



THE LIGHT OF
grace

Presence: Angels

CHRISTMAS DAY



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A SERVICE FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

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Sermon by Michael Hoy. Service by Carol Geisler. Art and design: Jamie Wyatt. Arrangement of choral music option by Brendan Knorp. © 2023 Creative Communications for the Parish, a division of Bayard, Inc., 1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026. 800-325-9414. www.creativecommunications.com. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. Purchase of this service gives the purchaser the copyright release to use the material in any format for use in worship, including livestream. Creative Communications is not responsible for the change or removal of any links listed from other sites.



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ABOUT “THE LIGHT OF GRACE: PRESENCE: ANGELS”

On Christmas Day, we celebrate with Scripture and song that the true Light of Grace gifts us with his holy presence in the Christ Child. We welcome the Savior in this service as we join with the angels in greeting God’s amazing grace in a manger. We raise our voices in praise to our God for the birth of his Son on this very special day. Hymns include “Amazing Grace,” “O Come, All Ye Faithful” “What Child Is This” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Use with The Light of Grace series or alone.

Other coordinating resources are available. Call Creative Communications for the Parish at 1-800-325-9414, or visit us on the web at creativecommunications.com for current pricing and availability.

Signature collection GRLSK

Complete collection GRLOCK

Offering

Prayers

Each petition concludes with the following response:

P Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

Lord's Prayer

Benediction (John 1:1, 14; Numbers 6:24-26)

P In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...

C And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

P The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

C Amen.

Closing Hymn.....Now Sing We, Now Rejoice (In Dulci Jubilo 66 66 66 55)

Now sing we, now rejoice, now raise to heav'n our voice;
He from whom joy streameth poor in a manger lies;
Not so brightly beameth the sun in yonder skies.
Thou my Savior art! Thou my Savior art!

Come from on high to me; I cannot rise to thee.
Cheer my wearied spirit, O pure and holy Child;
Through thy grace and merit, blest Jesus, Lord most mild.
Draw me unto thee! Draw me unto thee!

Now through his Son doth shine the Father's grace divine.
Death was reigning o'er us through sin and vanity
Till he opened for us a bright eternity.
May we praise him there! May we praise him there!



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COMPLETE SCRIPT FOR WORSHIP LEADERS

- If desired, an **Environmental Projection** is shown on a screen or on the walls of your worship space to set the tone for the service before the service begins or throughout the service at various points:

[shutterstock.com/image-vector/merry-christmas-horizontal-greeting-card-white-1827253775](https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/merry-christmas-horizontal-greeting-card-white-1827253775)

- This **Theme Verse** is read aloud by the pastor at the start of the service or is read silently by the congregation before the service begins:

When he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

Hebrews 1:6

- The **Opening Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune *Adeste Fideles* Irregular Meter, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him born the king of angels:
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Highest, most holy, Light of Light eternal.
Born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;
Son of the Father now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God in the highest;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n!
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him.
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

- The **Invocation and Lighting of the Advent Wreath** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

P In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

(The center white candle and all four candles around the Advent wreath are lit.)

P Out of his grace and love for the world, God promised to send a Savior. Through the inspired words of the prophets, the promise was repeated to generation after generation. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the Child to come:

C “To us a child is born, to us a son is given.”

P Isaiah also prophesied that the child, the son, would be born of a virgin:

C “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.”

P The name Emmanuel means “God with us.” In Jesus Christ, the Holy Child of Bethlehem, the son of Mary and Son of God, God himself was born among us.

C God is with us!

- The **Confession and Absolution** is spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

☐ Let us confess our sins to God and ask his forgiveness.

☑ **Almighty God, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus our Lord, we recognize our need for a Savior. We have often turned away from your will and your Word. We have listened to the temptations of the world around us. Instead of walking in obedience to you, we follow our own sinful desires. We do not love others as we should. Have mercy on us and forgive us.**

☐ In Jesus, God himself walked on earth. He took onto himself the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins. He rose in triumph over death. By God's grace through faith in Jesus, we have forgiveness for our sins and the gift of eternal life. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

☑ **We give thanks and praise to Jesus, the Lord Emmanuel, who is God with us!**

- The **Hymn of Response** is sung by the congregation to the tune New Britain CM, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come:
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

- The **Prayer of the Day** is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Lord Jesus, you came to be our Savior, to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, for our sins. You are our Lord Emmanuel. You are “God with us.” As we rejoice today in your birth, we also remember your promise, “I am with you always.” Until you return on the Last Day, watch over us, shelter us with your gracious presence and lead us to grow in faith. Help us to walk in love, following closely in your footsteps, so that by our acts of kindness and words of witness others will come to know and worship you as Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

- The **Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Greensleeves 87 87 68 67, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!

