

**2025 Combined Council Bluffs Lutheran Choir Cantata
Immanuel: God With Us**

Presented by the Choirs of **Saint John Lutheran Church**
and **Our Savior's Lutheran Church**

Council Bluffs, Iowa ~ Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 21, 2025 — 8:30 AM & 11:00 AM

Introduction to the day

Today Isaiah prophesies that a young woman will bear a son and name him Emmanuel. The gospel is Matthew's account of the annunciation and birth of the one named Emmanuel, God-with-us. During these final days of Advent we pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," a beloved hymn based on the O Antiphons, ancient prayers appointed for the seven days preceding Christmas. On this final Sunday of Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one born to save us from the power of sin and death.

PRELUDE: Organ

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

INVOCATION and CALL TO WORSHIP

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,
who makes all things new,
whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

Christ has called us to this place, gathered one and all by his Holy Spirit.
**We are followers of Christ who seek to hear the Word,
live the Word, and share the Word.**

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY Let us pray. Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection, awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day. **Amen.**



1 Come, thou long-ex - pect-ed Je - sus, born to set thy peo-ple free;
 2 Born thy peo-ple to de - liv - er, born a child, and yet a king;



from our fears and sins re - lease us; let us find our rest in thee.
 born to reign in us for - ev - er, now thy gra - cious king-dom bring.



Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art,
 By thine own e - ter - nal Spir-it rule in all our hearts a - lone;



dear de - sire of ev-'ry na-tion, joy of ev-'ry long-ing heart.
 by thine all - suf - fi - cient mer-it raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788
 Music: JEFFERSON, W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 1835

ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING

Reader 1: We light the fourth candle of Advent—the candle of Love. We light it in gratitude for the promise that God is with us—not far off in heaven, but here, beside us, within us.

Reader 2: As the light increases, our waiting grows shorter. The One foretold by the prophets draws near. In the stillness of this morning, we remember that God's greatest gift is not a word of power but a presence of love.

All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.



4 Light four can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He is com - ing, tell the glad tid - ings. Let your lights be shin - ing!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we await the coming of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who long for God's presence. *A brief silence.*

In the anticipation of these days, prepare our hearts for your arrival. Stir our spirits through the gifts of artists, musicians, poets, and preachers, as together we proclaim your advent among us. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

The earth breaks forth in singing as it heralds the Messiah's coming. Fill our hearts with wonder as we join heaven and nature in announcing this holy birth. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You send your saving grace and peace to the nations. Lead us in work for justice and care for the common good. May we meet the Christ-child we seek in the faces of our neighbors. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

When tears of grief, exhaustion, or loneliness come, or physical or emotional hurt overwhelms us, come to our aid. Uphold all who are anxious, who know the challenges of depression, or who are ill (*especially*).

Mel Satnan, Stephany Sanborn, Summer, Lyn Smith, Dana Hansen, Angie Robbins, John Robbins, Doug Knutson, Lucy Bergan, Lacey Mescher, Ann Huffman, Dawn Jensen, Dave Blasingame, Tim Wegner

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Surround expectant parents and those suffering from infant loss with communities of support. Bless young children and new parents. Guide us in ways that provide safety for all children and those who care for them. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for all who have treasured the gospel and lived in faithful service. Strengthen our earthly journeys until, at the last, your face shines upon us and we are held in your in love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

CHILDREN'S SERMON *video message with Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry*

THE CANTATA The Introduction

Narrator 1: Advent is a season of expectation—a time when silence holds its breath and creation leans toward the horizon of God’s promise.
We wait not in despair, but in hope; not in darkness, but in growing light.

Today we gather as one family of faith—Saint John and Our Savior’s—
to proclaim again the mystery of God’s presence among us.
The prophets called Him *Immanuel* — *God with us*—
the sign of God’s faithfulness to a weary world.

Through Scripture and song, we trace the promise from Isaiah’s ancient word,
to Joseph’s quiet obedience, to the radiant joy of all who believe.

