



Beyond Human Time

Sunday, December 31, 2023
First Sunday of Christmas



48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org
The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

Sunday, December 31, 2023

PRELUDE

Three Settings on “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

German carol
setting, Paul Manz

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The psalmist calls on the natural world, celestial bodies, fire and earth, creatures, and all humanity, to praise God. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon’s song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God’s salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we tell of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather today.

It is time to worship!

We listen for God

It is time to hear!

We receive God’s grace.

It is time to be loved!

We leave in peace.

It is time to serve others!

We celebrate the birth of Emmanuel, God with us, who is always here in this time and place.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

With God, there is always time for forgiveness. We trust God, and we confess our sins together.

Brief pause

Holy One,

We have not stayed awake. We have missed you when you appeared in our neighbors, in strangers half a world away, in the suffering planet. We have wasted the time and the skills that you gave us and assumed we were powerless to mend the breaches in our world. Sometimes, we have given up on your mercy, justice, and love. Speak tenderly to our anxious hearts. Tear open the heavens and heal what we have done. Amen.

People of God, hear this good news: In the name of † Jesus Christ, all your sins are forgiven. Forgiveness gives us the courage we need. Wherever we wait for God's time to come, we will witness wonders.

Amen.


GATHERING HYMN	Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	ELW 270
----------------	------------------------------	---------

GREETING

The grace of God, who was, who is, and who is to come, be with you all.

And also with you.

GLORY TO GOD



Glo - ry be to God on high. Peace, good-will to all the earth. Let us sing a
Love has come to dwell with us. Light now shines on ev - 'ry - one. Hope has lift - ed

joy - ful song to the Christ, the Liv - ing Word. Glo - - -
up our hearts. Joy has made, in us, a home.

- - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o; Glor - -

- - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

READING: Psalm 148 (to be read responsively)

Psalm 148 offers an exuberant song of praise. Not only men and women, young and old, but also cattle, wild beasts, hail and tempestuous wind, and even sea monsters—thought by these ancient landed people to be horrific powers of evil—praise God on this day. Through Christ, God has carried the whole world into life..

¹Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

²**Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!**

³Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴**Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

⁶**He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

⁷Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

⁸**fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!**

⁹Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰**Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!**

¹¹Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹²**Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**

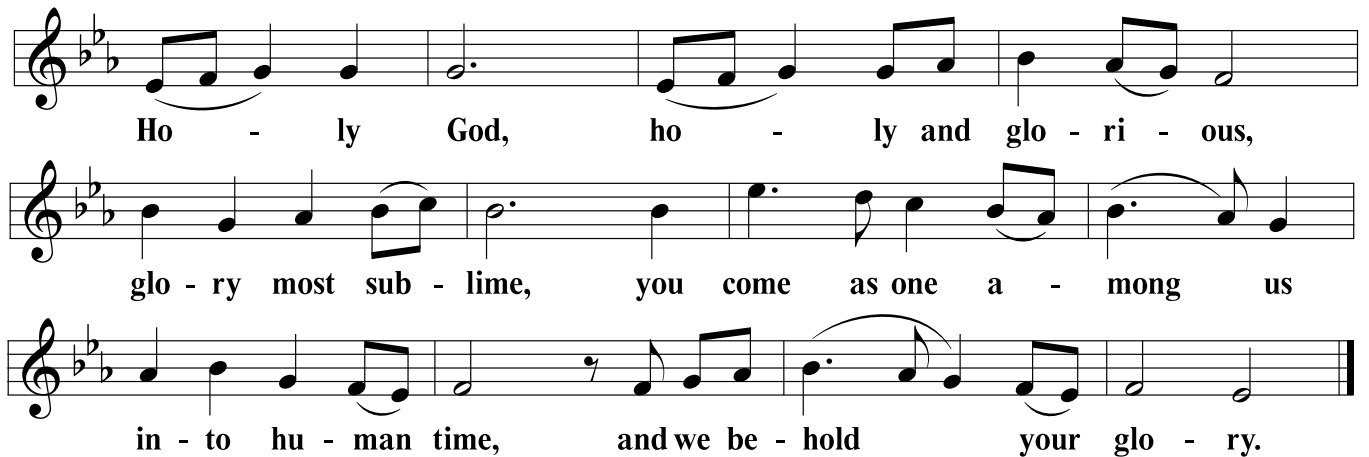
¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴**He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,**
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Ho - ly God, ho - ly and glo - ri - ous,
glo - ry most sub - lime, you come as one a - mong us
in - to hu - man time, and we be - hold your glo - ry.