- The **Children’s Sermon** is delivered by the pastor or other worship leader:

Needed: picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd; picture of Jesus on the cross; picture of Jesus as a King or a picture of a crown

- Ⓟ Christmas is an exciting day! We receive presents and often gather with friends and family to celebrate. We are here in church to worship our Savior and give thanks to God for the gift of his Son Jesus.

We have many different names and titles for our Savior. Of course, we call him Jesus. That is probably the name we love above all other names. Can you think of other names and titles that we might use for Jesus? For example, we call him our Savior, our Good Shepherd and our King (*show pictures; let children suggest other names*). The angel who announced to the shepherds that Jesus was born in Bethlehem called the newborn baby “Christ the Lord.”

Another name that we sometimes use for Jesus is Emmanuel. That name means “God with us.” Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is true man and true God. He came to live among us. He came to die on the cross and rise from the dead for us. He came to be our Savior. Today we celebrate Jesus’ birth. We are happy to know that God is with us, and we remember Jesus’ promise, “I am with you always.” Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, and he will always be with us, now and forever.

Let’s pray: Happy birthday, Jesus! Thank you for coming to be our Savior. We know that you are always with us. Amen.

- The **Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Greensleeves 87 87 68 67, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

Why lies he in such mean estate
 Where ox and ass are feeding?
 Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
 The silent Word is pleading.
 Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
 The cross be borne for me, for you;
 Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
 The babe, the son of Mary!

- The **Old Testament Reading**, Isaiah 55:10-13, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

- The **Epistle Reading**, Hebrews 1:1-9, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

- The **Gospel Reading**, John 1:1-14, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave

the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- The **Sermon Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Mendelssohn 77 77 D and refrain, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead.

Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

Hail, the heav’n-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris’n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor **P** as narrator and two reader, **I** and **II**, as angels:

P We know that angels are heavenly beings that spread God’s word. But the word *angels* can also be used more broadly in our world today. In fact, we often use the word *angels* to describe people who do good deeds.

In many contexts, *angels* can simply mean “messenger”—be they human or heavenly. John, in his gospel, is one of those human messengers. And what he transmits to us are some bold, even godly, claims about the presence of the Word.

I *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

II *He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*

Ⓟ Citing the Word as being with God rings remarkably similar to the first words in the Scriptures. “In the beginning...” are the first words used in both contexts to introduce God’s creation. So it seems the Word was present all along with God from that very beginning, sharing in God’s very presence, and in all of God’s glory. It was, after all, God’s own Word, God-speak, that brought all things into being in the creation. “Then God said, ‘Let there be’... and it was so.”

But the most outlandishly bold thing that this angel-evangelist says about the Word is to connect this Word at creation with its own incarnation, becoming flesh and blood. Where does this angel-evangelist get that audacity? From the very same source that we do, as we celebrate this flesh-and-blood incarnation of the Word this Christmas Day—from Jesus the Christ!

Ⓛ *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.*

Ⓟ Still, we ought not let these words about the Word gloss over us. What they are saying is that Jesus who was born sometime two millennia ago, and died on a cross some thirty-something years later, is also the very presence of God’s Word that was at the beginning, and even now sits at the right hand of God.

What we are saying is that all our own limited conceptions of history are done away with and made new in the birth of the Word-made-flesh Jesus.

To be sure, it is also confessed by us, as angel-confessors, in the creed about our Lord Jesus Christ that he was “the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father; through him all things were made.”

But historically, until two millennia ago, there was no Jesus. Do we trust that faithful connection between this young Jewish male named Jesus and the pre-Jesus Word that was in the very presence of God who was the creator of all things in the beginning? More importantly, why should we trust this is so?

