

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

*As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.*

Candle Lighting

God has come into the world.

**Glory to God in the highest!**

This is the good news for all people: to us is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

**The world is transformed.**

And things cannot remain the same.

**P: It is made new in hope, peace, joy and love.**

*(The candle is lit.)*

Let us pray: **Source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your transforming power. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen**

➤ ***Christ be our light***

† Prayer / Words of Hope

God of our lives and the times in which we live, we come before you on this last Sunday of the year, marvelling that another year has passed. For some of us, time has slipped by, and we wonder where another year went. For others, the pressures of the pandemic have been intense – the sorrows, heavy – the conflicts, challenging.

O God, you have seen us through this peculiar year, and we are grateful. We praise you for your love – for your comfort and joy which are there whenever we need them. In this time of worship, receive our prayers and our praises as we honour your gifts of Light and Love which shine upon us through Jesus Christ this day and every day by your grace.

God of our lives and the time in which we live, we know you are with us through thick and thin – in times of great joy and at moments of disappointment. We confess we sometimes feel let down when the joy of Christmas day has passed. Our hope seems to get folded away with the gift wrap – our energy for the future feels a bit tattered.

Forgive us when our faithfulness flickers like a Christmas candle burning down. Renew our hope and energy for the year ahead through the steadfast grace of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us. We are forgiven and set**

free to begin again. Let us forgive one another just as God has forgiven us. May the peace of Christ be with us all.

➤ *Once in royal David's city*

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### PWS&D Sharing **Christ is Born!**

Even in the face of poverty, injustice and disaster, hope finds a way.

For 75 years, our church has been faithfully responding with Presbyterian World Service & Development to God's call to serve those in need. Together with our partners, we are making a positive difference in our global village.

Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, we are responding to hunger, poverty, injustice and disaster. We are responding to care for the poor, sick and vulnerable. Working together, we are helping restore human dignity, ease the pain of want and promote community cooperation that benefits all. As an expression of Christ's hope, peace, joy and love, we are working towards a sustainable, compassionate and just world.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, let us remember our neighbours near and far. Without you, this transformative work would not be possible. Thank you for supporting PWS&D this Christmas.

➤ *Emmanuel, Emmanuel*

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### † Prayer for Understanding

**God of all wisdom, thank you for grounding our lives in your love. Draw us together as we seek to nurture one another in faith. Open our hearts and minds to the inspiration of your Holy Word. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen**

### Scripture

**1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26** [OT 246]

Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

### **Psalm 148**

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise the Lord in the heights!

**Praise the Lord, all the angels; praise the Lord, all the host of heaven!**

Praise the Lord, sun and moon; praise the Lord, all you shining stars!  
Praise the Lord, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

**Let them praise the name of the Lord, who commanded, and they were created,  
who established them forever and ever, and fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

Praise the Lord from the earth,  
**you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling God's command!**

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

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

Rulers of the earth and all peoples, leaders and all judges of the earth!  
Young men and women alike, old and young together!

**Let them praise the name of the Lord, whose name alone is exalted,  
whose glory is above earth and heaven.**

The Lord has raised up a horn for the people, praise for all the faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to their God.

**Praise the Lord!**

**Colossians 3:12-17** [NT 201]

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Luke 2:41-52** [NT 59]

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.

When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”

He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### Message     *Fast-forward to the Temple*

Supper is barely over – dirty dishes in the sink – Dad still dozing by the fire – opened gifts ring the base of the twinkling Christmas tree – shepherds linger outside the stable – the brilliant star continues to shine – the babe sleeps in the manger – but Luke, well Luke has leapt ahead. Luke has time traveled – Luke is twelve years down the road telling us about the boy Jesus, a young man really, not a baby anymore, not blinking up at a choir of angels but listening attentively to teachers in the temple. The family – not bathed in radiant light and crowded into a stable with strangers – not in a small town to be counted for census – now the family is journeying to the big city for a religious festival, among friends and family. We can hardly catch our breath as we are hustled out of the stable and into the temple.

We all know that time flies and it seems that children or grandchildren grow up far too quickly but isn’t Luke taking things too literally? Can’t we linger at the stable? Can’t we lull ourselves with rich food and cozy conversation? Can’t we sit at the Christmas feast for a little longer as the candles burn down, and our waistbands stretch? It seems not.

