

Second Week in Christmas



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

January 2, 2022

The Lihue Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hawai'i

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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: Kurt Medeiros, 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, Robert 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 (formerly Mandell), Karen & Patrick Pavao, Edward Rasay, Karen Richards (friend of Nancy Mandell), Marcos Larson (Liedeke's son), Dora Jane Rowell, 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, Sayla Hachey, 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



Introduction

Within the gospel reading's profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, the waters of new birth, and the bread and the wine. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.

Overview

A Light in Our Darkness

The longest night of the year has passed, but while the light is increasing, it remains so incremental it appears as though the darkness outside is triumphing. By the third day of January, the hangovers have arrived. Not just the self-inflicted suffering of many on New Year's Eve, but also the financial hangovers of the irrational exuberance of Christmas. Only a few more days and the darkness of January bills will be casting a pall over many homes. Add to all this the darkness of illness and injury, sorrow and loss, and even in this season there is plenty of pain and anxiety to go around.

Still, the promise of hope comes to us this day, not in the form of an infant as on Christmas Eve but in the form of light. We celebrate the pure radiant light that cuts through the darkness of this world and shines into shadow-filled lives. It is the light that shines through the love broken and poured in bread and wine. It is the light of the holy presence of Christ in times of confusion and despair. It is the light of grace and truth shining into lives young and old, rich and poor, broken and whole.

It is the light of Christ that sends people like John the Baptist into this world, people who dedicate their lives to pointing others toward Jesus. Some days we are privileged to play this role for others, reminding them of Jesus. Other days we need John the Baptist to tell us the story one more time. We need people like John to point our eyes toward the light, undiminished by time, so that we can see clearly the promise of Jesus in our lives, our communities and our world.

Theological Reflection

Psalm 147, likely written as the Israelites returned after their captivity in Babylon, is a prime example of what Walter Brueggemann calls a "psalm of orientation" (*The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), where both creation and human order are in place. Yet being restored by God to your own land is not the same as conquering another's. You cannot liberate one people by ruining another. And because reclaiming land is one of the Bible's most important vehicles for justice, how can this be carried out in your neighborhood or city, its land stolen (for those of us in the United States) from countless Indigenous peoples?

Announcements and Weekly Events!

Welcome, Check-In, and Announcements

In the Facebook chatbox share how Advent and Christmas have inspired you.

Announcements

- ◇ 2-hour introduction to **Centering Prayer**
Saturday, January 8, 9:00-11:00am via zoom
 Register by emailing Phyllis Meighen—phyllismeighen@gmail.com
- ◇ All-Church Work Day
Sunday, January 22, 9am-1pm (still TBD)
- ◇ Installation Service + Meet with the Bishop
Saturday, Feb @ 3pm in the church and online

Weekly Events

- ◇ Centering Prayer with Liedeke Bulder
Saturday, Jan 8, @ 9-11am via zoom <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/9079773456>
- ◇ Ghetto Sweet Tarts
Monday, Jan 10, New Year's Kickoff in the fellowship hall 5:30-7pm
- ◇ BOBS Bible Study—1 Corinthians + Zoom <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83104986901>
Tuesday, Jan 11, @ 5:30-7pm in the fellowship hall
- ◇ Youth Group
Sunday, Jan 16, Youth group in the fellowship hall 5:30-7pm

Second Week in Christmas

Order for Worship

*Confession and Forgiveness

P Blessed be the Holy Trinity, ✝ one God, who sends the word with angels, who is made flesh among all peoples, and who breathes peace on all the earth.

C Amen.

P In Christ, we are bold to name our sin and cry out for peace.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P Holy God,

C we confess our sin before you. We replace compassion with competition. We seek what is mighty while ignoring the meek. We are quick to anger but slow to forgive. We have not put on love in harmony with you. Wrap us in the grace of your powerful Word. Swaddle our hearts with your peace, that all we do, in word or deed, may reflect your love born among us. Amen.

P I bring you Good News of Great Joy for all people. God has come among us in the child born of Mary, Christ the Lord ✝ In Christ your sins are forgiven and you are clothed in peace

C Amen.



*Gathering Song

Cold December Flies Away



1 Cold De - cem - ber flies a - way at the rose - red splen - dor.
 2 In the hope - less time of sin shad - ows deep had fall - en.
 3 Now the bud has come to bloom, and the world a - wak - ens.



