



## First Evangelical Lutheran Church

627 Taylor Street, P.O. Box 540, Pecatonica, Illinois 61063 815-239-2390

Pastor Nord Swanstrom 815-520-5026 nordswanstrom@aol.com

### ***PUTTING CHRIST FIRST!***

**e-mail:** Churchoffice@firstluthpec.com **website:** www.firstluthpec.org

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/FirstLutheranofPecatonica>

**YouTube:** First Lutheran of Pecatonica

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December 18th, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Advent

## Welcome to Worship at First Lutheran Church



**Evangelical  
Lutheran**  
Church in America

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) —  
Northern Illinois Synod

*If you are visiting with us today, we want you to feel welcome and to know that we are delighted to have you here. We are blessed with your presence. We would appreciate it if you would complete a visitor information card, located in the pew rack, and place it in the regular offering plate or the special offering plate by the doors.*

*We practice open Communion — you don't have to be a member to participate. **All are welcome to receive Holy Communion.** In Holy Communion, we come trusting that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, that he is truly present in this meal and that we who receive his Body and Blood also receive his forgiveness and grace. All baptized persons who share this trust and hope are welcome to join us at the Lord's Table. Children who do not yet receive Communion are invited to come forward and receive a special blessing.*

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Today Isaiah prophesies that a young woman will bear a son and name him Emmanuel.

The gospel is Matthew's account of the annunciation and birth of the one named Emmanuel, God-with-us. During these final days of Advent we pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," a beloved hymn based on the O Antiphons, ancient prayers appointed for the seven days preceding Christmas. On this final Sunday of Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one born to save us from the power of sin and death.

Welcome & Announcements

**WE GATHER AS CHRIST'S PEOPLE**

### Confession and Forgiveness

P: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

**C: Blessed be God's name forever. Amen.**

P: Beloved, now is the time to wake from sleep. Let us confront our sins, and confess them to the one who is merciful and just.

*(Silence is kept for reflection)*

P: God of new beginnings,

**C: We confess that we have not welcomed your holy reign. We have strayed from your paths. We prepare for war instead of peace. We dishonor one another and your creation. Purify us with your refining fire and set us again on your way of love, that we may bear fruit worthy of repentance, and welcome your coming among us. Amen.**

P: People of God, a new thing is growing in our midst, a tender branch, a living sign. By water and the Spirit you are joined to this wonder. You have put on + Christ, and your sins have been washed away. Rejoice in the way of the Lord.

**C: Amen.**

### Gathering Hymn

**"People Look East"**

hymn #249

Verses 1, 2 & 4

### 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

**C: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

## Lighting of the Advent Wreath

R: On our journey to Christmas we have lit the candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy on our Advent Wreath. We relight them now to remind us of the hope that Christ will come again, bringing everlasting peace and joy. This is the fourth Sunday of Advent so we light the last candle, the candle of Love. To a world of empires and despots, war and greed, grief and apathy, we proclaim that love is strong enough to overcome all evil and that compassion is more powerful than fear.

R: The angel Gabriel reassured Mary that “nothing will be impossible with God.” The power of love is the power to overcome what we think is impossible. Love tells us God doesn’t want our excuses for why we dare not try, but our faithfulness to do. As we light the candle of Love, we remember that God so loves this world that he sent his only son, Jesus, to save us. We do so in honor of those who have shown us how to love even when doing so is not convenient or sensible. We remember those who show us that compassion— unconditional love— is central to a Christian’s life. Let us pray:

**C: All-loving God, break into our world and our hearts again. Magnify your love in us until it overflows to our neighbors. Renew our faith to relive the wonder of your love. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you that we may shine the light of your compassionate love. Come, God of Love, come. Amen.**

Hymn #240

“Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah”

Verse 4

## First Reading

### **Isaiah 7:10-16**

*An Israelite and Aramean military coalition presented a serious threat to King Ahaz of Judah. In response, Ahaz decided to secure his throne and kingdom by seeking Assyrian help. Isaiah reminds Ahaz that human attempts to establish security will fail. The prophet gives the sign that is the only source of true safety: Immanuel, God is with us!*

<sup>10</sup>The Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup>Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. <sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup>He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup>For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

R: Word of God, word of life.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

## Special Music

“Joy of Every Longing Heart”

Choir

Second Reading     **Romans 1:1-7**

*Most of the Christians in Rome do not know Paul. In this letter's opening he introduces himself as an apostle divinely appointed to spread God's gospel. The gospel's content is the promised coming of Christ, and Paul's mission is to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations, including his Roman audience.*

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, <sup>6</sup>including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

<sup>7</sup>To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

R: Word of God, word of life.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation

**C: Alleluia Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**

**Alleluia...Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia...Alleluia, Alleluia.**

Gospel Reading     **Matthew 1:18-25**

P: The Holy Gospel, according to Matthew — the first chapter.

