

Third Week in Advent

LET'S START THE PARTY



WOOHOO

The Lihu'e Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hawai'i

Ka Hale Pule 'O Na Lahui Apau . . .

Church Of All Peoples . . .

. . . Hele Pu Makou me Iesu Kristo

. . . Walking Together With Christ

December 12, 2021

The Lihue Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hawai'i
 4602 Ho'omana Road, Lihue, HI 96766

The Rev. Dr. JP Paxton *Tony Kment, Technology*
Rhonda Pabo, Organist *Cheryl Claypoole, Lector*

Church: (808) 245-2145 Fax: (808) 246-8626 Pastors Email: jpaxton@ses.plts.edu
E-Mail: staff@lihuelutheran.com Website: lihuelutheranchurch.com

Welcome to Our Guests

It is always a joy to share our faith and worship with people visiting from around the world. Please know your presence and participation in our service is most appreciated. At Lihue Lutheran we celebrate Holy Communion at every service. You are certainly welcome in joining us as our Lord comes to us in this holy meal.

Prayer Concerns

Please remember these people in your prayers during the week: The family of Amanda Thayer , Bob & Joann Clash, Sally Rasay, Linda Garrett, Stan Weeks, Ronnie Pacheco, Pagatpatan ohana, Villanueva ohana, Geronimo ohana, David Gragg, Joe Morgan, Zosimo and Virginia Austria, Karen Kinoshita, Jake Whisenhunt, Rick Rentz, Norman Dibble, Kazue Zaima, Virginia Hines-Aflague, John Mattek, Giraldo II (Bobby Giraldo's son), Kristie Schmid (Tony's sister), Lolli Hagen, Abraham Torres, Sr., Kristy Kahananui, Sonny Koerte, Uncle Joe, Mallory Rodriguez, Steve Schantz, Peter Alisna, Tirzah Pope, Pastor Matthew Weber, Joyce Anglemeyer, Stephen Shioi, Peggy Hood, Jason Shimono, Richard Rasay, Nancy Nelson (formely Mandell), Karen & Patrick Pavao, Edward Rasay, Karen Richards (friend of Nancy Mandell), Marcos Larson (Liedeke's son), Dora Jane Rowell, Franklin Parraga, Penny Parraga, Leticia Ancog (Kurt Javinar's sister), Yvonne Shinseki, Al Dressler (Larry's Father), Shirley Hallman (Denese Alcott's Mother), Mercy Ballesteros, Mike LaBerge, Anna Marie & Phil Croghan, Judy Carlson, Caroline Johnson, Sheila Belarmino, Ray Roderick, The Church Council, and leaders in the ELCA. If you have additional prayer requests, please let the church office know. "*Ask it in my name . . .*" Mahalo for your love.

Remembering Our Military

As we gather for worship, please remember those serving us in the military, and the families of our Hawai'i National Guard. These names have been given by loved ones and family members: Navy – TJ, Javinar, Kristian Matsumoto, Coast Guard - Brian Rodriguez, Navy - Kiana Alisna, Coast Guard - Ke'ale Renta Army - Jason Lumacad, Levi Fajardo: Air Force - Steven Javinar, Ikaika Fajardo, Army - Brandon Perkinson, Drew Cox, Tony Garton: National Guard - Benji MacKenzie, Eddie Resinto, Fred Casticimo, Philip Kamakea, Anthony Y. Torres, Master Sgt. If you know of someone you would like added to our prayer list, please advise the church office.

Lihue Lutheran Spotlight

Hau'oli Lā Hānau to Uncle Obie (12.17) as we remember his life, witness, and testimony.



Introduction

Christ's presence in our midst in the wonder of the holy supper is cause for singing. The nearness of the God in prayer, in every circumstance, is cause for rejoicing. The coming of one "more powerful" than John, even with a winnowing fork in hand, is good news—and cause for exultation—for us who are being saved. Great joy is the tone for the third Sunday of Advent.

Overview

No More Business As Usual

Lutherans looking for gospel may hear John the Baptizer's preaching as primarily law. It can be difficult to reconcile his fire-and-brimstone style with the joy that traditionally belongs to the third Sunday of Advent. Yet despite John's harsh words for the crowds, the people seem eager for his teaching—"What then should we do?" They keep asking questions fervently, even when the answers call them to higher expectations of moral and selfless living.

