



First Evangelical Lutheran Church

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PUTTING CHRIST FIRST!

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YouTube: First Lutheran of Pecatonica

Sunday, December 3rd, 2023

First 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.*

“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

Welcome & Announcements

WE GATHER AS CHRIST’S PEOPLE

Confession and Forgiveness

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who opens the heavens and draws near to us with salvation.

C: Amen.

P: God is patient and merciful, desiring all to come to repentance. Trusting this promise of grace, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P: Everlasting God,

C: you love justice and you hate wrongdoing. We confess the fear, greed, and self-centeredness that make us reluctant to work against oppression.

We are complicit in systems of exploitation.

We choose comfort over courage.

We are careless with creation's bounty.

Look upon us with mercy. Turn our hearts again to you. Make us glad to do your will and to walk in your ways for the sake of our waiting world.

Amen.

P: Hear these words of assurance:

God clothes you with garments of salvation and covers you with robes of righteousness.

In the tender compassion of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. God's covenant is eternal, and God's blessing rests upon us all.

C: Amen.

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Gathering Hymn

"Fling Wide the Door"

Hymn #259

All Verses

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.

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Prayer of the Day

C: Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

R: We wait for the coming of Christ, the light of the world

C: Come, Lord Jesus

Hymn for Candle Lighting

“Christ Be Our Light”

Hymn #715

Verse 1

R: The true light, which enlightens everyone is coming into the world.

C: Come, Lord Jesus

R: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

C: Christ, shine in your church today

First Reading

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the LORD love justice,

I hate robbery and wrongdoing;

I will faithfully give them their recompense,

and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations,

and their offspring among the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge

that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,

my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,

and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots,

and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,

so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise

to spring up before all the nations.

R: Word of God, word of life.

C: Thanks be to God.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

R: Word of God, word of life.

C: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel Reading

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

John's gospel describes Jesus as the "light of the world." John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

P: The Gospel of the Lord!

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Pastor Nord Swanstrom

Jesus' teaching in Mark 13 serves to prepare readers and hearers for what lies ahead in the story as well as what lies ahead in the more distant future.

After Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew inquire, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Jesus speaks of many troubling events that will occur before the end, starting with false prophets who will lead many astray. There will be wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines, but the end is not yet. "This is but the beginning of the birth pangs," Jesus says.

The image of birth pangs is common in apocalyptic literature as a metaphor for speaking of the suffering that will be experienced before the end.

It is ultimately a hopeful image, as it expresses a finality and purpose to the pain. The anguish will ultimately give way to new life, to a new creation.

After speaking of the persecution that the faithful will experience and the desecration of the temple, Jesus turns to cosmic signs of the end.

The sun and moon will be darkened, the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in heaven will be shaken.

Although these are perhaps the most frightening of the signs, they signal that deliverance is very near.

It is then that the Son of Man will return with power and glory and send out his angels to gather his elect from the ends of the earth.

Jesus speaks about all these things before directly addressing the disciples' question about *when* this will be.

His response is not to give them a timetable for the end, but rather an assurance that when they see these things taking place, they will know that he is near, as surely as foliage on a fig tree signals that summer is coming .

Finally, Jesus emphasizes the fact that no one knows the precise day or hour when this will happen, not the angels in heaven nor even the Son, but only the Father.

It is useless to speculate about timetables. The only faithful response is to be vigilant and prepared at all times, like slaves entrusted with the management of the household while the master of the house is away.

Since the servants do not know exactly when the master will return, they need to be about their work and prepared for his return at any moment.

In fact, there are two opposite and equally problematic extremes regarding preparation for Christ's return and the end of the age.

One is being overly eager to interpret contemporary events as signs of the end times.

The other is a complete lack of preparation, giving very little thought to Christ's return.

For many in the congregations to whom we preach, I would guess, the danger is more that of giving too little thought to Christ's return, in other words of falling asleep on the watch.

After all, it has been some 2,000 years, and still Jesus has not returned in glory. It is easy to lose the sense of urgency about the mission he has entrusted to us and to focus on other interests and priorities.

We are not the first to struggle with staying awake and prepared.

The fact that these words of Jesus are included in Mark suggests that the community originally addressed by Mark's Gospel was struggling too.

Jesus says: "Keep awake, be on the watch! For you do not know when the master of the house will come—in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly".

The disciples in Mark's Gospel serve as examples of the struggle to stay awake and prepared.

Despite having heard Jesus' teaching, they are totally unprepared when crisis comes.

Each of the four watches of the night that Jesus names—evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn—corresponds to an event of Jesus' passion at which his disciples will fail him.

At *evening* they gather for the Passover meal, and Jesus reveals that one of them is about to betray him. "Surely not I?" each one says.

At *midnight* in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus takes aside Peter, James, and John and asks them to stay awake and watch and pray with him, yet three times Jesus returns to find them sleeping.

After the third time, Judas arrives with the guards who arrest Jesus, and the rest of the disciples all desert Jesus and flee.

At *cockcrow*, Peter comes to the bitter realization that he has denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus had predicted.

And finally, at *dawn*, the chief priests and scribes bring Jesus before Pilate to be tried, and Jesus stands utterly alone. Not one of his disciples waits and watches with him.^[1]

Much interpretation and preaching about the end focuses on fear and judgment—the sense that you better be ready, or you will miss out on salvation.

That is not the story Mark tells, however.

According to the story Mark tells, in the one who was betrayed and denied and utterly forsaken, God worked an astounding act of mercy and grace.