The story continues and Luke hurries us along in the life of Jesus to his youth and quickly from youth to Jesus’ baptism and ministry. Today, however we pause for just a moment at Jesus’ childhood. What message is there for us in this short account? Why does Luke include it? Why not enjoy the babe a little longer or move directly from infancy to adulthood as does Matthew? While not an exhaustive list to be sure, three points can be drawn from the verses that we read this morning.

First let’s think about ritual. Luke begins his story by telling us that ***every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover*** and immediately we also hear almost the same words from First Samuel and recall the image of Hannah who made a robe and took it each year to the temple. Perhaps you are also reminded of repeated rituals in your own life:

- We always have Land of Nod cinnamon buns for Christmas breakfast. Ian makes them just right.
- I go to see the lights at Butchart Gardens and have tea with my sister every year to begin the festive season.
- Our celebrations must include...

...you fill in the blank. Suffice it to say that we like ritual – we crave routines like stories at bedtimes and habits like putting the dog out one last time before turning out the lights. During the season of Advent, we are encouraged again to engage in devotional habits – disciplines to nurture our faith. There is something comforting about using tried and true recipes or slipping into positive weekly practices, something relaxing about a story told according to a familiar pattern.

This is what Luke does in telling his story – he uses the pattern of the story from First Samuel to tell the story of Jesus in the temple. It is an ordinary, unglamorous Gospel story told using some of the same phrases and words as the Old Testament account that many of Luke’s listeners would know by heart. Luke uses the model, not to offer proof or build up authority – that is more Matthew’s style. Luke allows his story to be nourished by the familiar tales of Old Testament events and personalities. This is also the way that Luke maintains continuity with the people’s past. He weaves together the old and the new – historically, theologically, and literarily. He tells his new message in the pattern of the old, framing it in a way that will help it to be easily recognized by his readers and readily accepted.

Anyone who has married or remarried – anyone who has had a change in relationships due to loss or disagreement – anyone who has had to move from one home or town or country to another knows that the disruption of routine is both difficult and necessary. Each person comes to a marriage with his or her own Christmas traditions – some families hang stockings, some open gifts Christmas Eve, some eat trifle, others insist on mincemeat pie. When you leave home and marry you negotiate new traditions that become normal and special for your new circumstances. Nothing is exactly the same and nothing is entirely different. The same is true if there is a death in the family or if relationships are severed in other ways – the ordinary ways of doing things may no longer be possible or desirable. A shift in routine may make the holidays bearable. If you always go tobogganing on Boxing Day and you have moved to a city without snow, new rituals are required. If you always have roaring fire on Christmas Day and you have moved to an independent living situation with no fireplace, new practices must be established. Rituals are comforting and helpful but not if they keep us from adapting to new circumstances.

Luke uses Old Testament patterns and reminds us of the value of doing things year after year. He also introduces changes to the story that make it fresh and vibrant and new again. He refuses to be bound by the structure and instead chooses to be nourished by it.

**...and things went on as usual until they couldn’t find Jesus.**

This brings me to the second point for consideration – searching. In the story, **Jesus** is never lost. He is exactly where he thinks others would expect him to be – in his Father’s house. Jesus is not lost, but his parents cannot find him. Jesus is not lost, but people do not know where he is. Jesus is not lost, but they must all search for him. They search and do not find him until three days have passed – does it make you think of the days in the tomb – those days of sorrow and waiting and despair after his death when his followers think Jesus is lost? He is not lost then but in his Father’s house – just as he is now. Does this remind you that Jesus is not lost but waiting for us to search for him?

The searching is an important part of the story. Just as his parents assumed Jesus was with them, we may assume Jesus’ presence with us – taking his presence for granted – not paying proper attention to it. But perhaps in the busy day to day activities of our lives we have become separated from Jesus. Perhaps we have been paying attention to our jobs, cultivating friendships, making holiday plans, and all the while counting on Jesus to be there whenever we get around to looking for him. Jesus is not lost, but perhaps we are. Have we been paying attention to the journey and lost touch with the guide? We too need to return to Jerusalem – to return to the center of our lives and there we must search for Jesus – **he** is not lost.