It's the kind of teaching that people associate with the Messiah: good news that business as usual is on the way out and something new is on its way in. The status quo of greed, selfishness, scarcity, and complacency no longer has power. A new day of mutual sharing and justice is almost here. Images of the winnowing fork and the ax at the root of the tree suggest clearing out old habits and fears to make room for something new. In calling people to repentance, John invites them to turn away from the old life and turning toward God's new life.

John has even better news: The Messiah is indeed coming, one who will not only call people to high expectations, but also enable that faithful living. Because the Messiah is coming to baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire," life will never be the same. Through baptism business as usual will be replaced by a fruit-bearing, joy-yielding, grace-filled relationship with God. It's an excellent reason to "rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16): The Lord is near!

Theological Reflection

It is so easy to let John's call to repentance take us right back to trying to determine which and how many good works will save us from God's wrath. The both/and nature of the coming of the reign of God presses profoundly in this Advent season: Is it judgment or salvation? Should we fear it or welcome it? The answer, of course, is "yes." Along with the crowds listening to John, we also ask, "What then should we do?" Lutherans understand that this question isn't "What then should we do *for* salvation?" but rather "What then should we do *with* salvation?" There is nothing we can do to earn God's mercy, but there is a tremendous amount we can do *with* God's mercy—and John shows us what that looks like, at both individual and communal levels.

Announcements and Weekly Events!

Welcome, Check-In, and Announcements

In the Facebook chatbox share where God has surprised you in Advent.

Weekly Events

- ◇ Youth Group
 - Sunday, Dec 12**, Gingerbread decorating contest, 5:30-7pm in the fellowship hall
- ◇ Ghetto Sweet Tarts
 - Monday, Dec 13**, 5:30-7pm White Elephant Gift Exchange
- ◇ BOBS Bible Study—The Christmas We Didn't Expect
 - Tuesday, Dec 14**, @ 5:30-8pm in the fellowship hall
- ◇ Centering Prayer with Liedeke Bulder
 - Saturday, Dec 18**, @ 9-10am via zoom <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/9079773456>

Christmas Wish List (opportunities to give)

- ◇ Nintendo Switch for the youth group
- ◇ TV for the fellowship hall
- ◇ Help us get in the black this year with a one-time gift or offering!
- ◇ Get out there and love people this Advent if you're not already

Third Week in Advent

Order for Worship

*Confession and Forgiveness

P Blessed be the Holy Trinity, + one God, who alone does wonders, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things.

C Amen.

P Let us confess our sin, trusting in the tender mercy of our God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P God for whom we wait,

C in the presence of one another, we confess our sin before you. We fail in believing that your good news is for us. We falter in our call to tend your creation. We find our sense of self in material wealth. We fear those different from ourselves. We forget we are your children and turn away from your love. Forgive us, Blessed One, and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.

P God, in Christ Jesus, has looked with favor upon you! Through the power of the Holy Spirit, + your sins are forgiven. You are children of the Most High, inheritors of the eternal promise, and recipients of divine mercy. God strengthens you anew to follow the way of peace.

C Amen.



*Gathering Song

Gather Us In



1 Here in this place the new light is stream-ing, now is the dark - ness
 2 We are the young, our lives are a mys - t'ry, we are the old who
 3 Here we will take the wine and the wa - ter, here we will take the
 4 Not in the dark of build-ings con - fin - ing, not in some heav - en,



van - ished a - way; see in this space our fears and our dream-ings
 yearn for your face; we have been sung through - out all of his - t'ry,
 bread of new birth, here you shall call your sons and your daugh-ters,
 light years a - way— here in this place the new light is shin - ing,



brought here to you in the light of this day.
 called to be light to the whole hu - man race.
 call us a - new to be salt for the earth.
 now is the king - dom, and now is the day.



Gath - er us in, the lost and for - sak - en, gath - er us in, the
 Gath - er us in, the rich and the haugh - ty, gath - er us in, the
 Give us to drink the wine of com - pas - sion, give us to eat the
 Gath - er us in and hold us for - ev - er, gath - er us in and



blind and the lame; call to us now, and we shall a - wak - en,
 proud and the strong; give us a heart, so meek and so low - ly,
 bread that is you; nour - ish us well, and teach us to fash - ion
 make us your own; gath - er us in, all peo - ples to - geth - er,



we shall a - rise at the sound of our name.
 give us the cour - age to en - ter the song.
 lives that are ho - ly and hearts that are true.
 fire . . of love in our flesh and our bone.

