

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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January 3, 2021 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Second Sunday of Christmas

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Deacon of Word and Service			Sandye Fletcher
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Music Minister			Robert Eaton
Congregational Chair			Curtiss Schonenberg
Creative Child Center Director			Briana Bedford
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			O. C. S.
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor

VISION STATEMENT: Showing our love of God and neighbor, we will work to double the number of members that are serving as well as those that are being served from 2018 to 2021.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshipping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***

* **This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.**

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.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

D As we prepare for Jesus' return, let us first confess those places and times over this last week where we have sinned. We will do this privately and sincerely with God, who is always ready to listen. Then we will join in a public printed confession. *(Brief time of silence.)*

D God of giving,

C we confess that we have not always allowed the Christ we carry, to be seen by others. Forgive us, help us to be better. Forgive us and brighten our days and experiences of what it means to carry Emmanuel. Amen.

D Jesus taught his first disciples to proclaim to those who confess their sins, that He forgives them. Hear these words of Christ, You are forgiven. Now live in this promise and worship the one who has healed you.

C Amen.

READING: Ephesians 1:3-14

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

The reading begins:

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.

GOSPEL SONG: COME TO US

**Scattered and broken, bent in our way.
We are Your people, gathered to praise You.
A vineyard up-rooted, narrow in sight,
Come, Lord of Glory! Come, Lord of Light!**

CHORUS:

***Come to us, oh Lord of Glory and shine in our hearts.
Come to us, oh Lord of Glory and make us anew.
We adore You! We adore You!
We adore You, sweet Lord of Glory!***

CCLI Song #6149833 Words and Music by Greg Walton.
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GOSPEL: John 1:[1-9] 10-18

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.

A The holy gospel according to St. Johan, chapter 1, verses 1-18.

[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.

GOSPEL SONG: COME TO US

***Come, Lord, our Dayspring, come from on high.
As we Your people, gather to praise You.
Unworthy to taste from Your heavenly vine,
But Your word will heal us. Come, light divine!***

CHORUS:

***Come to us, oh Lord of Glory and shine in our hearts.
Come to us, oh Lord of Glory and make us anew.
We adore You! We adore You!
We adore You, sweet Lord of Glory!***

**Come Root of Jesse, come David's Son,
Come, Star of Morning. We come to praise You!
Hope of Creation, of all humankind.
Reign over body, spirit, and mind! CHORUS TWICE**

CCLI Song #6149833 Words and Music by Greg Walton.
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SERMON

Deacon Sandye Fletcher

* **SERMON SONG: SHINE, JESUS, SHINE!**

**Lord, the light of Your love is shining. In the midst of the darkness
Shining. Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us.
Set us free from the truth You now bring us. Shine on me, shine on me.**

CHORUS:

***Shine, Jesus, shine! Fill this land with the Father's glory.
Blaze, Spirit, blaze! Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow! Flood the nations with grace and mercy.
Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light.***

**Lord, I come to Your awesome presence. From the shadows into Your
Radiance. By the blood I may enter Your brightness.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness. Shine on me, shine on me. CHORUS**

**As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, so our faces display Your
Likeness. Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirror'd here, may our lives tell Your story. Shine on me, shine on me. CHORUS**

Words and Music by Graham Kendrick. CCLI Song #30426 © 1987 Make Way Music CCLI Lic #1729377

* **APOSTLES' CREED**

A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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 to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come 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 congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS

- A Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

- A Redeeming God, you gather together your people from the farthest parts of the earth. Protect your church from stumbling. Let it not be overcome by sorrow, division, or despair. Make us radiant with goodness, that we might live always to the praise of your glory.

A brief silence.

- A You overflow with grace upon grace. Expand the imaginations of those who serve in positions of authority. Open their hearts to the needs of their nations and communities. Protect all those in harm's way and those risking danger for the sake of others.

A brief silence.

- A You bring consolation to those who weep. Embrace those who feel far-off, excluded, or defeated. Accompany those living with chronic and invisible illness. Sustain the weak and weary. Refresh those who labor under the weight of pain or sickness.

A brief silence.

