



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.trinitylutheran.ca

CHURCH AT HOME

Announcements:

Welcome to Trinity's worship resource for December 4, 2022, celebrating the Second Sunday of Advent.

Pastor Jack Dressler (519-250-7210) is our interim Pastor. Please contact him for any pastoral needs.

Upcoming Services:

Date	Comment	Pastor / Lay Leader	Reader
December 11	Communion	Pastor Jack	Dagmar
December 18		Father Brian	
December 24	Christmas Eve – Communion – 7pm	Pastor Jack	Kathy
December 25	NO SERVICE	NO SERVICE	NO SERVICE
January 1, 2023	NO SERVICE	NO SERVICE	NO SERVICE
January 8	Communion	Pastor Jack	
January 15		Father Brian	
January 22		TBD	
January 29		Father Brian	

Introduction

At the heart of our Advent preparation stands John the Baptist, who calls us to repent and make a new beginning. As the darkness increases we turn toward the approaching light of Christ. For Christians he is the root of Jesse, the righteous judge who welcomes all, especially the poor and meek of the earth. We wait with hope for that day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and there will be no more hurt or destruction. From the Lord's table we are sent in the spirit of John the Baptist to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be God's name forever. Amen.

Beloved, now is the time to wake from sleep. Let us confront our sins, and confess them to the one who is merciful and just.

God of new beginnings,

we confess that we have not welcomed your holy reign. We have strayed from your paths. We prepare for war instead of peace. We dishonor one another and your creation. Purify us with your refining fire and set us again on your way of love, that we may bear fruit worthy of repentance, and welcome your coming among us.

Amen.

People of God, a new thing is growing in our midst, a tender branch, a living sign. By water and the Spirit you are joined to this wonder. You have put on ☩ Christ, and your sins have been washed away. Rejoice in the way of the Lord.

Amen.

Worship

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

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. *Alleluia.*

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah describes the coming of a future, ideal ruler who will renew David's royal line (the stump of Jesse). Gifted by the spirit of God, this ruler will reign with perfect justice. Enmity and danger will be restored to harmony and peaceful coexistence.

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.
¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall
inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Psalm: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

May the righteous flourish; let there be an abundance of peace.

- ¹Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the king's son;
²**that he may rule your people righteously
and the poor with justice;**
³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
⁴**Let him defend the needy among the people,
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.**
⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.
⁶**Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,
like showers that water the earth.**
⁷In his time may the righteous flourish;

and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

¹⁸**Blessed are you, LORD God, the God of Israel;
you alone do wondrous deeds!**

¹⁹And blessed be your glorious name forever,
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen. Amen.

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-13

God's promise to include Gentiles within the circle of God's blessed people has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christians live out their unity by welcoming and encouraging each other just as Christ has welcomed them into God's family.

⁴Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹²and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Just before Jesus begins his public ministry, John the Baptist appears, calling people to mend their ways and speaking of a powerful one who is to come.

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.' ”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

The gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

The Sermon: Hope for the Hard Heart (read by Greg Peifer, written by Maz Lucado, from his book “3:16: The Numbers of Hope”)

“I saw a woman today who finally became hard as wood all over.” French physician Guy Patin wrote these words in 1692, the first clinical description of fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva or FOP.

He unknowingly introduced the world to a cryptic disease that slowly, irreversibly turns its victims into a mass of solid bone.

Healthy skeletal systems are hinged together with ligaments and tendons. The bony figure hanging in the science classroom teaches this. Remove the connective tissue, and the frame collapses into a pile of loose bones.

FOP, however, hardens the soft tissues, like muscles and tendons, rendering the body an ossified suit of armor.

Consider the case of FOP victim Nancy Sando. When she was five, doctors diagnosed a mass on the back of her neck as terminal cancer and gave her three months to live. But she didn't die. No tumor grew. Her bones did, however. Doctors began to suspect the presence of the bone condition. By the time she was in her mid-thirties, her frame

was frozen in a near-straight posture, mildly bent at the waist. Her neck was locked, jaw fused, and elbows fixed at right angles.

Injuries often trigger the FOP sprawl. Bones overreact to a bruise or break, spreading like renegade cement through the system. The pattern is predictable: neck and spine solidify first, then shoulders, hips, and elbows. Over years, the disease can imprison the entire body: back to front, head to toe, proximal to distal. The rogue gene of FOP has one aim: harden the body a little more every day.

As tragic as this disease is, Scripture describes one even worse. The calcification, not of the bones, but of the will.

"I look at this people—oh! what a stubborn, hard-headed people!" God spoke these words to Moses on Mount Sinai. The disloyalty of the calf-worshiping Hebrews stunned God. He had given them a mayor's-seat perch at his Exodus extravaganza. They saw water transform into blood, high noon change to a midnight sky, the Red Sea turn into a red carpet, and the Egyptian army become fish bait. God gave manna with the morning dew, quail with the evening sun. He earned their trust. The former slaves had witnessed a millennium of miracles in a matter of days.

And yet, when God called Moses to a summit meeting, the people panicked like henless chicks. "They rallied around Aaron and said, 'Do something. Make gods for us who will lead us. That Moses, the man who got us out of Egypt—who knows what's happened to him?'"

The scurvy of fear infected everyone in the camp. They crafted a metal cow and talked to it. God, shocked at the calf-praising service, commanded Moses, "Go! Get down there! ... They've turned away from the way I commanded them...Oh! what a stubborn, hard-headed people!"

Remember how FOP spreads in an unhealthy response to pain? Our hearts harden in an unhealthy reaction to fear. Note: the presence of fear in the Hebrews didn't bother God; their response to it did. Nothing persuaded the people to trust him. Plagues didn't. Liberation from slavery didn't. God shed light on their path and dropped food in their laps, and still they didn't believe him. Nothing penetrated their hearts. They were flinty. Stiff. Mount Rushmore is more pliable, an anvil more tender. The people were as responsive as the gold statue they worshiped.