The holy gospel according to Luke.
Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40

Luke's narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus' connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is

destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY	The First Noel	ELW 300
-----------------	----------------	---------

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prayers are always offered on behalf of the whole community.

People of God, we are each other’s kin, and we are family with all creation. As we celebrate the birth of Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray together for our community, for the church around the world, and for every need.

A brief silence.

#1 You inspire faith in our hearts and call us to rejoice with our whole selves at the salvation you bring. Make our churches places of belonging for ALL PEOPLE in the fullness of their being. Inspire ALL PEOPLE to raise up the gifts and the witness of ALL PEOPLE who are neurodivergent, living with disability, or bearing invisible illness. ALL PEOPLE, Lord God, ALL PEOPLE. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

#2 Give hope and stamina to leaders who work tirelessly for the sake of the most vulnerable. We pray especially for organizations working on behalf of children to provide basic needs, to protect from abuse and neglect, to address trauma, and to rescue from trafficking. Protect our greatest gift. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

#3 Let this community of faith be a joyful and welcome place for all ages and generations. Teach us to honor the wisdom of children, the inquisitiveness of youth, the thoughtfulness of adults, and the knowledge of elders. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Come, Lord Jesus to neighbors far and near. Deepen our kinship with these members and friends of Bethlehem and their families: Dale & Ginny, Lori, Howard & Janet, Jim & Marcia, and Larry & Ros. Strengthen the ministries we share with others, especially our twinned parish in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Come, Lord Jesus to all who are hungry, thirsty, ill, or experiencing any struggles.

We pray for those in need of healing, especially:

- Steve F, neighbor of Kathy M, who is recovering from hip replacement surgery (remove after 12/31)
- Frank W, friend of Kathy M
- Morey R, who continues to face health challenges

Hear also these concerns we raise to you in our hearts or on our voice.

Silence for individual prayer.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

God, you are always with us. We gather these prayers together, and we entrust them to your endless love in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

Share the peace in a way that cares for friend and neighbor.

If you worship virtually, share the peace through the comments section or text.

OFFERING

Information about supporting Bethlehem's ministry with your offerings is available in the Welcome insert in your pew rack or by visiting blcfairport.org/support-our-ministry.