**C: Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Matthew's story of Jesus' birth focuses on the role of Joseph, who adopts the divinely-begotten child into the family of David and obediently gives him the name Jesus, which means "God saves."*

<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,

and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."<sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

P: The Gospel of the Lord!

C: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon          Pastor Nord Swanstrom

### **SERMON**

**An unmarried woman. An unplanned pregnancy. An implausible explanation.**

**It's not hard to imagine what others were saying and thinking. "Did you hear? Mary's pregnant. I never expected this. Mary and Joseph should know better. They aren't even married yet." "Well, I heard that Joseph's not even the father. How could she do that to him? He's such a good and just man." "Who is the father?" "They say Joseph still intends to take her as his wife. He's going to marry her after all this." "This whole thing is a disgrace. She and her love child should be stoned. The law requires it."**

**I am sure Joseph heard the whispers and saw the looks, if not in the village then certainly in his own imagination. Joseph knows this as a scandal.**

**He knows there are questions of faithfulness. The love child in Mary's womb proves that. By the light of day it all seems pretty clear. Joseph will awake in the morning and do what he has to do. He will quietly send Mary away. What appears to be one thing in the light of public scrutiny, however, becomes another in the night of silence, listening, and waiting.**

**Yes, this is a scandal. But it is not a scandal of immorality.**

**The real scandal is that God is with us. We thought God was up there, or out there, maybe somewhere in the future. But then Mary got pregnant.**

**The scandal of that pregnancy is that God is intimately present. God's holy spirit fills the womb of Mary. The wind of God is blowing through her life. The breath of God in her is so real that she begins to show like the pregnant woman she is. The scandal is that humanity can become pregnant with God.**

**Yes, Mary's pregnancy raises questions of faithfulness. But it is not the usual question or accusation of betrayal and infidelity.**

**Rather, this pregnancy is a statement of God's faithfulness and commitment to God's people.**

**In this pregnancy God renews all the covenants of history and again chooses us to be his people.**

**God's continuing promise to show up and live in the midst of our lives is fulfilled in Mary's pregnancy.**

**It can be said that this pregnancy is fleshly faithfulness.**

**Yes, the child within Mary is a love child.**

**That is not, however, a euphemism for illegitimate, a child born to unmarried parents.**

**No, this child is the revelation of God's love for humanity. Love that can be seen, heard, touched. This embodied love of God will feed and nourish God's people.**

**Joseph's daytime resolution to quietly dismiss Mary has given way to a night of dreaming, pondering, and wrestling.**

**Joseph's view of Mary, her pregnancy, even himself has been enlarged and opened.**

**He has begun to see this situation, this scandalous pregnancy, through the eyes of faith rather than the stares of the villagers. Mary's story and the angel's words now speak louder than the villagers voices.**

**The only reason this could happen is because Joseph entrusted himself to the night, to the inner world where angels appear, guide, and speak God's word.**

**The night of faith shows reality to be more than the daytime drama with which we often live. It is the place where God speaks the truth about us and sees more than we sometimes see for ourselves.**

**It is the night of Emmanuel. Joseph experienced God with him. He found holiness hidden, where it has always been hidden, in plain sight amongst the scandals, the talk, the looks, the questions and doubts.**

**So Joseph awoke in the morning and did what he had to do. He began emptying himself. He let go of fear. He let go of the villagers' voices and stares.**

**He let go of his doubts and questions. He let go of his own reputation and standing in the community.**

**He let go of his ideas and hopes for what his marriage to Mary could have been.**

**He let go of the law and punishment. With each letting go Joseph emptied himself so that, by God's grace and mercy, he might become the womb that would protect, nourish, and provide security to Mary and her child.**