**The Apostolic Greeting*

P The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

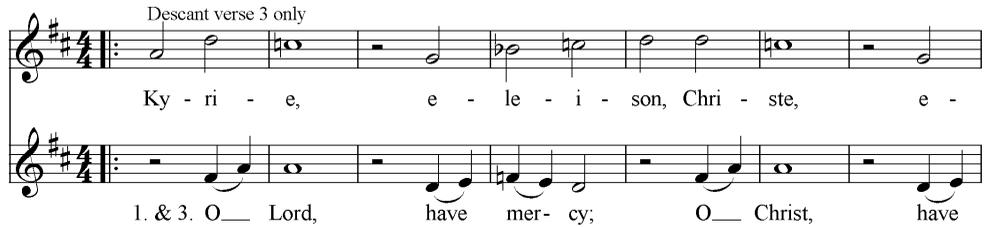
C **And also with you.**

**Kyrie*

Cantor Kahaku e', aho nuimai, Cristoe', aho nuimai,
Kahaku e', aho nuimai, Kahaku e', aho nuimaila.

arr. David Haas, Rob Glover

Descant verse 3 only



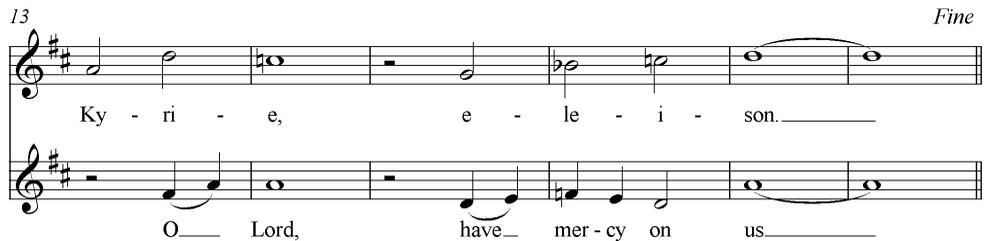
Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son, Chri - ste, e -
1. & 3. O__ Lord, have mer - cy; O__ Christ, have

8



le - i - son; Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son;____
mer - cy; O__ Lord, have mer - cy on us;

13 *Fine*



Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son._____
O__ Lord, have mer - cy on us._____

19



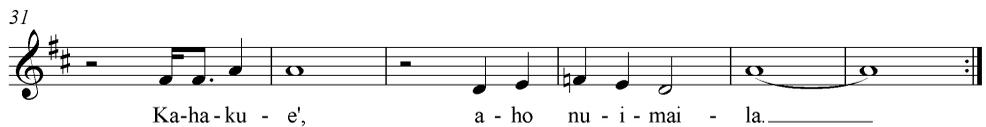
2. Ka-ha-ku e', a - ho nu - i - mai, Cris - to - e', a - ho

26



nu - i - mai, Ka-ha - ku e', a - ho nu - i - mai,

31



Ka-ha - ku - e', a - ho nu - i - mai - la._____

*The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

P Blessed are you, God of our salvation; you promised to raise up a righteous branch, One who would bring justice and righteousness to the land, so that we might live in safety. As we light this candle, kindle in us the fire of your justice and righteousness, and make us blameless before you at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints; let your face shine on us and bless us that we may be saved.

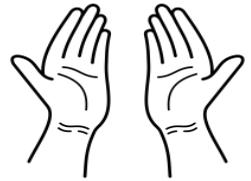
C Amen.



*Prayer of the Day

P Let us pray. Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the preaching of John, that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.



First Reading

Zephaniah 3:14-20

The prophet Zephaniah's message is mostly one of judgment for sin. This reading, however, which comes from the conclusion of the book, prophesies joy for Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment has led to repentance, and God's salvation is at hand.

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. ¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. ¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult

over you with loud singing ¹⁸as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. ¹⁹I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Isaiah 12:2-6

In your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (*Is. 12:6*)

²Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might, and has become my salvation.

³**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

⁴And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on God's name; make known the deeds

of the LORD among the nations; proclaim that this name is exalted.

⁵**Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.**

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Despite being in prison, Paul is remarkably upbeat as he writes this letter. Here, he urges his friends in Philippi to trust God with all their worries and concerns with the hope that they will experience God's joy and peace.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

*Gospel Acclamation



Holy Gospel

Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist heralds the mighty one who is coming. John teaches that preparation for God's reign is not a matter of identity but of bearing fruits of merciful justice, radical generosity, and vocational integrity.

