by your grace. Hear us, O God,

C: **Your mercy is great.**

- L:** You reveal yourself in blessed diversity. Help us to look for you in people near and far, in bodies of all kinds, and in kindred young and old. Let us seek you in many places, praising you in many tongues. Hear us, O God,

C: **Your mercy is great.**

- L:** You reveal yourself in new life. Support those beginning a new job, a new relationship, or a new living situation, especially those displaced because of tragedy or loss. Be with all others who need your life-giving touch this day

especially Kristy, Brad, Dick, Shirley, Luella, Chris, Bruce, Larry, Jerry, Jaxson, Gary, Bev, Joyce, Doug, Reilly, Joan, Dale, Cadence, Dennis, Lois, Allison, Becky, and Chad. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: You reveal yourself in holy communion. Sustain all who provide food and fellowship in this congregation and in the wider community. Make our tables signs of your welcoming presence among us. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: You promise to turn mourning into joy and to comfort those who weep. We remember those who have died and look to being united with them in your glory. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: With the joy of Christ's birth in our hearts, we commend our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your boundless mercy and eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

**C: O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: when I call, answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: come and listen to me.
Amen.**

Please stand as you are able

***APOSTLES' CREED**

(ELW pg. 217)

**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

***SHARING OF THE PEACE**

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

Please be seated

OFFERING

We thank you for your gifts of time, talent, and treasure that help this congregation, to continue our ministry together, and to make Christ known in our communities and the world.

OFFERING HYMN: "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" (ELW 857)

Lord, I lift Your name on high.

Lord, I love to sing Your praises.

I'm so glad You're in my life;

I'm so glad You came to save us.

You came from Heaven to earth

To show the way.

From the Earth to the cross,

My debt to pay.

From the cross to the grave,

From the grave to the sky;

Lord, I lift Your name on high.

Lord, I lift Your name on high.

Lord, I love to sing Your praises.

I'm so glad You're in my life;
I'm so glad You came to save us.

You came from Heaven to earth
To show the way.
From the Earth to the cross,
My debt to pay.
From the cross to the grave,
From the grave to the sky;
Lord, I lift Your name on high.

ext: Rick Founds, b. 1954 Music: Rick Founds Text and music © 1989 Maranatha Praise, Inc. admin.

Please stand as you are able

***THE OFFERING PRAYER**

P: God of glory,

C: Great are your wonders among us and many are the blessings you bestow. Use us and these your gifts for the needs of the world, that all the ends of the earth may rejoice in your saving grace, through Christ our Savior. Amen.

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

***GREAT THANKSGIVING** *spoken*

(ELW pg. 206)

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift our hearts to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give our thanks and praise!

***THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

***LORD'S PRAYER** *spoken*

(ELW pg. 208)

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: God is now in flesh appearing. Come to the feast of joy!

Please be seated

COMMUNION

Congregation may be seated The acolytes, ushers, organist and those assisting with communion should come forward at this time and receive communion. Following the assistants, we will celebrate continuous Holy Communion. The ushers will direct you. We welcome all baptized Christians to the Lord's Table where we experience the unity that God intends for all people. Those who do not receive the bread and wine may receive a blessing from the pastor. Gluten-free wafers and non-alcoholic wine are available.

COMMUNION HYMN: "Of the Father's Love Begotten" (ELW 295)

- 1 Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.
- 2 Oh, that birth forever blessed,
when the virgin, full of grace,

by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Savior of our race,
and the babe, the world's redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore.

3 This is he whom seers in old time
chanted of with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines, the long-expected;
let creation praise its Lord
evermore and evermore.

4 Let the heights of heav'n adore him;
angel hosts, his praises sing;
pow'rs, dominions, bow before him
and extol our God and King;
let no tongue on earth be silent,
ev'ry voice in concert ring
evermore and evermore.

5 Christ, to thee, with God the Father,
and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
and unwearied praises be:
honor, glory, and dominion,
and eternal victory
evermore and evermore! Amen.

Text: Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348-413; tr. Composite

Please stand as you are able

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION:**

P: Incarnate God,

C: You are among us at this table. May we treasure this gift and ponder in our hearts the mystery of your presence. Move us to discover the

wonders of your love in the everyday moments of our lives, through
Christ born in us. Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to our neighbor in need

***BLESSING**

The triune God,
glorious Mystery,
holy Incarnate One,
abiding Comforter,

✝ bless you with endless grace, peace, and joy.