**He would be the womb that sheltered Mary and Jesus from Herod's rage and the slaughter of the innocents.**

**He would be the womb that safely took Mary and Jesus to Egypt.**

**He would be the womb that sustained their lives in that land.**

**He would be the womb that brought them back to Nazareth when the time was right.**

**Isn't that what wombs do?**

**They are the place where life is created and sustained, nourished and grown. They offer security and protection. They are that deep interior place where God's life and breath meet and unite with ours to create something beautiful and sacred.**

**The womb Joseph offered was as important as the one Mary offered. Even as God was acting in Mary's womb to create new life, divine-human life, so God was acting in Joseph's womb to sustain that life.**

**At one level today's gospel is about Mary and Joseph but at another level it is about you and me.**

**It is about us becoming more open and receptive, more womb-like in this final week of Advent so that we all might give birth so that we all might give birth to God's Son in our time and our culture.**

**Joseph guides us to Christmas reminding us that before a womb can be filled it must first be empty.**

**He invites us to enter the night of faith and to begin emptying ourselves of all that keeps our womb closed.**

**We must let go of all those things that make our womb inaccessible. Things like fear, guilt, resentment and anger, the villagers' voices and stares, the thoughts that say we are not enough, the doubts of God's presence, the isolation and loneliness of loss and sorrow. Letting go creates space, openness, and opportunity for God.**

**Over and over we let go, emptying ourselves until we find that we are nothing and have nothing.**

**That nothingness is our empty womb offered with scandalous faith that it will be filled with God, we will be re-created, the world will hear good news, and once again we will discover God is with us.**

**To God be the Glory!**

**AMEN**

Hymn of the Day

**"Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"**

hymn #254

All Verses

## Apostles' Creed

**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.**

## Prayers of Intercession 12/18

R: As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

*A brief silence.*

R: God our shepherd, let your Spirit move with power throughout the church. Give discernment and wisdom to our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders. Take away our fear, so that we serve and love, confident that you are guiding us. God, in your mercy,

**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God our source, awaken us to the beauty of the earth and the marvelous variety of life. Unite humankind in repairing and caring for your creation. Protect creatures and habitats in peril due to rising seas and warming temperatures. God, in your mercy,

**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God our vision, raise up leaders in every nation who dream of freedom and justice for all people. We pray for the work of international organizations that promote peace and human rights, especially Amnesty International (*others may be named*). God, in your mercy,

**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God our Emmanuel, you are with us in our life together. We give you thanks for gathering us in worship and fellowship, and we remember those who cannot be present. Watch over those who travel. Heal the sick and speed their recovery *especially*:

† Kathy Dougherty (member)

† Kim Greene (member)

† Michael Love (member)

† Denise Lyons (niece of Daryl and Linda Anderson)  
† Jeremy Raymond (Linda Anderson's friend's son)  
† Estelle Smith and Family (Granddaughter of Michael & Lynn Love)  
† Roger & Sue Schomber (members)  
† Earl Hansen (friend of Kent and Lori Peterson)  
† Geri Glenly (friend of Kent and Lori Peterson)

God, in your mercy,  
**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God our helper, come to the aid of all who cry out to you. Shelter migrants, refugees, and those fleeing war and famine. Bring relief to individuals and families experiencing hunger, homelessness, or impoverishment. Comfort any who are isolated or lonely.

God, in your mercy,  
**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God our hope, you bring life out of death, and you promise to be our God forever. Shine upon the faithful who now rest in the fulfillment of your promise and bring us also into your blessed reign of peace. God, in your mercy,  
**C: hear our prayer.**

R: God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

**C: Amen.**

#### Sharing of the Peace

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

**C: And also with you.**

#### Offering

#### Offering prayer

P: Eternal God, you make the desert bloom and send springs of water to thirsty ground. Receive these simple gifts of bread, wine, and money, and make us messengers of your mercy and love for all in need of your healing and justice. We ask this through Christ our Savior.

**C: Amen.**

#### The Great Thanksgiving

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

P: Lift up your hearts.