P The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke, the third chapter.



⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed

for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,

¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

P The Gospel of the Lord.



Keiki Sermon

Sermon

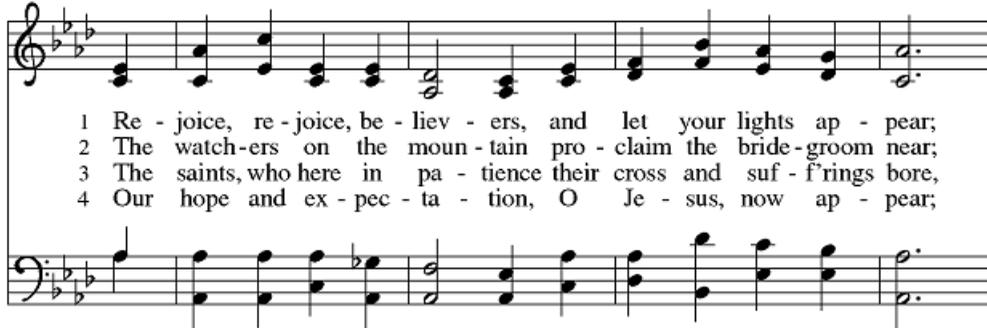
Sermon Song

Start Up The Party

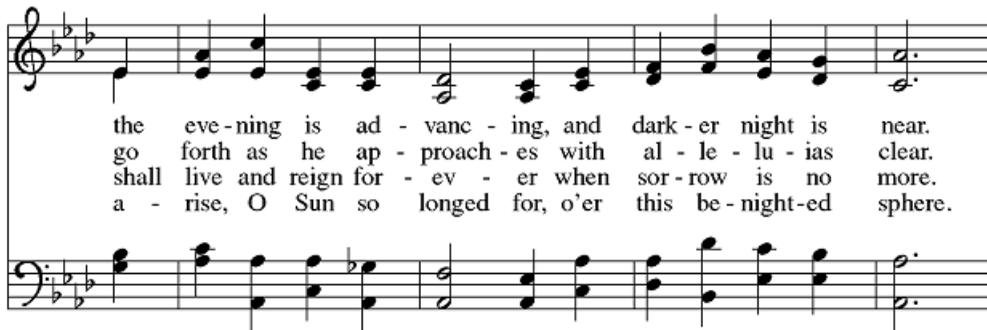
[Start up the Party—Drew Bodine](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5EMuUynkYs), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5EMuUynkYs>

*Hymn of the Day

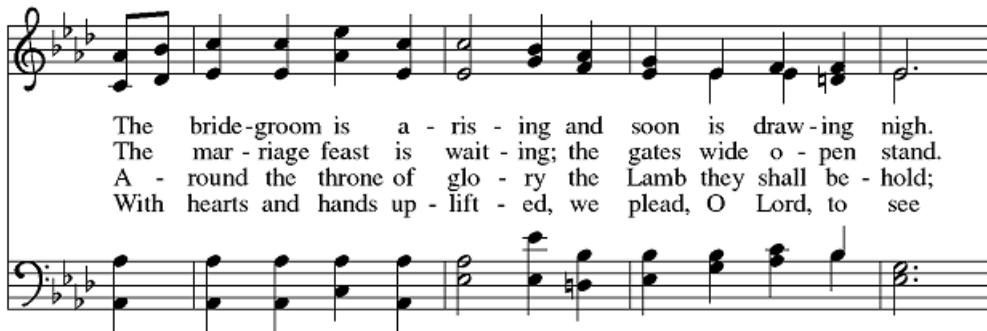
Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers



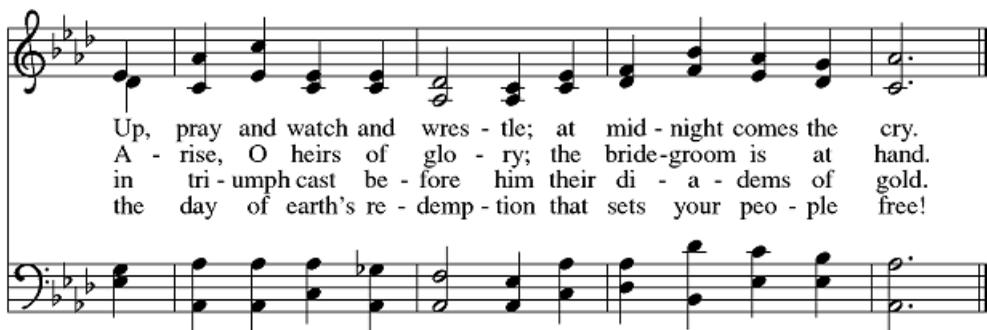
1 Re - joice, re - joice, be - liev - ers, and let your lights ap - pear;
 2 The watch - ers on the moun - tain pro - claim the bride - groom near;
 3 The saints, who here in pa - tience their cross and suf - f'ring bore,
 4 Our hope and ex - pec - ta - tion, O Je - sus, now ap - pear;