John seeks to give an answer to that “why” question in his opening prologue to his gospel.

Yet as he does so, even he is aware that there are doubts—doubts about Jesus, about whether or not Jesus is this very presence of the divine Word of God, even the Word in the flesh. John recognized that many in the late first century questioned Jesus’ credentials, especially when they considered Jesus among the glowing credentials of others. Some thought that Moses or perhaps Abraham was more impressive. Still others valued the firebrand John the Baptist. And in doing so, they would even point out that before Jesus was in the flesh, these others had already been in the flesh.

For this reason, many doubted Jesus, choosing instead to follow their own designated leaders

whom they believed were just as good, if not better, than Jesus—even better about being true to the Word of God.

Some of the other evangelists even tell the story of when Jesus asked his disciples, “Who am I?” Jesus’ disciples all gave him rave and grandiose reviews—John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Jesus had no doubts about who he was or what he was about. In fact, it was precisely because he did not doubt that Jesus could not accept any of these answers as getting to the heart of who he was. Yet even when Peter shouted out, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus still held back—and held back precisely because Jesus feared that his disciples would misunderstand. Hence, he ordered the disciples not to talk about it—at least not until after his death. Did that clear up all the misunderstanding or doubts from the minds of his own disciples who thought of Jesus as the Messiah? Or did it only add more fuel to their doubts, making those doubts all the more serious? It seems so. They had such serious doubts, in fact, that on the day when Jesus’ death did occur, most of them fled the scene. Some, like Peter, even denied his Lord in the midst of trial.

Yet such doubts are not limited to these first-century witnesses in the gospels. Jesus may still be one of the most, if not *the* most, well-known and most used-names in history, if not only in the most flattering of ways. Yet not all of these name-droppers recognize him through the lens of faith. Many have doubts, only conceding that he was little more than a good person who ended up getting crucified. Even that death might resonate with some meaning for those who consider that Jesus is among the countless numbers of those who have suffered the pain of humiliation. But does it clear up all doubts about Jesus, such that all believe in him?

There are still many doubters who cannot identify Jesus with the very presence of the Word that was with God from the beginning—and that assumes that these doubters even believe in God. Instead they ask, “How can Jesus, whose life and death we can for the most part chronicle in history, be the all-encompassing presence of God who brought all things into being?”

For that, John has his work cut out for him in order to make his faithful confession that Jesus is that Word-made-flesh. What will be his message for the doubters?

- I *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him;*
- II *yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.*
- P John does not deny that Jesus is the Word and that his origins are from the beginning where all things “came into being through him.” What he does is up the ante.

Though Jesus was the Word from the very start start, John says, the world “did not know him... and his own people did not accept him.”

The most serious problem is not about Jesus but about the doubters—all of us who parcel out the historical Jesus from this Word and all of its divine beginnings and origins in the glorious presence of God. All of us who limit Jesus to only his historical humanity but not his unfolding promise as the light of grace from God—the God who was “in the beginning.”

Not all the doubters may buy that the problem is with them. But then again, all have their own forms of self-doubt—the kind of doubt that betrays the serious darkness in their lives that begs this light of grace from Jesus.

For one thing, among all these doubters, even the most ego-stroking narcissists among us, there comes an end—the inescapability of death. We so often choose, as psychologist Ernest Becker said, the “lie” in our “denial of death,” even while putting forth our own accomplishments or achievements or those of someone we may follow. Jesus, however, didn’t need to feed self-esteem, choosing instead to keep his focus on humble fulfillment of his mission for his Father and for the souls of God’s people. But he, also, did die. And in death he did cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” in some of the gospels, and in John’s gospel, more boldly, “It is finished!” Yet such cries are meant not for himself, but the people, the doubters, caught in the darkness of this world.

Others may say, either stoically or nihilistically, that they do not fear death. Yet even among these doubters, there is the despair that life itself is not all that much worth living. Even for some of these, there is the flickering hope that perhaps someday something or someone will come along to make life less hopeless, maybe not even in their lifetimes. Yet these doubters find themselves trapped in the darkness of their own despair. For even these despairing cries, Jesus as the Word-made-flesh is also with them, counting them not only as people to be treasured, but even to be blessed as those among the children of God.

