



**IMMANUEL EV. LUTH. CHURCH
CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025**

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love.

A Children's Christmas Service

This service—with its four themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love—draws on a traditional interpretation of the Advent wreath. The service culminates with the lighting of the center white Christ candle during the reading of John chapter 1.

PROCESSIONAL HYMN: “Where Shepherds Lately Knelt” (CW 345)

- 1 Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the angel’s word,
I come in half-belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred;
 but there is room and welcome there for me,
 but there is room and welcome there for me.
- 2 In that unlikely place I find him as they said:
sweet newborn babe, how frail! And in a manger bed:
 a still, small voice to cry one day for me,
 a still, small voice to cry one day for me.
- 3 How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
his prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart I stare:
 a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me,
 a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.
- 4 Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned
its way into my heart—unasked, unforced, unearned,
 to die, to live, and not alone for me,
 to die, to live, and not alone for me?

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Stand

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

OPENING DIALOGUE (*excerpts from Psalm 33*):

Pastor: Shout joyfully to the Lord, you righteous. The praise of the upright is beautiful.

Congregation: Yes, the word of the Lord is right, and everything he does is trustworthy.

Pastor: By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the breath of his mouth he made the whole army of stars.

Congregation: Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world revere him.

Pastor: The plan of the Lord stands forever. The intentions of his heart stand through all generations.

Congregation: Our souls wait for the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

Pastor: Yes, in him our heart rejoices, because we trust in his holy name.

Congregation: May your mercy, O Lord, be on us, even as we wait confidently for you.

PRAYER:

Pastor: Heavenly Father, our hearts again rejoice this night as we hear sweet angel voices proclaiming “Christ is born!” Softly, Jesus calls from his lowly manger, saying, “You are safe from danger. Children, from the sins that grieve you, you are freed; all you need I will surely give you.” Come, then, banish all our sadness! Accept our songs of gladness. Fix our eyes on the day when we shall live with you forever on high in that joy which will vanish never; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

All: Amen.

Be seated

1. HOPE

NARRATION: Shelby Larcom

What do you hope for? Why do we all need hope? It's likely no surprise to any of us that hope often stands alongside something negative—difficult circumstances, adverse conditions, or some less than ideal reality. Are you discontent? Are you suffering in some way? Do you have uncertainties? Do you feel broken in some way? When the answer to any of these questions is yes, we need hope. Even when life is going well, we hope the good wave won't come crashing into darker shores too soon—or ever, if possible.

NARRATION: Sophia Kannas

When God created the world, hope did not exist. Nor did it *need* to exist. Think about it: There was no need for hope because God created a perfect world. The perfect people God created—Adam and Eve—did not need hope because they had it all: peace with God and each other, joy in the wonders of his perfect world, and love perfectly shown and received in all ways. There was no discontent, no suffering, no uncertainties, and no brokenness. But then . . .

All Men:

Now the serpent was more clever than any wild animal which the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’” (Genesis 3:1)?

All Women:

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but not from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it. You shall not touch it, or else you will die’” (Genesis 3:2-3).

All Men:

The serpent said to the woman, “You certainly will not die. In fact, God knows that the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5).

All Women:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was appealing to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it (Genesis 3:6).

NARRATION: Ella Kannas

What had they done? And what does it mean for all of us here today? The need for hope was born. From that moment forward, all people ever born, right up to all of us here today, are born sinful, will someday die, and have earned an eternity in hell. St. Paul wrote,

RECITATION: Libby Larcom

So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

RECITATION: Arabella Buttenhoff

Every single one has turned back. Altogether they have become rotten. There is no one who does good. There is not even one (Psalm 53:3).

NARRATION: Liam Sindelir

We all desperately need hope, just as Adam and Eve did. With generations of God's people, we confess our sins.

HYMN BY CONGREGATION AND CHILDREN: "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall" sts. 1-3 (CW 556)

The children sing stanza one. The congregation sings stanzas two and three.

1 All mankind fell in Adam's fall;
one common sin infects us all.

From one to all the curse descends,
and over all God's wrath impends.