A - pril's crown - ing glo - ry breaks while the whole world won - ders
 All the world lay un - der death. Eyes were closed in sleep - ing.
 In the lil - y's pur - est flow'r dwells a won - drous fra - grance.



at the ho - ly un - seen pow'r of the tree which bears the
 But, when all seemed lost in night, came the sun whose gold - en
 And it spreads to all the earth from the mo - ment of its



flow'r. On the bless - ed tree blooms the red - dest flow'r. On the tree blooms the
 light brings un - end - ing joy, brings the end - less joy of our hope, high - est
 birth; and its beau - ty lives. In the flow'r it lives, in the flow'r, and it



rose here in love's own gar - den, full and strong in glo - ry.
 hope, of our hope's bright dawn - ing, Son be - lov'd of heav - en.
 spreads in its heav'n - ly bright - ness sweet per - fume de - light - ful.

*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,

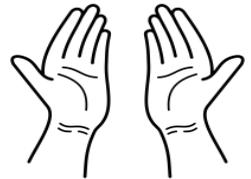
31

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

*Prayer of the Day

P Let us pray. Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, 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

Jeremiah 31:7-14

God promises to bring Israel back to its land from the most remote parts of exile. In Zion Israel will rejoice over God's gift of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.

⁷Thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."
⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. ¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel

will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock. ¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Psalm 147:12-20

Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. (*Ps. 147:12*)

¹²Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem;
 praise your God, O Zion,
¹³**who has strengthened the bars of your gates
 and has blessed your children within you.**
¹⁴God has established peace on your borders
 and satisfies you with the finest wheat.
¹⁵**God sends out a command to the earth,
 a word that runs very swiftly.**
¹⁶God gives snow like wool,
 scattering frost like ashes.

¹⁷**God scatters hail like bread crumbs.
 Who can stand against God's cold?**
¹⁸The LORD sends forth the word and melts
 them; the wind blows, and the waters flow.
¹⁹**God declares the word to Jacob,
 statutes and judgments to Israel.**
²⁰The LORD has not done so to any other na-
 tion; they do not know God's judgments. Halle-
 lujah!

Second Reading

Ephesians 1:3-14

In Jesus, all of God's plans and purposes have been made known as heaven and earth are united in Christ. Through Jesus, we have been chosen as God's children and have been promised eternal salvation.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set

forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

*Gospel Acclamation

Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the
words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

Holy Gospel

John 1:1-18

John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.

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

G Glo - ry to you, O Lord.

[¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.]

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own

people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

P The Gospel of the Lord.



☐ Praise to you, O Christ.

Keiki Sermon

Sermon

*Hymn of the Day

Love Has Come



1 Love has come— a light in the dark - ness! Love shines forth in the
 2 Love is born! Come, share in the won - der. Love is God now a -
 3 Love has come and nev - er will leave us! Love is life ev - er -



Beth - le - hem skies. See, all heav - en has come to pro - claim it;
 sleep in the hay. See the glow in the eyes of his moth - er;
 last - ing and free. Love is Je - sus with - in and a - mong us.



hear how their song of joy a - ris - es: Love! Love! Born un - to
 what is the name her heart is say - ing? Love! Love! Love is the
 Love is the peace our hearts are seek - ing. Love! Love! Love is the



you, a Sav - ior! Love! Love! Glo - ry to God on high.
 name she whis - pers; Love! Love! Je - sus, Im - man - u - el.
 gift of Christ - mas. Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

**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 Joining our voices with the heavenly host and Christians throughout time and space, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A You make yourself known in the gift of language in diverse forms. Draw our attention to those who communicate through sign, braille, and technology. Make your church a place where all methods of communication are celebrated. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A Creating God, the sun greets us anew each morning. Thank you for waking us up today to witness and share your abundance. Awaken us always to your wisdom and deepen our care for your natural world. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A Emmanuel, in your name we are assured that you are with us. Train nations and peoples to honor and respect one another, especially those whose names and identities have been mistreated, neglected, or oppressed. Merciful God

C receive our prayer.

A You adopt us as your beloved ones. Accompany parents and children navigating the adoption process, especially those in the foster system. Sustain those struggling with infertility or pregnancy loss. Tenderly embrace all in need. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A You journey with us through change. Guide those assuming new roles in this congregation or making transitions in their families, workplaces, or communities. As the seasons and the calendar change, equip us for unexpected challenges. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

A We give you thanks for all who modeled lives of loving service. Lead us in your grace until, with all your saints, we enter the fullness of your glory. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

P Rejoicing in your Word made flesh among us, we commend these prayers to you, confident of your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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

6



Pno

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.