the eve - ning is ad - vanc - ing, and dark - er night is near.
 go forth as he ap - proach - es with al - le - lu - ias clear.
 shall live and reign for - ev - er when sor - row is no more.
 a - rise, O Sun so longed for, o'er this be - night - ed sphere.



The bride - groom is a - ris - ing and soon is draw - ing nigh.
 The mar - riage feast is wait - ing; the gates wide o - pen stand.
 A - round the throne of glo - ry the Lamb they shall be - hold;
 With hearts and hands up - lift - ed, we plead, O Lord, to see



Up, pray and watch and wres - tle; at mid - night comes the cry.
 A - rise, O heirs of glo - ry; the bride - groom is at hand.
 in tri - umph cast be - fore him their di - a - dems of gold.
 the day of earth's re - demp - tion that sets your peo - ple free!

*Apostles' Creed

P Let us join together in reciting the Apostles' Creed

C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again 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.



*The Prayers of the Church

P In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

A Holy God, renew your church and raise up leaders who announce your good news. Grant peace to congregations and seminarians in the midst of transition. Guide the work of candidacy and call committees. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Creating God, your Spirit brought forth the earth and all that is in it. Breathe life into us, that we are inspired to live in harmony with one another and the planet. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Shepherding God, you lead your people in paths of righteousness. Raise up prophets in our own day who warn against captivity to greed and point us to the freedom found in generosity. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Nurturing God, you come near in times of worry and need. Cradle us in your arms, that we trust you and are not afraid. Attend to any who are hungry, imprisoned, or ill this day. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Rejoicing God, you exult over us in singing. Enliven the song of this assembly and bless the ministry of church musicians. With instruments and dance, join our voices to the song of all creation. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

A We give you thanks for your servants who showed us your goodness and grace. By the power of your Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith until we make our home with you. Hear us, O God.

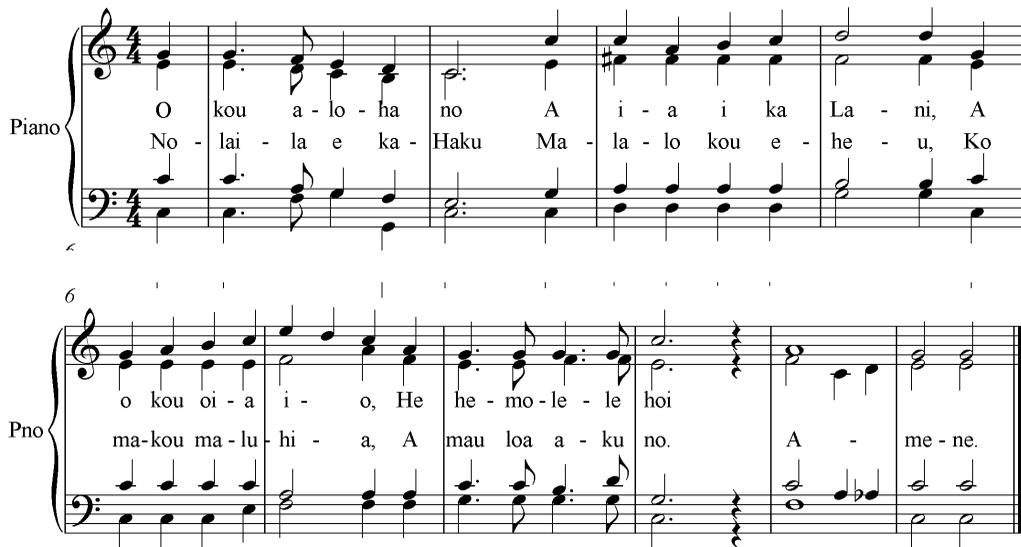
C your mercy is great.

P God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus.