After two more long, dark nights, at dawn on the third day, the women found the tomb empty. The angels proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that he would meet his disciples in Galilee.

So even for sleepy, unprepared, miserably failing disciples, there is hope—hope based on God's faithfulness and not our own.

This means that our watching and waiting need not be full of fear and dread.

Rather, it is an active, hopeful, and purposeful waiting—like preparing for the birth of a child. It is to be about the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us.

Jesus says that the troubles before the end are only the beginning of the birth pangs.

The present pain will give way to new life, to a new creation. He promises to return and to gather his chosen ones from the ends of the earth. We watch and wait not because our salvation depends upon it—that is securely in God's hands—but because Jesus has given us a mission, because he calls us to participate here and now in the new creation that he is ushering in.

To God be the Glory

AMEN

Hymn of the Day

“My Lord, What a Morning”

hymn #438

All Verses

The 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 12/3

R: With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

R: Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give your church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent. Merciful God,

C: receive our prayer.

R: Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter. Merciful God,

C: receive our prayer.

R: You love justice and promise your favor to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and incarcerated. Grant wisdom and compassion to those who work for public safety and all who work within prisons, jails, and courts, that mercy may increase and violence wither away. Merciful God,

C: receive our prayer.

R: Give us strength to pray for our world without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need especially:

† Kathy Dougherty (member)

† Kim Greene (member)

† Michael Love (member)

- † 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)
- † Richard Nortch (community member)
- † Linda Book (members)
- † Joe Enzenbacher (member)
- † Mary Vanvleck (friend of Jim & Janis DeWall)
- † Carolyn Ebbesmeyer (Mother of Bob Ebbesmeyer)
- † Sarah Banks (Daughter of Kathy Dougherty)
- † Cheyenne Green (friend of Carrie Daly)
- † Jennifer Dougherty (Daughter of Kathy Dougherty)
- † Matt Brown (friend of Kathy Dougherty)
- † Pastor Zach Baer (Pastor of Living Waters Lutheran Church)
- † Bridgette Reddy (community member)
- † Allison Nelson Goble (community member)
- † Leona Greene (member)
- † Ryker Hoppe and Family (community members)

Provide for all without adequate housing, food, employment, or access to health care. Empower us as helpers and advocates. Merciful God,
C: receive our prayer.

R: Open our hearts to those who serve as truth-tellers in our church and in our society. Bless leaders in church and society in their task of proclamation. Amplify voices of peacemakers, advocates, and especially those whose voices are ignored or marginalized. Merciful God,
C: receive our prayer.

R: With gratitude we rejoice in the saints (*especially*) who witnessed to your life in all circumstances, in whom your Spirit was not quenched, even in death. Through them, teach us always to hold fast to what is good. Merciful God,
C: receive our prayer.

R: Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.
C: Amen.

Sharing of the Peace

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

Offertory

Offering prayer

C: God our provider, by your merciful hand abundance springs up from the earth. Receive and bless these gifts of your own bounty. Let them be a sign of your steadfast love and faithfulness for all people, through Jesus Christ our Savior. 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

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: In this meal, righteousness and peace meet together. Come, take your place at the table.

C: Thanks be to God.

“Be Known to Us Lord Jesus”

Communion Hymn

“O Come O Come Emmanuel”

hymn #257

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-communing 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: The God of peace bless you, the love of Christ sustain you in hope, and the anointing of the Spirit ✠ remain upon you now and forever.

C: Amen.

Communion Prayer

P: Generous God, in bread and cup you have revealed your glory for all people to see together. Nourished by this meal, send us out to proclaim your good news of liberation and release, brought to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior.

C: Amen.

Sending Hymn

“Soon and Very Soon”

hymn #439

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. Keep awake.

C: Thanks be to God.

In Our Prayers

- † Kathy Dougherty (member)
- † Kim Greene (member)
- † Michael Love (member)
- † Jeremy Raymond (Linda Anderson's friend's son)
- † Estelle Smith and Family (Granddaughter of Michael & Lynn Love)
- † Roger & Sue Schomber (members)
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- † Pastor Zach Baer (Pastor of Living Waters Lutheran Church)
- † Bridgette Reddy (community member)
- † Allison Nelson Goble (community member)
- † Leona Greene (member)
- † Ryker Hoppe and Family (community members)

Celebrating Birthdays:

Judy Johnson (3), Ron Heffelfinger (5), Daryl Anderson, Linda Withers (9)

Serving away from home:

Jake Jenkins

Altar Flowers given by:

The Heffelfinger's

Announcements:

Pecatonica Food Pantry— For the month of December we are collecting canned fruits and vegetables for the Pecatonica food pantry. Please leave all donations in the basket by the church doors.

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 3rd, 2023	Hanging of the greens
Sunday, December 10th, 2023	St. Lucia Sunday
Sunday, December 10th, 2023	Church Council Meeting, 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, December 10th, 2023	Memory Lights Program, 2:30 p.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!*

Weekly offering needed: \$2,400

Attendance 11/26

Offering received on 11/26

32

General \$ 1243.00

Virtual Views - 2

Synod \$ 00.00

Improvement \$ 559.05

Simply Giving \$ 2304.00/mo

2023 Mission Commitment \$6,600

YTD amount forwarded ~ \$6,000

Worship Volunteers

December 3rd

Carrie Daly

Bob Ebbesmeyer

Sandra Smith

Sue Schomber

Joe Enzenbacher

Reader

AV Tech

Accompanist

Ushers

December 10th

Rose Jensen

Carrie Daly

Sue Schomber

Joe Enzenbacher