PART I — THE PROMISE FORETOLD

Narrator 2: Long before angels sang or shepherds watched their flocks, God made a promise—that His love would not abandon His people. Through the prophet Isaiah, God offered a sign that heaven and earth would meet.

FIRST READING — Isaiah 7:10–16 (NRSV)

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying,
“Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”
But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.”
Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

CHOIR ANTHEM ~ O Come, All Ye Faithful — arr. Joel Raney

Narrator 1: The promise of Isaiah still rings through the centuries—
a whisper of hope to every generation that waits in faith.
When we cry out for deliverance,
God answers—sometimes slowly, but always faithfully.

PART II — THE PEOPLE'S CRY

Narrator 2: The psalmist gives voice to a restless people—
a community aching for God's face to shine upon them again.
Their prayer becomes our prayer still.

SECOND READING — Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19 (NRSV)

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
O Lord God of hosts, how long
will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

CHOIR ANTHEM ~ Unexpected and Mysterious — ELW 258 *(adapted by Elmer Ellefson)*

Narrator 1: How often have we prayed those same words? When we grieve, when we wander,
when the world grows weary, we lift our eyes and say, "Restore us, O God." And though we
wait, we do not wait alone.

PART III — THE PROMISE FULFILLED

Narrator 2: Centuries after Isaiah's prophecy, the apostle Paul declares that the promise has now come near in Jesus Christ—the long-awaited Son of David.

THIRD READING — Romans 1:1–7 (NRSV)

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHOIR ANTHEM ~ Now the Heavens Start to Whisper ACS #901 (adapted by Elmer Ellefson)

PART IV — THE PROMISE REVEALED

Narrator 2: In Matthew's Gospel, the promise becomes reality. Through Joseph's faithfulness, the child called *Immanuel* — *God with us* steps into the world.

FOURTH READING — Matthew 1:18–25 (NRSV)

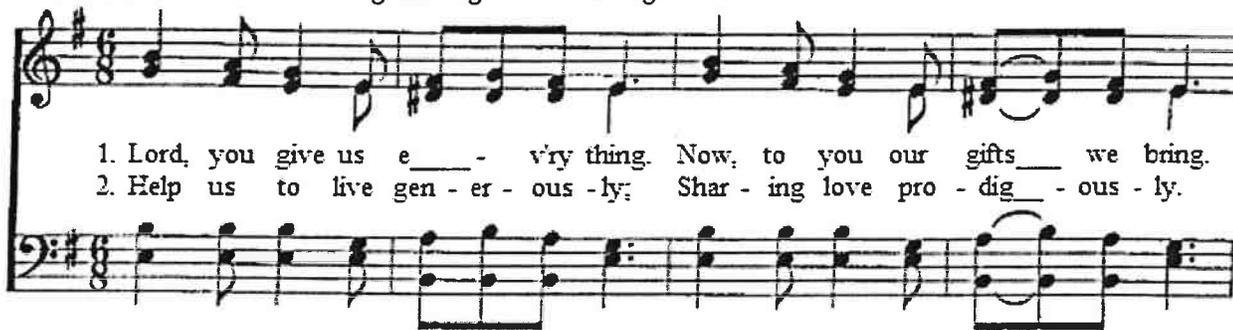
Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

CHOIR ANTHEM ~ Do You Hear What I Hear? — arr. Harry Simeone

PASSING OF THE PEACE

As the choir has just reminded us through "Do You Hear What I Hear?" that Christ comes as the One who brings peace, let us now share that peace with one another. The Peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

OFFERTORY MUSIC: *sung during the Offering.*



1. Lord, you give us e - - v'ry thing. Now, to you our gifts - - we bring.
2. Help us to live gen - er - ous - ly; Shar - ing love pro - dig - ous - ly.



Time and trea - sure, joy and plea - - sure, songs of thanks-giv - ing sing.
Al - ways serv - ing, faith un - swerv - ing, wor - ship - ing rev - 'rent - ly.



O - - - God of glo - ry, Lord of love, born of Ma - ry, from a - bove;



grant us grace to seek your face - - - lead us by your Heav'n-ly dove.