C Amen

*The Queen's Prayer

Piano



O kou a - lo - ha no A i - a i ka La - ni, A
No - lai - la e ka - Haku Ma - la - lo kou e - he - u, Ko

o kou oi - a i - o, He he - mo - le - le hoi
ma - kou ma - lu - hi - a, A mau loa a - ku no. A - me - ne.

Pno

English Translation

1. O Lord thy Loving Mercy,
Is high as the Heavens.
It tells us of thy truth.
And 'tis filled with holiness

3. For thy grace I beseech thee.
Bring us 'neath thy protection.
And peace will be thy portion
Now and forever more. Amen

The Sharing of the Peace

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C And also with you.

P Let us share the peace of the Lord with those here locally and those joining us online via Facebook live! As the ushers come forward, take a minute to share "Aloha" with those joining us online!



Offertory Word

We invite you partner with us in ministry through the pandemic with a one-time gift, tithe, or offering. Ministry is never done alone, but in collaboration with the community gathered so that we can be the community sent. If God puts it on your heart to give, donations can be given here today, mailed in, or given online our website [here](#) or you can copy and paste the weblink below @



https://www.eservicepayments.com/cgi-bin/Vanco_ver3.vps?a_pver3=tYgT1GfNxRUIiimjHMvORYXmm3bazY6GfrmTtVDZydsksODEa-Up5lt373GHnco2evTpo0mld6BrVzd2nG0p8xSFKZ9u6c4AzLo4CjNx7k=&ver=3

Offertory Response

O Come O Come Emmanuel

1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things

Is - rael, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
far and nigh: in strength and beau - ty and stay;

Refrain
un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
teach us your will and guide our way. Re-joice! Re-joice!

Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - rael.

*Offertory Prayer

- P** Let us pray. God of our waiting and watching, we offer the gifts of our hearts and our lives to the service of all your people. Prepare the way before us as we meet you in this simple meal, through Christ Jesus, our pathway and our peace.
- C** Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Come to Christ's banquet. Feast on God's gift of grace.

**The Words of Institution*

(All are welcome to share in this meal with us. The sacraments are provided in accordance to synodical guidelines in collaboration with CDC, state, and local precautions. If you do not have sacraments, please raise your hand and an usher will bring them to you.)

**The Lord's Prayer*

P Let us pray the prayer our Lord taught us to pray...

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 for give 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.**



**The Post-Communion Blessing*

P May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

C **Amen.**

**The Prayer After Communion*

P Most High God, You have come among us at this table. By the Spirit's power, form us to be bearers of Your Word, sharing gifts of mercy and grace with all, through Christ Jesus, our host and our guest.

C **Amen.**

*The Blessing

P The God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, through Christ Jesus for whom we wait.

C Amen.

*The Sending Song

Prepare the Royal Highway

1 Pre - pare the roy - al high - way; the King of kings is near!
 2 God's peo - ple, see him com - ing: your own e - ter - nal king!
 3 Then fling the gates wide o - pen to greet your prom - ised king!
 4 His is no earth - ly king - dom; it comes from heav'n a - bove.

Let ev - 'ry hill and val - ley a lev - el road ap - pear!
 Palm branch - es strew be - fore him! Spread gar - ments! Shout and sing!
 Your king, yet ev - 'ry na - tion its trib - ute too may bring.
 His rule is peace and free - dom and jus - tice, truth, and love.

Then greet the King of glo - ry, fore - told in sa - cred sto - ry:
 God's prom - ise will not fail you! No more shall doubt as - sail you!
 All lands will bow be - fore him; their voic - es join your sing - ing:
 So let your praise be sound - ing for kind - ness so a - bound - ing:

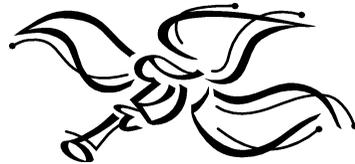
Refrain

Ho - san - na to the Lord, for he ful - fills God's word!

Dismissal

P Go in peace, Christ is near.

C Thanks be to God.



What's in your basket of fruit?

Luke 3 mirrors the same content in Matthew 3, “bear fruit worthy of repentance”. A great question to ask when reading this passage is, “What does it mean to ‘bear fruit worthy of repentance’”? The text makes the interpretive task a little bit easier by giving us a few illustrations with 1) what to do and 2) what not to do.