The most serious problem is that no one can escape their darkness. Nor can the sources that these doubters may lift up to justify their own lives. They may lift up Moses or John the Baptist or some other prophet or prophetic type, past or present—but all of these, as well, come up short—in death, in despair, in loss ... in the darkness.

In fact, some of these, to their credit, recognize their shortcomings and even point to Jesus as the very presence of God as the Word-made-flesh. John recounts this happening with John the Baptist:

- I *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ...*
- II *John testified to him [namely, Jesus] and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”*

Ⓟ John the Baptist did not point to himself. He had no such tendencies, and certainly discredited any followers of his who did. Instead he pointed to Jesus. Follow Jesus, not me, John said, even calling Jesus the light and the one who was “before me.”

And John would also have some words about Moses in comparison to Jesus.

Ⓛ *The law indeed was given through Moses;*

Ⓛ *grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Ⓟ Moses makes no bones about the fact that he was all about the law, and so do his followers. He does deliver the presence of grace and promising truth that came through Jesus the Christ, the Word-made-flesh.

Jesus encountered his doubters regularly in the religious elite, who liked to prop themselves up as keepers of the law. But Jesus can recognize the darkness of such legalists, even their spiritual darkness. With their religious bravado and their citing Moses, they cannot cover up the fact that they, and we, can never escape the darkness of this world in all of our sins. For even if they manage to seemingly cover their own overt, external commission of sin, their sin certainly becomes evident when Jesus, who like God sees through us, recognizes and exposes that such hearts are not only far from God but far from our neighbors. Indeed, these self-righteous legalists even went so far as to criticize some of their neighbors—particularly those who were most aware of their sins and had no doubt about that. This still goes on today among doubters, both secular and religious types, who disregard the neighbors most in need of grace.

Yet, Jesus makes them all aware that forgiveness cannot come from Moses. “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” (John 5:45-46) Even falling back upon the claim that they are children of Abraham is not enough to justify them, for Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58). And Jesus makes it even clearer when he says, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39 ESV). Jesus is the only way to forgiveness and salvation.

Of course, some doubters are never satisfied. They may even demand that Jesus be cast out, rejected and put to death. But we know that even death cannot stop the promise of God’s Word from unfolding this light of grace in Jesus, the Word-made-flesh. Jesus’ death is the fulfillment of God’s plan.

Ⓛ *The true light, which enlightens everyone,*

Ⓛ *was coming into the world.*

Ⓟ The promise of this Word-made-flesh Jesus is that he comes into the world as the light which enlightens everyone—even all of us. He comes even to those who did not receive him. He shines his light for all these whose hopes are fading or for all who have put their hopes on things or people that are fading. Jesus calls us all to embrace his enduring promise to give us new life.

Ⓛ *What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

Ⓜ ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.***

Ⓟ Darkness brings about despair, even as darkness seeks to keep us hopeless in unbelief. But Jesus' light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

As the Word-made-flesh, Jesus's very real flesh-and-blood life is for our life, even as his death is for our death and darkness. The Word that shares in the presence of God's glory above is the same as this Word-made-flesh, in life and in death. "For our sake and for our salvation," Jesus shines this light in the darkness of this world. And the darkness is no match for his light. Jesus light is the very light of the Word that chased the darkness away from the very beginning of this world, with all of its chaos.

Ⓛ *From his fullness we have all received,*

Ⓜ ***grace upon grace.***

Ⓟ In Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, what we get instead is his life—his full, human and divine life, with all of its vibrancy and promise. He is the gift, the present, of God's fullness in the flesh. And we get that fullness precisely by his own life and death. For in his sharing his life and death with us, he blesses us with the fullness of his grace that casts aside our darkness and doubt, and opens our eyes to the light of light eternal in heaven.

Ⓛ *No one has ever seen God.*

Ⓜ ***It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.***

Ⓟ Through Jesus, the heart of the Father is made known to us. So where will we go to find him? Where will we see this amazing grace that comes from God? Where, in all the world, will we discover that lasting and glorious evidence of the presence of God who will never let us go? We find the answer in the words of the angels to the shepherds:

Ⓛ *To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Ⓜ ***This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."***

P Baby Jesus, born in a manger, gives us his grace and promise that we can all count on him, and that he counts us among us family.