Lastly, we reflect on the attractiveness of Jesus. The idea of a charismatic leader has gotten a bad reputation in recent years, but we can interpret the human favour Jesus enjoys as a kind of popularity. He is often portrayed as a man with great personal appeal. Not only was Jesus filled with the power and beauty of divine light, not only was his life related radiantly to the unseen Creator – it was related with a happy naturalness to human circumstances. He was not only ***in favour with God*** but had a nature that won the response of people.

This is important to keep in mind as we hope to gather a whole picture of Jesus and develop our understanding of him. Although he encountered bitter opposition and deadly enemies, he is not separated from people by an antagonistic gulf. Quite the contrary – he grew up in Nazareth in human favour. People liked him – got on with him – enjoyed his company. He encouraged common, ordinary people to put everything else aside and follow him. In fact, he is occasionally criticized for being too joyful, eating and drinking with too much enthusiasm, consorting with all sorts of people under all sorts of circumstances. Jesus was altogether too good humoured, too kind, and gentle and gracious for the drab, conventional religious types of the day.

Many people since that day, both within and outside of the church, have made the mistake of the Pharisees. They have projected some sort of conflict between religion and enjoyment of this world. They have separated enthusiasm and excitement and sparkle from rituals of the church. They have confused control with discipline and form with substance. Worst of all they have treated religion as something that has nothing much to do with everyday life or relationships.

In Nazareth, while growing up, and elsewhere throughout his life, Jesus gave himself greatly to those whom he loved. He consistently made life brighter for those among whom he lived. That is what it means to say that he increased in human favour. This is the spirit we, who want to be his disciples, must endeavour to have reflected in our lives. We must eagerly seek to put on the nature of Jesus – to wear his charisma, his joy, his good humour, and his gentle kindness. In this way we can find Jesus and be a beacon for others.

Luke drags us from the Christmas feast before we are ready. He yanks us forward in time to see that we cannot loiter in the stable. We cannot daydream in the quiet by the manger for too long lest we lose ourselves in empty ritual, or stop searching for Jesus, or fail to appreciate his joyous, gracious nature. Luke keeps the story moving, keeps us moving because the story doesn't end with the birth of Jesus – this is where it begins. **Amen**

➤ *Lord, you were rich*

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#### † Offering and Prayer

The letter to the Colossians reminds us that whatever we do, in word or deed, we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. May our offering this day show our gratitude to God in Jesus' name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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**God of love, we give thanks for the many blessings you have given us throughout our lives. We are grateful to celebrate the birth of your greatest gift, our Saviour Jesus, once again. Bless the offerings we make in his name. Use them and us to serve you well in the coming year. Amen**

#### † Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Holy One, creator of heaven and earth, we bring you our prayers with glad and grateful hearts in this season of hope and joy. We give you thanks for your image set within us all, calling us to love one another and to care for your creation – for the gift of Jesus who redeems us and guides us to serve you in the world – for the energy and inspiration of the Spirit, who equips us to meet any challenges we face. Empower us to show your love to those for whom we pray...

the church and those who lead in it, as they seek to refresh ministries following pandemic restrictions...

the world that you have asked us to care for amid the challenges the climate crisis creates...

those who rule in the nations of the world, that they will attend to the needs of the most vulnerable and cries for justice...

those who serve as teachers, instructors, and mentors, and for students who face a world of constant change and challenge...

those who serve others as healers and caregivers, especially those feeling exhausted by the demands the pandemic has placed on them and their workplaces...

those struggling with poverty, homelessness, and hunger, and the challenges to recover amid steep economic pressures...

those who mourn the loss of someone dear and those who feel alone or neglected...

those imprisoned for defending truth and justice, and all who experience exclusion, powerlessness and oppression...

Lord, hear all our prayers for people and situations you have placed upon our hearts this day. Bring to our hearts and minds any for whom you wish us to intercede...

As this year of ongoing and unexpected challenges draws to a close, give us grateful hearts for what has been loving and life-giving – peace about things that have been painful – and focus our attention on emerging opportunities to grow closer to you and to each other. All these things we ask and pray about in the name of Jesus, the Christ – the one who was born under the light of a star, and who gives us the light we need to walk into each day as your holy and beloved people – the one who encourages us to pray together, saying... ***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ ***Hark! the herald angels sing***

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### Blessing

Go now, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly – clothe yourselves with love – forgive one another and do everything you do in the name of Christ, giving thanks to God. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the community of the Spirit, embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)***

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