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=tYgT1GfNxRUldiimjHMvORYXmm3bazY6GfrmTtVDZydsksODEa-Up5lt373GHnco2evTpo0mld6BrVzd2nG0p8xSFKZ9u6c4AzLo4CjNx7k=&ver=3

Offertory Response

Lord of Aloha



God of the is - lands, Lord of the seas, Ma - ker of beau - ty and source of the breeze,
 5 King of Cre - a - tion, an - cient and new, Lord of A - lo - ha we wor - ship you.
 9 Auth - or of mer - cy, Giv - er of grace, Bles - sed Re - deem - er who died in our place, Fath - er of one O
 14 ha - na are you, Lift - ing our voic - es we sing "Al - le - lu" Lord of A - lo - ha we wor - ship you.
 19 God of the is - lands, Lord of the seas, Ma - ker of beau - ty and source of the breeze,
 23 King of Cre - a - tion, an - cient and new, Lord of A - lo - ha we wor - ship you.
 27 Lord of A - lo - ha we wor - ship you.

*Offertory Prayer

P Let us pray. Gracious God, your Word-made-flesh brings harmony to the earth. As we offer ourselves and these your gifts, prepare us to receive the grace and truth you offer at this table and renew in us the song of your salvation, in Jesus Christ our Savior.

C Amen.

Invitation to Communion

In Christ's manger, at Christ's table, come, see what God makes known for you.

**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 We thank you, Wondrous God, for Jesus, God with us, in these gifts of bread and wine. As we have shared this feast of love, strengthen us to share your love with all the world. In Jesus' name we pray.

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.

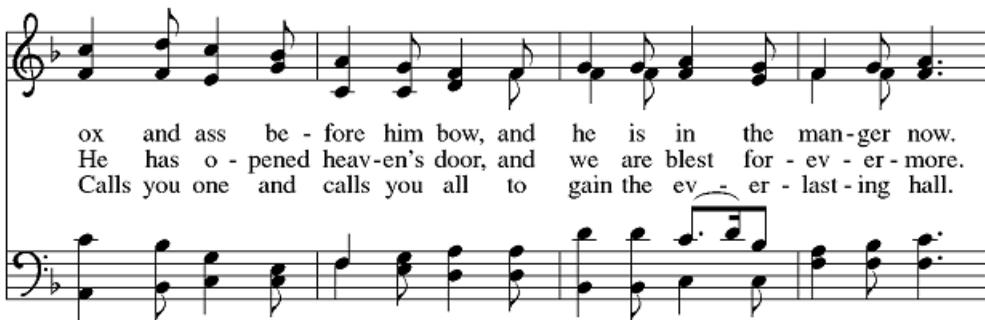
*The Sending Song



1 Good Chris-tian friends, re - jice with heart and soul and voice;
 2 Good Chris-tian friends, re - jice with heart and soul and voice;
 3 Good Chris-tian friends, re - jice with heart and soul and voice;



give ye heed to what we say: Je - sus Christ is born to - day;
 now ye hear of end - less bliss: Je - sus Christ was born for this!
 now ye need not fear the grave; Je - sus Christ was born to save!



ox and ass be - fore him bow, and he is in the man-ger now.
 He has o - pened heav-en's door, and we are blest for - ev - er - more.
 Calls you one and calls you all to gain the ev - er - last - ing hall.



Christ is born to - day! Christ is born to - day!
 Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!
 Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

Dismissal

P Go in peace. Rejoice in Christ our Savior.

C **Thanks be to God.**



Upcoming Commemorations

Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, renewer of the church, died 1872

Sunday, January 2, 2022

A nineteenth-century German Lutheran pastor, Loehe worked to enliven the church with the eucharist at its center, from which would flow evangelism and social ministry. He sent pastors to North America, Australia, New Guinea, Brazil, and the Ukraine.

Focusing on the Incarnation in John 1

What is the incarnation?

Why does it matter?

What does it mean for *you* today?

John 1 launches us into the reality of the incarnation, but I wonder if the reality of Christ coming to us and dwelling among means anything to us. Have you thought about it? Does it matter to you? Does it impact the way you live, the way you love, or the reasons why you do (or don't do) what you do? If you're anything like me, the answer might either be, "no, not really", or "sometimes."