- A You come to us in the beauty of darkness and of light. Bring justice and reconciliation to communities divided by oppressions and misuse of power. Guide us to speak holy words of advocacy and truth. Help us to honor your image in one another.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Cindy Kahlden; Janis Stancik; Tiger Bergfeld; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

- A We pray those battling cancer including:
Jo Ann Moeller; Lily Presswood; Denise Lange; Cliff Grohmann; Doug Mason; Wanda Sutton; Fran Gillett; Dr. Tom Hancher; Stanley Yearwood; Joe Berry; Joyce Templeton; Tim Dahlstrom; Gracie Brune; Margaret Rogers; Leonard Kahlden; Curtis Wallin; Harvey Skow; Megan Burch; Jennifer Aleman; Lisa Grazier; Phyllis Behrend; Bill Stolle; Jamie Stokes; Jessica Mauchlen; Larry Guthrie; Donna Tiner; Libby Divin; Tina Barten; Anthony Baumbach; Cindy Masek; Denver Meyer; Diane Brooks; Bob Loy; Joe Hluchanek; Devon Tiffin; Stanley King; Monty Gillett; Dawn Foster; Amber Smith; Edward Halcolm; Alison Randazzo; Amber Kutach; Louis Camacho; Melvin Schobel; Janet Greene; Karen Teal; Sabrina Galindo; Debbie Grimes; Horst Traub; Margie Fisk; Preston Carter; Penny Miller; Carl Hahn; Megan Cain; Bob Rutta; Amanda Fuchs; Cyndi Wallace; Karen Broussard; Donna Young; Sharon Heimann; and Brenda Baker that they may know healing and comfort.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for all expectant mothers and especially for:
Hannah Pavlicek; Kelsey Maertz Zapalac; Courtney Busselman; Chandler Divin; and Kelsey McNeely that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for those who reside in care facilities and the homebound including:
Mae Dene Zajicek; Coy Dell Schindler; R. O. (Reuben) Barten; Clemons Venghaus; Deanna Lee; Dolores Wessels; Alma Larmer; Doris Poppe; Bill Rodgers; Barbara McMath; Linda Munos Rodgers; Mabel Krenek; Judy Brisco; Barbara Prause; Lou Cordes; Madeline Menke; Adeline Spross; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Delores Purcell; Curtis Berger; Marjorie Brune; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Beatrice Zikuhr; Robert Eaton; James Booker; Adrian Fritsch; Don Morrison; and Sylvia Marburger that they receive your caring and compassion.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for all law enforcement officers, including Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Marley Mayo; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Andrew Lattimore; Luke Kanz; Bruno Flores; Jessica Dimas; Zane Weido; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Randy Neuendorff; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Garrett Flores; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette, as well as those active duty military members including Jeanna Willett; Arturo Mares; Keven Rios; Michael Grahm; Brian Anderson; Landon Cheatham; Bryan Kubena; Brad Bergfeld; Cody Jowers; Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Ryan Neisner; Anthony D'Angelo; Dalton Kapel; Kindra Dawson; and William Phillips that they are protected and kept safe.

A brief silence.

- A God of mission, we pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregation, Cristo Rey in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

- A You turn our mourning into joy. We give thanks for those who have died in faith. With all the saints, give us our inheritance in Christ. In the fullness of time, gather us all together in your mercy.

A brief silence.

A God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

C Amen.

* **PEACE**

D As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. (*Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.*)

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

PRESENTATION OF OUR GIFTS

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These "Power of One" dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

* **OFFERING PRAYER**

D Gracious God, you came to us as one unknown, bringing joy and salvation to the earth. Nourish us at your banquet table, that with all who welcome your birth we may proclaim your peace, revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C Amen.

* **REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

* **LORD'S PRAYER**

D Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach 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 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 TO COMMUNION**

D The Word is revealed in a manger, in simple bread and wine. Come meet Christ in this meal.

C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Please keep 6 feet between those who are not your family members. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor "Gluten-free, please." Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

D We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have once again fed us from your very self with the body and blood of Christ. Through this mystery, send us forth to proclaim your promise to a world in need, through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C Amen.

* **BLESSING**

D Almighty God, who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary, proclaimed joy through the angels, sent the shepherds with good news, and led the magi by a star, bless you this day † through the Word made flesh.

C Amen.