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

God of abundance, we bring before you the precious fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives. Teach us patience and hope as we care for all who are in need, until the coming of your Son, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

***Eucharistic Prayer (by Pr. Luke Kuenzli) and Words of Institution**

On the night in which he was born, our Lord Jesus took a body, in all its human brokenness, and his mother placed him in a feeding trough – a foreshadowing of another night, when Jesus would offer his own body, broken as food. That night, when God came to earth, the new covenant began to take shape, a covenant begun with the pains of labor and brought to completion with the agony of the cross. On the night in which he was born, our very God became very human, so that he might live and die for us.

On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks; and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, take and drink, this is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

***The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Invitation: Come, let us adore him: Christ our Lord. **God is with us, Emmanuel.**

All Christians are welcome to this table of God's grace. Both wine (red) and grape juice (white) are available at each station. Gluten-free wafers are available upon request. If for any reason you do not wish to take communion, you may come forward to receive a blessing. If you are unable to come forward, let an usher know, and communion or a blessing can be brought to you in the pews.

LAMB OF GOD

(words by David Eck, tune "O Come, O Come, Emanuel")



O Lamb of God you take a-way our sin; have mer-cy on us, give_ us your



peace. Pre-pare us to re- ceive_ your grace and teach us how to fol - low your ways. Re-



joice! Re- joice! E - man - u - el has come to you, O Is - ra-el.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

We Are Waiting for Jesus

(ACS 905)



1 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
2 We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.



We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.



Sun of jus - tice, shine up-on us; we are trust - ing in your prom-ise.
Lov-ing Shep-herd, walk be-side us; stir our hearts, and gent - ly guide us.



We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.
We are wait - ing for Je - sus; Je - sus brings peace.

Text: John Helgen, b. 1957

Music: JESUS BRINGS PEACE, John Helgen

Text and music © 2013 Augsburg Fortress



O - so - sŏ o - so - sŏ, pyong - hwa - ũi - im - gŭm
 1 Come now, O Prince of peace, make us one bod - y.
 2 Come now, O God of love, make us one bod - y.
 3 Come now and set us free, O God, our Sav - ior.
 4 Come, Hope of u - ni - ty, make us one bod - y.



u - ri - ga han - mom i - ru - ge ha - so - sŏ.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile your peo - ple.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile your peo - ple.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile all na - tions.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus, rec - on - cile all na - tions.

Text: Geonyong Lee, b. 1947; tr. Marion Pope
 Music: OSOSŎ, Geonyong Lee, b. 1947
 Text and music © Geonyong Lee

***Table Blessing:** May the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you, and keep you in his grace, now and forever. **Amen.**

***Prayer After Communion**

God of abundance, we give you thanks that in this holy meal you have invited us to feast with you and with one another. May the joyful light of your love remain with us to fill us with hope, and may our words and our work in your name invite others into your peace. Send us from your table to proclaim your presence, even as we await the glorious coming of Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

CLOSING NARRATION and BENECTION

Pastor: The promise has been spoken. The sign has been revealed. The child called *Immanuel* — *God with us* draws near. As we leave this place, may the songs we have shared echo in our hearts, reminding us that the God who came to us in Bethlehem still walks beside us now. For in every season and through every trial, His truth endures.

The Lord bless you and keep you.
 The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy.
 The Lord look upon you with favor + and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN ~
(with Jackie & Ramsey)

Joy to the World

ELW 267



1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re -
2 Joy to the earth, the Sav - ior reigns! Let all their
3 No more let sin and sor - row grow nor thorns in -
4 He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the



ceive her king; let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare him
songs em - ploy, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
fest the ground; he comes to make his bless - ings
na - tions prove the glo - ries of his righ - teous -



room and heav'n and na - ture sing, and heav'n and na - ture
plains re - peat the sound-ing joy, re - peat the sound-ing
flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is
ness and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his



sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and na - ture sing.
joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
found, far as, far as the curse is found.
love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674–1748

Music: ANTIOCH, English melody, 18th cent.; arr. Lowell Mason, 1792–1872

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

POSTLUDE ~ Organ