More than three thousand years removed, we understand God's frustration. Turn to a statue for help? How stupid. Face your fears by facing a cow? Udderly foolish!

We opt for more sophisticated therapies: belly-stretching, food binges or budget-busting shopping sprees. We bow before a whiskey bottle or lose ourselves in an eighty-hour workweek. Progress? Hardly. We still face fears without facing God.

He sends Exodus-level demonstrations of power: sunsets, starry nights, immeasurable oceans. He solves Red Sea-caliber problems and air-drops blessings like morning manna. But let one crisis surface, let Moses disappear for a few hours, and we tornado into chaos. Rather than turn to God, we turn from him, hardening our hearts. The result? Cow-worshiping folly.

According to heaven's medical diagnosis:

[Hardhearted people] are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

Measure the irregular pulse of the hard heart:

- “Hopelessly confused”
- “Minds. . . of darkness”
- “Have no -sense of shame”
- “Live for lustful pleasure”
- “Practice every-kind of impurity”

Morticians render a brighter diagnosis. No wonder Scripture says, "He who hardens his heart falls into trouble?' (Prove 28:14).

But it gets worse. A hard heart ruins, not only your life, but the lives of your family members. As an example, Jesus identified the hard heart as the wrecking ball of a marriage. When asked about divorce, Jesus said, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." When one or both people in a marriage stop trusting God to save it, they sign its death certificate. They reject the very one who can help them.

My executive assistant, Karen Hill, saw the result of such stubbornness in a pasture. A cow stuck her nose into a paint can and couldn't shake it off. Can-nosed cows can't breathe well, and they can't drink or eat at all. Both the cow and her calf were in danger. A serious bovine bind.

Karen's family set out to help. But when the cow saw the rescuers coming, she set out for pasture. They pursued, but the cow escaped. They chased that cow for three days! Each time the posse drew near, the cow ran. Finally, using pickup trucks and ropes, they cornered and de-canned the cow.

Seen any can-nosed people lately? Malnourished souls? Dehydrated hearts? People who can't take a deep breath? All because they stuck their noses where they shouldn't, and when God came to help, they ran away.

When billions of us imitate the cow, chaos erupts. Nations of bull-headed people ducking God and bumping into each other. We scamper, starve, and struggle,

Can-nosed craziness. Isn't this the world we see? This is the world God sees.

Yet, this is the world God loves. "For God so loved the world ..." This hard-hearted, stiff-necked world. We bow before gold-plated cows; still, he loves us. We stick our noses where we shouldn't; still, he pursues us. We run from the very one who can help, but he doesn't give up. He loves. He pursues. He persists. And, every so often, a heart starts to soften.

Let yours be one of them, Here's how:

Don't forget what God has done for you. Jesus performed two bread-multiplying miracles: in one he fed five thousand people, in the other four thousand. Still, his disciples, who witnessed both feasts worried about empty pantries. A frustrated Jesus rebuked them: "Are your hearts too hard to take it in? ... Don't you remember anything at all?"

Short memories harden the heart. Make careful note of God's blessings. Declare with David: "[I will] daily add praise to praise. I'll write the book on your righteousness, talk up your salvation the livelong day, never run out of good things to write or say."

Catalog God's goodnesses. Meditate on them. He has fed you, led you, and earned your trust. Remember what God has done for you, And,

Acknowledge what you have done against God. "If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has-no place in our hearts."

Sin-hoarding stiffens us. Confession softens us.

When my daughters were small, they liked to play with Play-Doh. They formed figures out of the soft clay. If they forgot to place the lid on the can, the substance hardened. When it did, they brought it to me. My hands were bigger. My fingers stronger. I could mold the stony stuff into putty.

Is your heart hard? Take it to your Father. You're only a prayer away from tenderness. You live in a hard world, but you don't have to live with a hard heart. **AMEN.**

Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

The Prayers of Intercession

As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

God, you renew the church in every age. We give thanks for hymn writers and theologians (*especially John of Damascus, whom we commemorate today*). Inspire teachers, writers, and musicians to delight and instruct your people. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You give us a vision of creation in harmony, when hurting and destruction will be no more. Teach us to be stewards of the earth and companions to its creatures. Restore to balance and wholeness what human greed has harmed. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You defend the cause of all who are poor and oppressed. Raise up leaders who will govern with equity and serve the common good. Guide judges, lawmakers, and public officials to protect the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You deliver those in need from suffering and fear. Come to the aid of any who are exploited or abused, especially children, elders, and victims of human trafficking. Provide safety and help to our neighbors without shelter, refugees, and those fleeing violence. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You urge your people to welcome one another as you have welcomed us. Nurture ministries of hospitality and care in this and every congregation. We pray for people who are homebound, hospitalized, or separated from loved ones. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of presence, bless those of this community who cannot be with us this morning, and those who walk with them, especially:

In Residence: Margaret; Maria; Stan; Katie; Katherine; Cordelle; Dorothy

Needing our prayers: Ed; Pastor Mike & Patti, Donna; Sharon B; Jeffrey; Art; Joan

Friends of our Members Needing our prayers: Audrey; Greg; Phyllis; Hilda; Mary; Anna

...and all members who may have needs unknown to us

And all those we name in our hearts...

God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You embrace all who have died trusting in your promises, and we give thanks for their faithful witness. Sustain us in hope until we are united with them in the joy of your eternal presence. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

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.

Blessing

God the eternal Word, who dwells with us in Jesus, and who holds us in the grace of the Holy Spirit, ✠ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is near. **Thanks be to God.**