**C: We lift them to the Lord.**

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

**C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; who, sharing our life, lived among us to reveal your glory and love, that our darkness should give way to your own brilliant light. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Holy, Holy, Holy

pg. #190

Thanksgiving at the Table

P: Holy God, Breath of life and Fire of love: with a mighty wind you brought creation into being, and by a pillar of fire you led your people into freedom. We praise you for the gift of your Son, who poured out your Spirit on his disciples of every race and nation.

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.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and the sending of the holy and life-giving Spirit, we await his coming again to renew the face of the earth. Send now your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this meal: anoint us with your gifts of faith, hope, and love, that, with thankful hearts, we may be witnesses to your Son.

Through him all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**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: Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God, who has come to save you.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**“Lamb of God”**

**Pg. 191**

Communion Hymn      **“Savior of the Nations, Come”**      hymn #263

**The Holy Communion**

*Please come forward at the direction of the ushers. The bread is received in the open palm. Upon receiving the wafer, proceed to the person serving the wine. A blessing is offered to non-communicating children. If you do not wish to receive Communion, you are welcome to come forward for a blessing, indicated by crossing your arms over your chest.*

Communion Blessing:

P: God the eternal Word, who dwells with us in Jesus, and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit, + bless you now and forever.

**C: Amen**

Communion Prayer

P: Faithful God, in this meal you have remembered your mercy, bringing heaven to earth in the body and blood of Christ. As we wait for the day when all your promises will be fulfilled, sustain us and strengthen us by this holy mystery. Guide us toward your promised future, coming to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

**C: Amen.**

Sending Hymn      **“Love Divine All Loves Excelling”**      Hymn 631

Verses 1 & 4

Benediction

P: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. + In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen**

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Christ is near.

**C: Amen.**

### **In Our Prayers**

† Kathy Dougherty (member)

† Kim Greene (member)

† Michael Love (member)

† Denise Lyons (niece of Daryl and Linda Anderson)

† Jeremy Raymond (Linda Anderson's friend's son)

† Estelle Smith and Family (Granddaughter of Michael & Lynn Love)

† Roger & Sue Schomber (members)

† Earl Hansen (friend of Kent and Lori Peterson)

† Geri Glenny (friend of Kent and Lori Peterson)

### **Celebrating Anniversaries**

Ken & Coni Stein

**Altar flowers given by:**

Women's Circle

**Serving away from home**

Jake Jenkins & Jacob McGrew

***Weekly offering needed: \$2,400***

***Attendance 12/11***

***Offering received 12/4***

***Sunday Worship 33***

*General*           \$ 1944.00

***Memory Lights Service 28***

*Synod*             \$ 00.00

*Improvement*   \$ 100.00

*Simply Giving*   \$ 2304.00/mo

***2022 Mission Commitment \$6,000***

*YTD amount forwarded ~ \$5,500*

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**Announcements:**

**Pecatonica Food Pantry**— For the month of December the Pecatonica Food Pantry has sent out an advent calendar of needed items. Pick up a copy in the back to participate!

**AV Tech help**— The office is looking for help with AV tech. If you are interested there is a sign up sheet in the office.

**Council Meetings**— Church Council will now be meeting on the 1st Sunday of each month immediately following worship.

**Stockholm Inn**— Hope Charity invites everyone in the congregation to join them at the Stockholm Inn in Rockford for lunch on Thursday, December 29th at noon for a good time of food & fellowship. Please tell Susan Zumdahl if you can come, so we reserve a table for us all.

**Committee Reports**—The church office needs all committee reports sent in by January 4th in preparation for the Annual meeting.

**Altar Flower Sign-up**—The 2023 Altar flower sponsor sheet is in the back of the sanctuary.

**Important Dates:**

***Have a meeting coming up? Please contact the church office with details so we can get it on the church calendar. Thank you!***

Sunday, December 18th 2022                      Choir Practice, 8:05 a.m.

Sunday, December 18th 2022                      Finance Meeting, 10:00 a.m.

***New Members:*** *Visiting or know of anyone who would be interested in becoming a member of First Lutheran? If so, please notify the office. We would love to welcome you as a member of the family of First Lutheran!*

**Worship Volunteers**

December 18th

Sallie Morgensen

Sandra Smith

David Zumdahl

Kent Peterson

Bob Morgensen

Reader

AV Tech

Accompanist

Ushers

Counters

December 24th

Susan Zumdahl

Sandra Smith

David Zumdahl

Kent Peterson