2 Through all our pow'rs corruption creeps
and us in dreadful bondage keeps;
in guilt we draw our infant breath
and reap its fruits of woe and death.

3 From hearts depraved, to evil prone,
flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;
God's image lost, the darkened soul
nor seeks nor finds its heav'nly goal.

Lighting of the Hope Candle**NARRATION: Conner Zvorak**

God did not leave Adam and Eve in despair. He promised a Savior from sin, death, and hell.

RECITATION: Valen Marks

The Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the livestock, and more than every wild animal. You shall crawl on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel (Genesis 3:14-15).

NARRATION: Archer Heller

When God said this to the devil, who had taken the form of a serpent, God was promising Adam and Eve a Savior, a unique offspring who would defeat the devil forever. But this promise wasn't just for Adam and Eve; it is for all of us too! Tonight, let's celebrate how God in his great love provided the hope we need by sending the Offspring—Jesus. Let's explore God's Word, in which "Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope" (Romans 15:4). Let's look at prophecy, fulfillment, and promise, and by these renew our hope in the peace, joy, and love of God our Father and Jesus Christ, his Son, our Savior.

HYMN BY CHILDREN AND CONGREGATION: “What Hope! An Eden Prophesied” (CW 304)

The children sing 1-2. The congregation sings 3-4.

- 1 What hope! An Eden prophesied
 where tame live with the wild,
 the lamb and lion side by side,
 led by a little child!
- 2 A shoot will sprout from Jesse’s stem,
 a branch from David’s line,
 a Prince of Peace in Bethlehem:
 the fruit of God’s design.
- 3 As banner of God’s love unfurled,
 Christ came to suffer loss,
 that by his death a dying world
 would rally to the cross.
- 4 Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord,
 lost Paradise restore;
 lead past the angel’s flaming sword—
 come, open heaven’s door.

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2. PEACE

NARRATION: Shelby Larcom

After God made the first promise of the Savior in the Garden of Eden, questions were natural. Who would he be? How would we recognize him? What would he do? What would it mean for life now and beyond the grave? As time passed and the promise awaited fulfillment, God answered these questions through his prophets.

RECITATION: Jenna Claussen

For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no limit to his authority and no end to the peace he brings. He will rule on David’s throne and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from now on, into eternity. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

RECITATION: Duane Buttenhoff

He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root from dry ground. He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him. But it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:2,5).

RECITATION: Finley Heller

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel. His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity. He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. They will dwell securely, for at that time he will be great to the ends of the earth. This one will be their peace (Micah 5:2,4-5a).

Lighting of the Peace Candle

NARRATION: Sophia Kannas

Some of the answers are straightforward: This Savior would be born just like any other human child, in the town of Bethlehem. There is also this common answer regarding what he would do: He would achieve peace. He would *be* our peace. Does that seem hard to believe? The conflicts around the world are the exact opposite of peace. Do you feel at peace? Perhaps you and I do briefly from time to time, but daily we face all kinds of things that oppose any sense of lasting peace—personal failures, strained relationships, myriad tasks that are expected at work and are required to keep the household humming. In this broken world, peace always seems elusive. Consider what these psalm writers said:

RECITATION: Violet Zvorak

For they do not speak for peace, but they devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land (Psalm 35:20).

RECITATION: Libby Larcom

For too long my soul has dwelt with those who hate peace (Psalm 120:6).

NARRATION: Ella Kannas

But enter Jesus. He would suffer in our place the eternal punishment we each deserve. He would restore our peace with God and make peace possible among the people of God. God's forgiveness grants peace to our minds, consciences, and souls. Jesus even made it possible for us to be at peace in the face of death.

NARRATION: Conner Zvorak

What price would you pay for such peace? How can you make sure it is yours? Such profound and eternal peace is beyond price. It is too lofty to attain by any effort or means of our own. But when the time was right, God sent Jesus—to us and for us and without cost—as recorded by Luke.

RECITATION: Nolan Claussen

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria. And everyone went to register, each to his own town (Luke 2:1-3).

RECITATION: Logan Sindelir

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. He went to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child (Luke 2:4-5).

RECITATION: Violet Zvorak

And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:6-7).