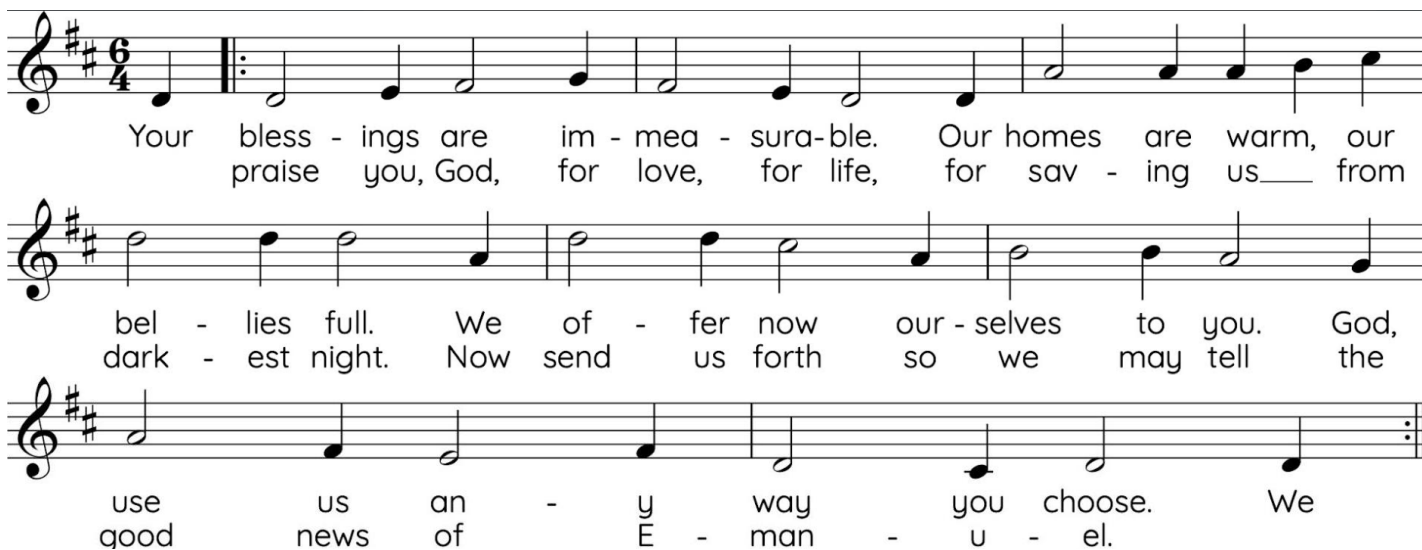
OFFERING OF MUSIC

Go Tell It on the Mountain

African American spiritual
arr. Fred Bock

Marsha Gerhardt, piano

OFFERTORY



Your bless - ings are im - mea - sura-ble. Our homes are warm, our
praise you, God, for love, for life, for sav - ing us from
bel - lies full. We of - fer now our - selves to you. God,
dark - est night. Now send us forth so we may tell the
use good us an - y way you choose. We
of news of E - man - u - el.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Loving God, for the time we have, and for the gifts we offer, we say:

Thank you.

For the chance to help others, and for the people whose lives will be better because of these gifts, we say:

Thank you.

For the ways you are changing the world, we say:

Thank you.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who appears wherever people need our help.

Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

God, our Creator

the abundance of your goodness overflows into creation.

Through the generations

your goodness continues to flow in friendship with humanity.

From beyond time into this moment

your goodness comes in this meal.

When the time was right, you entered our human existence in Jesus, who was born humbly, who spent his life with the unlikely and unloved, who healed and taught and preached the good news of your way.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Whenever we share this bread and cup,

Jesus is here with us, in this moment, in this time and place.

Whenever we share this bread and cup,

God takes us out of time and joins us with God's people in every time and place.

Whenever we share this bread and cup, we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Send the Spirit of your presence on us now, O God, so that we too will overflow with goodness.

Strengthen us by this meal, so that through us, your presence will flow out in mercy, justice, and love. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

We prepare for you, praying as you taught us,

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who

sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

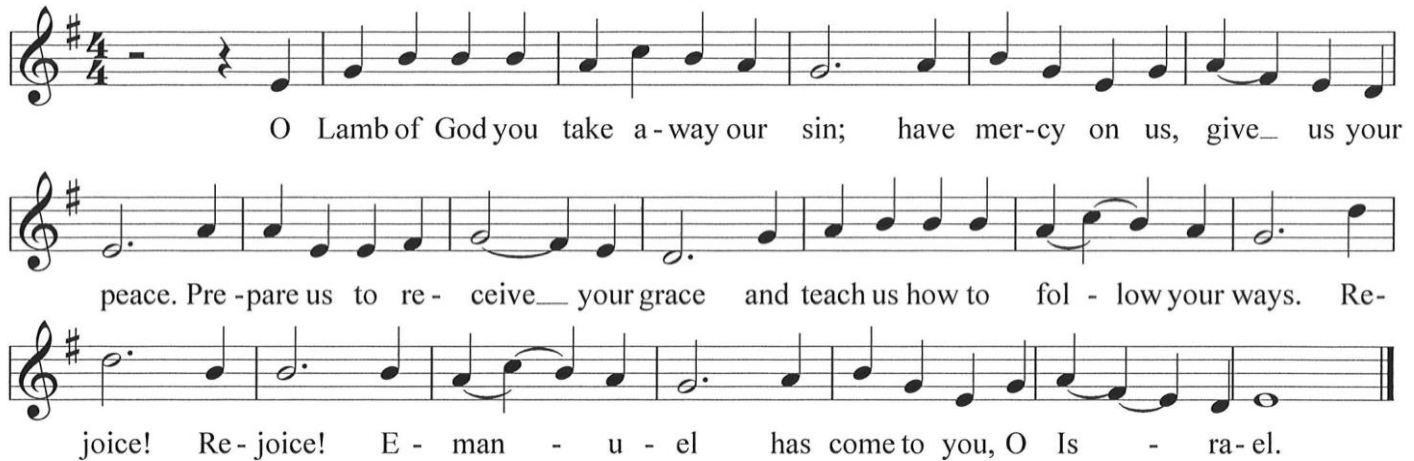
Love has come! Taste and see God's goodness!

