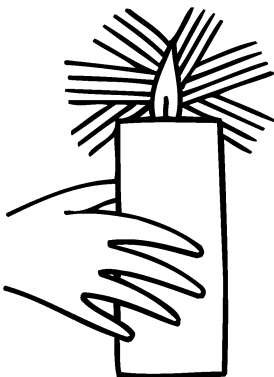




# APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH

7092 Main Street, Gloucester, VA 23061 | 804-693-9098 | [www.apostles-elca.org](http://www.apostles-elca.org)



## **Blue Christmas Candlelight Service of Comfort, Remembrance, and Hope** **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023 | 7:00 PM**

Our Mission is to be a Caring Inclusive Christian Community responding to God's grace through Worship, Service, and Sharing the Gospel.



RECONCILING *in* CHRIST



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

*The holidays are billed as a joyous time of the year. The music sings of having a holly jolly Christmas or paints the picture of the tender birth scene of our Lord, surrounded by shepherds and kings, angels and creatures, all basking in the warm glow of an amazing star, shining bright in the heavens.*

*For many people, however, the approaching holidays are not a joyous time. As families gather, the pain of lost family and friends is felt more sharply. Other losses of relationships, health or jobs cloud our minds. For some people it is the most depressing time of year.*

*As the darkness grows around us, there is a battle waged in many people's lives and in our communities – against depression and loss, against violence and forces of evil. All of the colored lights, Christmas cookies and holiday feasts cannot overcome this darkness that surrounds us.*

*As we gather this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ child this Christmas season. May the Christ child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and refugee, bring light, comfort, peace and joy this holiday season.*

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## **RESTROOMS**

A restroom can be found by exiting the rear door of the worship space. It is directly in front of you to the right. Additional restrooms can be found in the back corner of the fellowship area, near the Pastor's office.

## **FOR PASTORAL CARE**

Pastor Jay Serafin can be reached at 570-205-7506 or at [j80j84@msn.com](mailto:j80j84@msn.com).

## **RESOURCES**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255, a free, 24-hour hotline.

**COPE Crisis Line:** 1-800-542-2673

**Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741

# GATHERING

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

## PRELUDE AND SILENT PRAYER

*Martin Luther said of music: "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world." Please take a moment to **silence all cell phones.***

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you called light into being, and you set lights in the sky to govern night and day. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night you let your people into freedom. Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may your Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are merciful, and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## MUSICAL INTERLUDE

**ELW #279**

**"O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

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.

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.

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!

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 Immanuel!

## **LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES**

This first candle we light to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past. We offer it to God, asking that from His hands we may receive the gift of peace.

**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

This second candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

We remember ...

**May God's eternal love surround them.**

This third candle we light to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember these past weeks and months: our grappling for faith, our anger and pain, our struggles, our bittersweet memories, the welcome and embrace of family and friends and all who stood by our side during difficult moments. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

**Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

The fourth candle we light to remember our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

**Let us remember the One who shows the way, who brings the truth, and who bears the light.**

## MUSICAL INTERLUDE

ELW #282

### "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

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'n's all-gracious king."  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
to hear the angels sing.

2 Still through the cloven skies they come  
with peaceful wings unfurled,  
and still their heav'nly music floats  
o'er all the weary world.  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
they bend on hov'ring wing,  
and ever o'er its babel sounds  
the blessed angels sing.

3 And you, beneath life's crushing load,  
whose forms are bending low,  
who toil along the climbing way  
with painful steps and slow:  
look now, for glad and golden hours  
come swiftly on the wing;  
oh, rest beside the weary road  
and 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.

## DIALOGUE

"Comfort, O comfort my people," says your God. (*Isaiah 40:1*)

**"The Lord binds up the brokenhearted and comforts all of us who mourn."**

(*Isaiah 61:1-2*)

Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest." (*Matthew 11:28*)

**"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength."** (*Isaiah 40:31a*)

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (*Revelation 7:17*)

**We gather tonight in the name of Emmanuel, which means God is with us.**

**O Come, O Come Emmanuel. God is with us today and every day. Shine**

**Jesus shine on us!**

## MUSICAL INTERLUDE

**ELW #257**

### **“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”**

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

#### *Refrain*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,  
embracing all things far and nigh:  
in strength and beauty come and stay;  
teach us your will and guide our way.

#### *Refrain*

3 O come, O come, O Lord of might,  
as to your tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times you gave the law  
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

#### *Refrain*

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse, free  
your own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save,  
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

#### *Refrain*

5 O come, O Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heav'nly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery.

#### *Refrain*

6 O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;  
O Sun of justice, now draw near.  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadow put to flight.

#### *Refrain*

7 O come, O King of nations, come,  
O Cornerstone that binds in one:  
refresh the hearts that long for you;  
restore the broken, make us new.