I *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,*

II *who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

P We believe and trust in his name, and hence receive him. But we receive not only him, but all the gifts, all the presents (p-r-e-s-e-n-t-s) and presence (p-r-e-s-e-n-c-e) that he brings. The little Lord Jesus comes to grace us in his light of grace that shines in and over our darkness, even our darkness of doubt. And he gifts us with all of his benefits—our faith in his life, his sure and certain hope, his claim that makes us royal offspring, his promise that there is nothing so dark, not even death itself, that can separate us from his compassionate and abiding love. For we who have life in his name are called the children of God. And even as we live our own flesh and blood life and death, we live and die in the promise that the Word-made-flesh abides with us. There is no doubt about it.

As children of God and brothers and sister in Christ, then, we bear the Christ Child’s gifts and his light of grace to all the world. We witness to the truth, even as our Lord witnessed—with humble compassion for any and all who are ensnared in the darkness. We witness that the light of grace shines ever bright. We witness so that no one may be left in the dark.

With all the angels, in heaven and on earth, we witness and celebrate with joy the message of this Christmas Day: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” And so we affirm how much this light of grace, this new creation, was God’s plan all along, from the very beginning.

I *The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,*

C **the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.**

- The **Hymn of Response** is sung by the congregation to the tune Regent Square 87 87 87, or a selection from the contemporary music song suggestions list at the end of the music guide for this service can be sung instead:

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o’er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation’s story, now proclaim Messiah’s birth.
Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds in the field abiding, watching o’er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing, yonder shines the Infant Light.
Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.

All creation, join in praising God the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your voices raising to the eternal Three in One.
Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.

- The **Apostles' Creed** is spoken in unison by the congregation:

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his 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 into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

- The **Offering** is collected at this time. If desired, your parish choir can sing the included specially commissioned choral arrangement of “Amazing Grace” on pp. 40-41 (with “Away in a Manger”) or pp. 45-48, or your choir can sing “Christmas Grace” by Philip Kern, Copyright 1989 by GlorySound, a division of Shawnee Press, A-6498, SATB (purchased by you from amazon.com), or this **Mini Movie** (purchased by you from Worship House Media: worshiphousemedia.com) is presented on a screen at this time for reflection on the theme of the service:

worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/123790/god-came-close-a-christmas-minimovie

- The **Prayers** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

P Lord Jesus, you are the Word-made-flesh, born among us to be our Savior. Just as the angels rejoiced and brought the glad news to the shepherds near Bethlehem, we too celebrate your birth. Accept our prayers and our praise as we join the saints and angels to worship you. Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

P Lord Jesus, crucified and risen Savior, when your saving work on earth was finished, you ascended in glory to reign as King and to prepare a place for us. You promised, “I am with you always.” Lead us to seek you in your Word and in your holy sacraments. Strengthen our faith and help us to grow in grace so that we, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, will tell others of your glory and presence. Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

P Lord Jesus, we pray for those who are struggling in difficult times and suffering through illness, grief and loneliness. Comfort them with the knowledge that you are with them at all times. Help them to find hope and encouragement in the promises of your holy Word. Strengthen them and, according to your gracious will, bring healing to them. Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

P Lord Jesus, the holy angels are sent to carry out your will on earth and in heaven. Send your angels to watch over us. Lead us in the power of the Holy Spirit to serve others in your name with care and compassion as we reflect your love in the world. Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

P Lord Jesus, today we rejoice in your presence among us. As we celebrate your birth in Bethlehem, we also look forward with joy to your return on the Last Day. We will be raised from death as you were raised and we will live in your presence forever. Jesus, our Lord Emmanuel,

C Be present with us always.

P Amen.

- The assembly may remain standing if the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The words of institution or another eucharistic prayer may be used here, then the Lord's Prayer, then the communion at the table. If the Lord's Supper is not celebrated, continue here with the Lord's Prayer.
- The **Lord's Prayer** is spoken in unison at this time.
- The **Benediction**, from John 1:1, 14; Numbers 6:24-26, is spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

P In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...

C And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

P The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

C Amen.