The sequence in Luke (and Matthew) actually begs a much more serious spiritual question: Are you bearing fruit worthy of repentance? We just came out of lectionary texts that drew from the book of Revelation. If we read further into the first chapter, we begin to see Jesus’ critique of the churches. Two notable critiques come to the church of Ephesus and the church in Laodicea. Jesus takes a look at these churches and then He says, “This I have against you...” To the church in Ephesus the critique is that the people have “lost their first love”. To the church in Laodicea, the critique is that they have become “lukewarm”.

The state of these churches is not a good thing in the same way that the state of the religious leaders is not good. They are referred to as “a brood of vipers”. These people are doubly critiqued because they 1) avoid punishment at the surface but at a much deeper level 2) don’t repent of their wrong doing. Repentance is not about just about avoiding bad behavior or doing good deeds. What repentance represents is a fundamental change in one’s beliefs and orientation.

What comes to mind with this text brings about a possibly imprecatory question for us: have we repented of our wrong doing? And some of you might say, “I’m a pretty good person. I don’t kill anybody, I don’t oppress or cheat or steal from anybody.” But sin is not just about what you do, it’s also about what you don’t do. As Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5, the bar is actually much higher than we anticipate. It’s not about *not killing* or *not lusting*...the law is about being perfect. Matthew 5:48 says, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees no one will ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

This produces a caveat for the one who wants to follow Christ because there is an inherent dilemma. *One cannot produce a righteousness that exceeds the pharisees*. So, how can one be saved? The answer: one must be fundamentally changed. This, my friends, is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches us that “no one is good, not even one” and “all of us like sheep have gone astray”. What we need is someone who can save us and then manifest in us the works of His Kingdom. To receive salvation, and be baptized daily, is to turn continually to the living Christ. As we turn to the living Christ, the fountain that flows out of our lives are good deeds. It’s not about behavior change, it’s much more foundational and fundamental than that. We must be changed, and only God can do that work through the waters of baptism.

For Further Reflection

Denominational Resource

The ELCA's website includes information on its goals for [Future Directions](#). Goal 4 is "A visible church deeply committed to working ecumenically and with other people of faith for justice, peace, and reconciliation in communities and around the world." This goal addresses both the themes of trust and peacemaking reflected in Philippians and the call to justice and restoration in the gospel. The Future Directions goals reflect the ELCA's answer to the question "What then shall we do with the good news being proclaimed to us?"

Let the Children Come

What does wholehearted rejoicing look, sound, smell, taste, and feel like in your context? For some, it may be a dance party; for others, an especially bountiful coffee hour. What beloved practice makes your congregation truly feel like itself at its best and most joyful? Singing a favorite song with gusto? Having kids help with communion? Filling the worship space with (allergy-friendly) flowers? Splashing around in the baptismal font? Whether drawing attention to something joyful that you always do or planning something special for this day, enlist the help of the children to enact something that will embody REJOICE for them and the assembly.

Theological Reflection

A popular bumper sticker in the 1970s and '80s read "My God's not dead; sorry about yours." While the sentiment was probably meant to convey a sense of confidence and joy in God, it came across more as gloating over having the right faith—as opposed to all those poor losers who don't. When we are speaking about God, it's important to our witness that we remember the difference between rejoicing and gloating—the latter being a great temptation in cultures that place high value on competitiveness and winning. As Christians we rejoice, not primarily because we are saved, but because there is a God who is good, powerful, loving, just, and merciful.

Connections with Creation

We rejoice to prepare for the One who binds up the brokenhearted, sets the prisoner free, and brings good news to the poor and recovery of sight to the blind. But God's steadfast love not only consoles—it also purifies. John the Baptist brings an important message: to prepare for God's coming, we must come clean. We must relinquish behaviors that are unloving and unjust. "What then should we do?" (Luke 3:10). John's answers point to equity, generosity, and justice—values that inform Christian efforts to care for God's creation and prevent catastrophic climate change. Living the Change (livingthechange.net) is an international, multi-faith initiative to help people live more gently on the earth. Join religious and spiritual leaders from around the world and make a commitment today to live sustainably. For many of us, one immediate and effective place to start is to move toward a plant-based diet.

Worship Reflection

What biblical texts stood out to me and why?

What do I feel God is trying to say to me in and through this sermon?

Is the Holy Spirit prompting me to change something in my heart or life? If yes, what is it? What is one step I can take to make a positive change in my life this week?

Where did I see/hear God in the sermon?