#### *Refrain*

8 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

#### *Refrain*

# WORD

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

## READING

## PSALM 22

<sup>1</sup>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?  
<sup>2</sup>O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.  
<sup>11</sup>Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.  
<sup>24</sup>For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.

## READING

## JOHN 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup>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.

## **ANTHEM**

## **APOSTLES CHOIR** **“Only By Our Lonesome”**

## **READING**

## **JOB 2:11-13**

<sup>11</sup>Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home — Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. <sup>12</sup>When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. <sup>13</sup>They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

## **REFLECTION**

## **INGRID PETERSON**

*Silence is kept after the reflection.*



## "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"



1 O sa - cred head, now wound - ed, with grief and shame weighed down,  
 2 How pale thou art with an - guish, with sore a - buse and scorn;  
 3 What lan - guage shall I bor - row to thank thee, dear - est friend,  
 4 Lord, be my con - so - la - tion; shield me when I must die;



now scorn - ful - ly sur - round - ed with thorns, thine on - ly crown;  
 how does thy face now lan - guish, which once was bright as morn!  
 for this thy dy - ing sor - row, thy pit - y with - out end?  
 re - mind me of thy pas - sion when my last hour draws nigh.



O sa - cred head, what glo - ry, what bliss till now was thine!  
 Thy grief and bit - ter pas - sion were all for sin - ners' gain;  
 Oh, make me thine for - ev - er, and should I faint - ing be,  
 These eyes, new faith re - ceiv - ing, from thee shall nev - er move;



Yet, though de - spised and gor - y, I joy to call thee mine.  
 mine, mine was the trans - gres - sion, but thine the dead - ly pain.  
 Lord, let me nev - er, nev - er out - live my love to thee.  
 for all who die be - liev - ing die safe - ly in thy love.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607–1676, based on Arnulf of Louvain, d. 1250; tr. composite

Music: HERZLICH TUT MICH VERLANGEN, German melody, c. 1500; adapt. Hans Leo Hassler, 1564–1612

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

## **HYMN**

**ELW #751**

**“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”**

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.

## **CANDLE LIGHTING REMEMBRANCE**

**ELW #281**

**“Silent Night, Holy Night!”**

*During the song, please come forward, if you wish, light a candle, and place it in the crossbox as you remember your loved ones. You are welcome to return to your seat or stay for a moment of silence.*

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 hosts 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.

## **SENDING**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission back into the world.*

### **DISMISSAL**

Go in God's light, hope and peace!

Emmanuel, God is with you!

Shine, Jesus, shine on us!

**Thanks be to God!**

## **GOD SHINES THE BRIGHTEST IN OUR DARKEST MOMENTS.**

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### **WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS**

The Reverend Jay Serafin

Ingrid Peterson

Nate Peterson

Don Garfield

Nina Buzby (cello)

Vanessa Fry (flute)

Janet Gomez (piano)

Chris and Jennie Hawkins (technology)

## A READING FOR USE AT HOME

## ISAIAH 40

- <sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
- <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.
- <sup>3</sup> A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
- <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
- <sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.
- <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.
- <sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"
- <sup>10</sup> See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
- <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.
- <sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?
- <sup>13</sup> Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?
- <sup>14</sup> Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?
- <sup>15</sup> Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.
- <sup>16</sup> Lebanon would not provide fuel enough, nor are its animals enough for a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup>All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

<sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

<sup>19</sup>An idol? — A workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains.

<sup>20</sup>As a gift one chooses mulberry wood — wood that will not rot — then seeks out a skilled artisan to set up an image that will not topple.

<sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in;

<sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

<sup>24</sup>Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.



## **WELCOME TO APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH!**

It is an honor to worship God with you this evening. We pray you experience the loving presence of the Spirit as we share our words and our actions. Apostles is a church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. For us, this faith comes through the good news of Jesus Christ and gives us the freedom and the courage to wonder, discover and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person – questions, complexities and all. Apostles is a church that has a place for you.

## **RECONCILING *in* CHRIST**

We, the people of Apostles Lutheran Church, follow Paul's message to the Galatians (3:28): "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Believing that because we are all one in Christ, and created in God's image, all are welcome as beloved children of God. We welcome into the full life of the church all those whom God sends us. Rejoicing in God's amazing diversity, we welcome people of all ages, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, and physical and mental abilities. Centered in Christ, we commit ourselves to breaking down dividing walls and building a community where all are beloved.

# **CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES AT APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**Sunday, December 24, 7:00 PM**

**THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, CHRISTMAS EVE**

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Holy Communion

**Sunday, December 31, 10:00 AM**

**FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS**

Lessons and Carols

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