THREE-FOLD AMEN

***SENDING HYMN: “Good Christian Friends Rejoice”**

(ELW 288)

- 1 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today;
ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!**
- 2 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!**
- 3 Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye need not fear the grave;
Jesus Christ was born to save!**

**Calls you one and calls you all
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!**

Text: Medieval Latin carol; tr. John Mason Neale, 1818-1866

***DISMISSAL**

P: Glory to God in the highest!
C: **And peace to God's people on earth!**
P: Go in joy. Embody God's redeeming grace.
C: **Thanks be to God!**

IN OUR PRAYERS

Jerry Anderson	Chris & Bruce Carter	Jaxson Bosl
Kristy Fyhrie	Larry Sather	Dick & Luella Thom
Joan Burquest	Dennis Rosenquist	Lois Rosenquist

Brad Sanvik- Nephew of Jewel Townsend
Rev. Bruce Miller- father of Karin Wagner
Dale Flemming – father of Laurie Ratajesak
Doug Tvedt – brother of Joan Burquest
Jerry Pogose – father of Chuck Pogose
Gary Borst – friend of the Andersons
Shirley Nesges – friend of the Thoms
Joyce Muyres – friend of the Thoms
Bev Guse-Ohlrech – friend of the Pedersons
Reilly McCormick – friend of Esther congregation
Christopher Noll – friend of the Thoms
Chad Way- friend of the Townsends
Allison Dotzler – friend of Kathy Mittag
Cadence Smith – friend of Mandy Arvidson
Becky Yttrie – friend of the Townsends
Family and Friends of: Sarah Pomeranz, David Anderson, Ron Myren, Katie Jahnke, Dave Bendix, Megan Sheen, and Colleen Burquest

THIS WEEK AT ESTHER

Sunday, January 4TH - *Second Sunday of Christmas*

NO SUNDAY SCHOOL

10 am – Worship with Holy Communion led by Pr. Greg Billberg

2 pm – Worship at St. William's

Wednesday, January 7th

6 pm – Confirmation: Meal: Laney Steidl

Thursday, January 8th

9 am – Quilting Day- bring a sack lunch

Sunday, January 11th – *Baptism of our Lord*

8:30 am - WELCA

9 am – Sunday School

10 am – Worship led by Pastor Dennis Preston

2 pm – Worship at St. William's

NEWS AND NOTES

We will be taking down the Christmas decorations following worship on Sunday, January 11th. Many hands make light work!

Sign-up sheets for 2026 Worship Tasks are on the Narthex table.

SAVE THE DATE: The Esther Annual Meeting will be on Sunday, January 25th following worship with a back-up date of February 1st. There will be a potluck afterwards. Please have your financials to the auditors by January 11th. Please have reports to the office by January 17th.

Artisan Bread Class by Dave from Miltona Greenhouse! When: Monday, January 26th at 6:30 pm. Where: Esther Lutheran Church. Cost: \$30.00 per person. We need a minimum of 5 people for a class to be held. Please bring an ice cream bucket WITH a lid. You will get enough dough to take home for two loaves of bread. Sign-up sheet will be in the Narthex for anyone interested. Please sign up by January 22nd so Dave has time to purchase all the ingredients for the quantity

of people. Please make your checks payable to Esther WELCA. All guys and gals are invited!

Luther Crest Camp Opportunities: Summer Camp Early Bird Registration goes until February 14th. The Esther Camp Fund and WELCA cover all but the registration fee! Register online at luthercrest.org.

Children and Youth Retreats: These weekends are filled with games, worship, Bible study, winter play, cabin time, and new friendships. Dates: January 16-18 and February 6-8 or campers grades 3-9

Youth Leader Jamboree: This FREE retreat offers time for renewal, networking, meaningful conversation, and inspiration with other youth ministry leaders. It's a great way to enter the year refreshed and encouraged. This retreat is free for all who work with youth in their congregation and communities. Dates: January 11-13.

High School Recharge Retreat: This weekend is designed for high schoolers to slow down, connect with God and peers, and enjoy intentional rest with fun activities and quiet moments alike. Dates: February 20-22.

Adult Creative Retreat: Come to the Adult Creative Retreat at Luther Crest and breathe life into your creative spirit in community with others. Whether you love art, writing, music, crafting, or simply exploring your imagination, this weekend offers time away to slow down, create, reflect, and connect with God and with others in a peaceful camp setting. Enjoy cozy spaces, inspiring conversations, and campfire moments, and creative time that feeds your soul. Dates: March 26-29.

Women's Week: Come for the week or just a day and experience joy, fun, food, and spiritual growth alongside a crew of amazing women. Dates: June 21-26.

Esther Lutheran Church, ELCA
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