Thanks be to God!

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

Our communion bread is gluten-free, unless noted by the pastor. Grape juice is available; indicate your need to the communion assistant. If you worship through the Livestream and wish to receive communion, please reach out to one of the pastors.

THE COMMUNION



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.

COMMUNION HYMNS

What Child Is This

ELW 296

Cold December Flies Away

ELW 299

TABLE BLESSING

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

God our redeemer, you have fed us at this table with gifts of grace, truth, and life. As you have gathered us in joy, send us forth as messengers of your peace. Make us shine with the good news of your glory, born to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

LEAVING TO SERVE

BENEDICTION

God our Creator, present before time; † Jesus our Redeemer, arriving at the right time; The Holy Spirit our Enlivener, acting in our time; Bless you now and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN	Good Christian Friends, Rejoice	ELW 288
--------------	---------------------------------	---------

DISMISSAL

Christ the Savior is born!

Go in peace. Proclaim the good news.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

MENDELSSOHN
setting, David Cherwien

BLC Musicians

Raelynn Clare, Music Director and Organist

Dr. Jim Jefferis, Director of The Chancel Choir

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Thank you to Pastor David Gerhardt for leading worship and Chrisanne Gates for serving as our guest organist today. We're grateful for your leadership which allows our pastors and staff to take time away.

The altar flowers are given by Rebecca Purvis in joyful celebration of the 51st anniversary of Bob and Becki Purvis today.

Thank you to all those who participated in worship this Sunday! Want to learn more about what roles are needed in worship or sign-up for a pre-scheduled role? Talk with Mark Finke or one of the pastors following worship or contact Mark directly at volunteersupport@blcfairport.org.

Communicate with us: Share more about who you are, request further information, or leave a prayer request or comment through our website - <https://blcfairport.org/share-in-worship/> - scroll down the page to request or share information.

What's happening at BLC this week? Visit the Calendar of Events at www.blcfairport.org. Zoom links for virtual meetings are also found there. If you would like to schedule a meeting or event, please email the church office at office@blcfairport.org or visit <https://blcfairport.org/blc-facility-request/>

Church office hours: The church office will be closed Monday, January 1. Pastor Amy, Pastor Hoffman, and Sarah will be away from 12/25-1/1. While our pastors are away, Pastor David Gerhardt is also available to handle pastoral emergencies. He can be reached by phone at 585-429-5675.

Augsburg Fortress resources are being livestreamed by permission. All rights reserved.
From *Sundays and Seasons.com*. Copyright 2023 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #43732.

Permission to stream and print the music in this service obtained from One License under Annual License #A-724002

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education

Of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Out of Time Liturgy © 2021 by Barn Geese Worship. Used by permission of Barn Geese Worship. [Adapted by Pastor Amy Walter-Peterson.]

Everlasting Light Musical Liturgy © 2011 by Pastor David Eck.

Copyright content:

Go in Peace

With Simeon and Anna we receive consolation (Luke 2:25) and good news: Jesus frees us to go in peace. God's Word is incarnate, and we have seen the light of our salvation (2:29-32). "Go in peace" is our call to action—a reminder that we are freed from sin and death and sent out to share that good news with the world. "Go in peace" is also our prayer as life ends—a reminder of a love more powerful than death.

And yet . . . right along with these words of peace come troubling words from Simeon. The infant Jesus will be a source of turmoil for his people and his family. The words "and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35) must have been the opposite of peaceful and comforting to young mother Mary. Luke even includes the detail that Mary and Joseph offered the least expensive purification sacrifice, a reminder that Jesus was born into poverty (Lev. 12:8). Even in the presence of God's incarnate peace, all is not well with the world.

This is where we enter the story, full of questions. How do we experience God's peace in our broken world? Faced with the reality of war, poverty, hunger, destruction, and loss, how do we speak of peace? How do we live God's peace in our lives? Like Simeon and Anna, we have faith in God's promise of peace because we have faith in the promiser. As Simeon and Anna witnessed, God's word has been, is, and will be fulfilled.