* **CLOSING HYMN: TRADING MY SORROWS**

INTRO:

**I'm trading my sorrows, I'm trading my shame,
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord.
I'm trading my sickness, I'm trading my pain,
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord.**

CHORUS:

**We're singin' YES, Lord! YES, Lord! YES, YES, Lord!
YES, Lord! YES, Lord! YES, YES, Lord!
YES, Lord! YES, Lord! YES, YES, Lord! Amen!**

**We're hard-pressed, but not crushed.
Persecuted, not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed.
I am blessed beyond the curse, for His promise will endure,
And His joy's gonna be my strength.
For the sorrow may last through the night,
But joy comes in the morning!**

(Repeat INTRO verse and CHORUS to the end)

Words and Music by Darrell Evans. CCLI Song # 2574653 ©1998 Integrity's Hosanna! Music CCLI Lic #1729377

* **DISMISSAL**

D Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus. **C Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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USHERS: Kevin & Wendy Page; Ryan Thomas

LAY READER: Heather Thomas

ACOLYTE: Zachary Janik

ALTAR GUILD: Peggy Geisler

WELCOME: Happy New Year! Welcome to worship, one and all. Please greet one another with the peace of Christ.

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes “Power of One” dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

ATTENTION: *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

♦ **GLUTEN-FREE WAFERS:** For those who are allergic to gluten, we will have a few gluten-free wafers available at communion. Please tell Pastor when coming forward, “Gluten-free, please.”

** **NOTICE REGARDING BULLETINS:** Please take your bulletin home after worship. If you do not wish to take your bulletin home, please place it in the recycling container after worship. We will **not** be reusing them. Thank you! **

** **Get the new year off to a good start! 2021 Pocket Calendars** are available for you to pick up in the narthex and church office for your use. They are a gift from the Evangelism Team. Enjoy!

► **2021 OFFERING ENVELOPES ARE HERE!!!** Please check the coat area of the narthex for your 2021 offering envelope boxes. You can also take the box of a family member, friend or neighbor and deliver it to them. That would be appreciated very much! The boxes are in alphabetical order. Thank you!

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Mon., Jan. 4 – 9:00 AM – Staff Meeting
6:00 PM – Evangelism Team (library)

Tues., Jan. 5 – 5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)

Wed., Jan. 6 – ***Annual Reports due in Church Office!!***

9:00 AM – CCC Chapel
12:00 PM – Ministerial Alliance
5:00 PM – Confirmation Class (fellowship hall)

5:30 PM – BLAST (youth center)

6:00 PM – High School Youth (youth center)

Thurs., Jan. 7 – Stephanie meets with Youth Ministry Network (via Zoom)

6:00 PM – Youth & Education Team

6:00 PM – Property Team

Sat., Jan. 8 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship

Next Sun., Jan. 9 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship

10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School & Confirmation

11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Saturday, January 9, 2021 **Adrian of Canterbury, teacher, died around 710 (TFF)**

African by birth, Adrian (or Hadrian) worked with Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, in developing the church in England. He was director of a school at which church leaders were trained.

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OTHER READINGS: 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 gifts of food and livestock. Young women will express their joy in dancing; God will give gladness instead of sorrow.

The reading begins:

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, says the LORD.

PSALM: Psalm 147:12-20

¹²Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, ¹³who 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. ¹⁵God sends out a command to the earth, a word that runs very swiftly. ¹⁶God gives snow like wool, scattering frost like ashes. ¹⁷God 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. ¹⁹God declares the word to Jacob, statutes and judgments to Israel. ²⁰The LORD has not done so to any other nation; they do not know God's judgments. Hallelujah!

SERVICE OVERVIEW: REFLECTING THE GRACE OF GOD

In sharp contrast to the image of Jacob, who wrestles with an angel and prevails, in today's first reading the Lord redeems Jacob from hands too strong for him. Jacob does not always prevail. We too are reminded this day that it is not our own strength but God's power that blesses, strengthens, fills, gives, and grants peace. God has the power to bring together and to scatter. God creates family not because we are God's blood relatives but through adoption. In baptism we are claimed, redeemed, and forgiven. We receive wisdom and are lavished with grace. We are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. We receive an inheritance. Through God's powerful gift, we are gathered up, become children of God, and receive grace upon grace.