The lectionary invites us into the reality of the incarnation so that the incarnation can become a living and ever-present reality we experience and live out in our day to day lives. Put as a declarative statement, **the incarnation changes everything!**

The incarnation is an event where God comes to us and dwells among us. Literally, God takes on flesh. There are a few focal points. 1) God comes to us **with humility**. 2) God **comes to serve**. Perhaps one of the greatest aspects of God coming to us and God dwelling with us is that it gives God an opportunity to teach, lead, and guide us—to show us how to live! Paul describes the life of Christ as *a living sacrifice*. A living sacrifice is a living dead-thing. One who is alive to God and the will, want, and way of God, but dead to self (note* this does not mean the neglect of self, but the denial of selfish ambition that would otherwise decrease the quality of life for others—they are dead *to that*).

The blessing of the incarnation is not just for Christ to show us how to live, it is an opportunity for humanity to experience communion and fellowship with the living God. It is a **hyper-relational** reality. And this is a reality we can experience and live in, with, and under every single day! This will mean something to the lonely, the outcast, the less-thans, the unimportant, unacknowledged, forgotten, and poor in our society because God doesn't just come to the prominent, powerful, or popular, God comes to the lowly. And God comes to help, benefit, and bless the lowly with gifts of salvation. **THIS IS GOOD NEWS!**

The incarnation matters and means something for us today. It matters because it reminds us that God is not far off, God is close. God is nearby. God is intimately aware of and involved in our day-to-day affairs. There is nothing (seemingly) too small for God! Second, it means that we don't have to live life alone. We have the help of an ever-present God who hears us and responds to our prayers. But it also means something for our neighbors. In the same way Christ came to us, to love and serve us, we need to incarnationally seek to show up in the lives of others to love and serve just as Christ came to us to love and serve us!

For Further Reflection

Current Event

The murder of seventeen-year-old high school student Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012, was a prophetic summons. After his murderer's acquittal on July 13, 2013, a voice rang out over all of the US saying: "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel" (Jer. 31:7) because #BlackLivesMatter! Tragic stories from the north (Philando Castile), south (Sandra Bland), east (Freddy Gray), and west (Stephon Clark) raised the cry "aloud on the height of Zion . . . radiant over the goodness of the LORD" (31:12). Since then, millions the world over have joined the chorus. When have you or your congregation answered such a call?

Let the Children Come

One of the ways we know God and experience the refreshing, "watered garden" (Jer. 31:12) of God's love for all creation is through the gift of baptism. You may have a baptism in worship today. Even if you don't, set up the space the way you would for a baptism, with whatever certificates, cloths, candles, and other items you would use. Invite children to come up close, touch everything, and tell you about each of these objects: times they have seen them before, things they notice (such as colors and symbols), and other impressions they have of what they can see and touch. Ask each other questions about your experiences of recent baptisms: what you noticed, saw, heard, felt, and wondered about.

Theological Reflection

John's opening lines are some of the most enchanting in all of scripture—likely written to 'out evoke' the ever-evocative Gnostics, who soon after Jesus' death and resurrection began coopting his wisdom. Their belief in 'enlightened' teachers of 'secret' knowledge made Jesus' story and thought attractive to them and it made problems for early Christian leadership. To counter this John wrote a gospel that in turn mirrored the Gnostics, with vivid poetic imagery anchored in Greek thought, but the irony was that for John Jesus' wisdom, prayers, and discourses weren't meant only for a spiritual elite but to be shared and embodied by every believer. And this Jesus didn't preach for us to 'ascend' to 'higher planes of being,' as did the Gnostics, but rather to be firmly grounded here, even to the point of dying for all humanity. How do we keep from spiritually 'neutering' the gospel? What are ways that believers do this?

Connections with Creation

"The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14). William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940s, called Christianity "the most avowedly materialist of all the great world religions." Why? Because we proclaim a God who values matter as well as spirit. Thanks to the incarnation, the tangible, material world discloses the transcendent presence of God. When we need to pray, many of us seek out natural places of beauty—forests, mountains, oceans—for in these settings we often sense God's glory. As poet Gerard Manley Hopkins affirms: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Because we honor God's creation, we refuse to allow it to be desecrated and destroyed. Because Black Americans, Latinos, and other minority groups are three times more likely to live in areas with limited access to nature, we join the struggle against environmental racism.

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?