HYMN BY CHILDREN AND CONGREGATION: "Peace Came to Earth" (CW 330)

The children sing 1. The congregation sings 2-4.

- 1 Peace came to earth at last that chosen night
when angels clove the sky with song and light
and God embodied love and sheathed his might—
Who could but gasp: Immanuel!
Who could but sing: Immanuel!

2 And who could be the same for having held
 the infant in their arms and later felt
 the wounded hands and side, all doubts dispelled—
 Who could but sigh: Immanuel!
 Who could but shout: Immanuel!

3 You show the Father none has ever seen,
 in flesh and blood you bore our griefs and pain,
 in bread and wine you visit us again—
 Who could but see: Immanuel!
 Who could but thrill: Immanuel!

4 How else could I have known you, O my God!
 How else could I have loved you, O my God!
 How else could I embrace you, O my God!
 Who could but pray: Immanuel!
 Who could but praise: Immanuel!

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3. JOY

NARRATION: Liam Sindelir

There are many short verses in the Bible. Job 3:2 is “Job spoke up and said.” Famously, John 11:35 says, “Jesus wept.” Here is another one: “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Always? Just as peace seems elusive, so does joy—at least, joy *all the time*. How can we be joyful when we are sick or injured? when we are suffering consequences for our poor choices? when friends or family somehow hurt us, or worse yet, when we hurt them? Because of our own sin and life in a world that is affected by sin, we tend toward sorrow rather than joy.

RECITATION: Libby Larcom

The joy of our hearts has ceased. Our dancing has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen off our head. Woe to us, because we have sinned (Lamentations 5:15-16)!

NARRATION: Archer Heller

There were shepherds near Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. They too were sinners living in a fallen world. Consider their situation: They were working the night shift while their families slept. They fended off dangers for the flock, or they faced the consequences for fleeing from danger and abandoning the flock. They were endlessly saving dumb animals from forever making bad and dangerous decisions. What could bring these shepherds joy? What could bring us joy as we navigate trade-offs between work and family, difficult decisions, and the fallout from our sinfulness and that of others?

RECITATION: Nolan Claussen

There were in the same country shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified! But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people (Luke 2:8-10):

RECITATION: Arabella Buttenhoff

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11-12).

RECITATION: Violet Zvorak

Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying (Luke 2:13),

All Children:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind” (Luke 2:14).

HYMN BY CHILDREN: “Joy to the World” st. 1 (CW 353)

1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let ev’ry heart prepare him room
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

Lighting of the Joy Candle**NARRATION: Shelby Larcom**

The joy we seek, the joy Paul tells us to have always, comes from the Savior born for us! With the shepherds that first Christmas night, we hurry to see him.

RECITATION: Logan Sindelir

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Now let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger (Luke 2:15-16).

NARRATION: Sophia Kannas

Where do we go when our hearts are heavy with guilt? See Jesus in the manger, born to give us peace in sins forgiven! What do we hold on to when our death looms large? See Jesus in the manger, born to ensure the hope of life eternal! What do we do upon seeing this peace and hope in our Jesus, who is lying in the manger? What did the shepherds do?

RECITATION: Finley Heller

When they had seen him, they told others the message they had been told about this child. And all who heard it were amazed by what the shepherds said to them. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (Luke 2:17-18,20).

NARRATION: Ella Kannas

The peace and hope we have in Jesus are not just for us gathered here; they are for everyone—people all around us who suffer under the curse of Adam but to whom Jesus offers hope and peace and joy. Like the shepherds, we have good news to share with the whole world!

HYMN BY CONGREGATION: “Joy to the World” sts. 2-4 (CW 353)

2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 No more let sins and sorrows grow
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

4 He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

4. LOVE

NARRATION: Conner Zvorak

What makes this all possible? We know our sins are great and many. Does your conscience still accuse? Does your soul still yearn? Does your mind still ask: How can we possibly have firm and uninterrupted hope, peace, and joy? Do you wonder: Why would God do this for *me*? After all, Paul wrote to the Romans, “It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him” (Romans 5:7). Thankfully, Paul doesn’t stop there. He continues:

RECITATION: Ben Pedersen

But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

NARRATION: Liam Sindelir

Love—God’s amazing and perfect love—is behind it all. Addressing a different group of Christians, Paul wrote:

RECITATION: Jenna Claussen

But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5)!