Receiving this gift of grace we are called to live as children of the light. In this holy calling we have John the Baptist as our guide. You can tell the story of Jesus leaving out all sorts of important details. In John's gospel the shepherds, angels, and manger are all absent. But the gospel writers agree, you cannot tell the story of Jesus without John the Baptist. You simply must have the one who comes solely to point others to Jesus. This is our calling as well. We who are forgiven and redeemed, we who are claimed and called, are the ones who point to Jesus. We do this with our lives; we do this with our words. We point to Jesus when we feed the hungry, when we invite those we know and love to know the gift of grace we see in Jesus. We point to Jesus when we allow the holy light of the season to shine through all we do and all are.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

The lectionary continues the tradition from medieval times that Christmas lasts twelve days so this year we will have the opportunity to worship twice before Epiphany. All twelve days are appropriate to celebrate Christ's birth as we focus on the mystery of the incarnation. Welcome to worship! Continue your celebrations because it's still Christmas! Christ is born in the hearts of believers each day.

Christmas, John tells us, is God's purposeful invasion of our time; it is God's decisive and determined action to become flesh and live among us. John moves us beyond the baby to the Creator of all! In this version of the story, nothing could stop God. As we hear the soaring

symphony of John's prologue, we are transported from angels and shepherds and the holy family to a cosmic explosion that inaugurated a new era, a new kingdom! Rather than a quiet, silent night with a birth in a stable, John's nativity story is more like a rushing meteor plummeting toward and smashing into the earth.

The Christmas story is about more than the birth of an infant. In fact, the human birth of Jesus in the gospel today seems almost an afterthought, as John writes so eloquently about Jesus, the Word, being present and participating in the creation of all things. It is a reminder that Jesus' existence did not begin when he was born in Bethlehem. His existence has always been and will always be. What a gift!

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us." These are some of the most wonderful and blessing-filled words in all of scripture. The One we turn to is not distant and far off. The One we follow is the One who knows what it is to be human. This One knows our joys and our sorrows. Jesus is the One who knows the wonder and joy of the words: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," and the sorrow of speaking the words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knows the heights and the depths of the human experience. God with us: Emmanuel!

In Ephesians Jesus is referred to as "the Beloved." This is a different sort of title for Jesus. During the Christmas season we are accustomed to "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" from Isaiah. All of these titles describe attributes of Jesus, many of which are revealed through his actions. The title *Beloved* is different, as it reveals to us the relationship between the Son and the Father. Here Jesus is not identified for what he does or who he is, but instead he is named for *whose* he is. This is a title all the baptized share with Jesus, for in baptism all are named beloved children of God.

KID STUDY:

The word "magnify" has two meanings. It means to make things larger, as when we look through a magnifying glass. We can see details we didn't know were there when we first look at something. To "magnify" also means to "praise" or "give thanks" like when we say "magnify the Lord." In the Bible, as we read about the birth of Jesus, Mary felt joy because she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus and she gave thanks to God. She said, "My soul magnifies the Lord." The joy that Mary felt, as she prepared for the arrival of Jesus, is also for us as we celebrate his birth. We also have the opportunity to praise God and give thanks for his love. We "magnify the Lord" as we sing Christmas carols, read from the Bible, light candles, pray, and listen to the story of the birth of Jesus. We also "magnify" the Lord when we take a closer look at his life and ministry, and when we live as he taught, loving God and loving our neighbor.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Then I saw a most splendid light, which is without beginning and to whom nothing can be wanting: this splendid light means the Father; and in a figure of a man of a sapphire color, without any spot of the imperfection of envy and iniquity, is declared the Son, born of the Father, according to the divinity before all time, but afterwards incarnate according to humanity, in the

world, in time; and the whole of this burns in a most beautiful, shining fire, which fire shows the Holy Spirit, by whom the Son poured forth the light of true brightness upon the world. - Hildegard of Bingen [Hildegard of Bingen, trans. Francesca Maria Steele, in Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, ed. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (New York: Oxford, 1986), 153.]

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Next Week's Theme (January 9 & 10): Jesus' Baptism

Next Week's Scriptures (January 9 & 10):

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

"God creates light."

Psalm: Psalm 29

"The voice of the LORD is upon the waters." (Ps. 29:3)

Second Reading: Acts 19:1-7

"Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Gospel: Mark 1:4-11

"Revelation of Christ as God's servant."