Lighting of the Love Candle

NARRATION: Archer Heller

God has such great love for us that he made certain we would have hope beyond the grave, peace in the forgiveness of all our sins, and joy in these most gracious gifts! We have them because God sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior. We have them despite what we may see, think, or feel. As one Christian songwriter has said it, “I can’t live by what I feel but by the truth your Word reveals.” That Word says this:

RECITATION: Duane Buttenhoff

This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

NARRATION: Shelby Larcom

But does God’s love ever seem far off? Do you ever wonder if it has run out or if it could be revoked at some point? Again, we live by this truth of God’s Word, his perfect promise and commitment to us:

RECITATION: Valen Marks

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

HYMN BY CHILDREN AND THE CONGREGATION: “Love Has Come” (CW 364)

The children sing 1. The congregation sings 2-3.

- 1 Love has come, a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high!
- 2 Love is born! Come share in the wonder.
Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;
what is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers.
Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.
- 3 Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

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OFFERING: During the offering the children play “Away in a Manger” with the handbells.

Stand

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Pastor: The Gospel according to St. John, chapter one.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5,9-14).

Pastor: The Gospel of the Lord.

Children and Congregation: Praise be to you, O Christ!

NARRATION: Sophia Kannas

Are you looking for durable hope? Are you yearning for lasting peace? Do you want abiding joy? On this Christmas, be filled with the hope and the peace we have through the perfect and never-ending love of God in Jesus, our Savior. With joy, we say together with the psalmist:

All Children:

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. With my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations (Psalm 89:1).

PRAYER

Pastor: Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true light. Grant that as we have known on earth the wonder of that light, we may also behold him in all his glory in the life to come; through your only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Congregation: Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

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.

BLESSING

Pastor: May he who by his incarnation gathered things earthly and heavenly into one, fill us with such joy that comes with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. And the blessing of God Almighty — the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit — be upon you and remain with you always.

Congregation: Amen.

Be seated

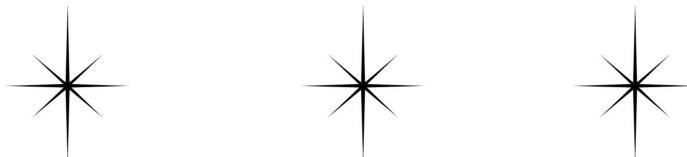
RECESSATIONAL HYMN BY CHILDREN AND THE CONGREGATION: "Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising" (CW 362)

The children sing 1-2. The congregation sings 3-6.

- 1 Come, your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising;
loudly sing his love amazing,
worthy folk of Christendom.
- 2 Christ, from heav'n to us descending
and in love our race befriending,
in our need his help extending,
saved us from the wily foe.
- 3 Jacob's Star in all its splendor
beams with comfort sweet and tender,
forcing Satan to surrender,
breaking all the pow'rs of hell.

- 4 From the bondage that oppressed us,
from sin's fetters that possessed us,
from the grief that sore distressed us,
 we, the captives, now are free.
- 5 Oh, the joy beyond expressing
when by faith we grasp this blessing,
when, O Christ, we come addressing
 thanks to you and highest praise!
- 6 Gracious Child, in mercy hear us,
from your lowly manger cheer us,
gently lead us and be near us
 till we join th' angelic choir.

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Invitation: Everyone is invited to come to the Fellowship Hall downstairs for a meal following our service this afternoon.

Thank You: We thank everyone who helped to make today such a special day to proclaim the gospel message of Christ Jesus. We especially thank Jen Heller for planning, preparing and directing the service; Maria Claussen for accompanying the children on the piano; Joanne Malkuch for playing the organ; the Sunday school teachers for helping the children prepare; the Buttenhoff family for preparing the Christmas bags; and everyone who brought and served food for our meal tonight.

Christmas Bags: The ushers will distribute Christmas bags following the service.

