

Devotions followed by Service

Christmas Eve 2023

Devotion 1 - Genesis 3

They fell for it. They fell for the fake news. They fell for the fake news that God was holding back from them, that God was holding them back. They fell for the fake news that if they just listened to the lies of Satan, that if they just went with their own thinking and feelings, then life would be better for them and they could be like God. They fell for it, like we so often fall for it.

And it cost them. They lost their innocence and peace; innocence turned to shame, peace turned to fear. They had to cover up and hide - from themselves, from each other, from God. Love for each other turned in on itself; we hear how Adam instead of thanking God for Eve, turned against Eve, blamed God for her and threw her under the bus. By listening to themselves, they thought they were being so smart; instead they lost their hearts and minds to foolishness.

They bought into the lie that hiding truth would help them.

They bought into the lie that blaming God and each other would help them.

They bought into the lie that making excuses would help them.

But none of that helped. It just showed how much they had lost, how much listening to their own "truth" had cost, how far from God they had fallen.

They fell for the fake news and it cost them. But it didn't just cost them. It cost you and me. We live in a world filled with bad news and fake news. The fake news sucks us in like it sucked Adam and Eve in. The bad news eats at us exposing more and more our sin and guilt, our fear and foolishness.

And yet, God so loved the world. You heard how the LORD didn't step away, but he steps in. First he calls and invites; he gives Adam and Eve a chance to look to him, turn to him. They're too twisted in their guilt and fear and pride to give God a straight answer, to give God a straight call for help. But the LORD doesn't write them off.

You heard how the LORD goes after the source of the fake news. God would send a Champion - someone to fight for him, someone to fight for Adam and Eve, someone to fight for you and for me. In that fight, what would happen? God's Champion would be struck, but Satan would lose his head. He would lose his voice so, today, instead of just hearing bad news and fake news, we can hear the Good News of Jesus. And we can add our voices to that Good News!

They fell for it. They fell for the fake news. They fell for the fake news that living the life of the world is better than living the life God has for us. Instead of listening to the call of God and following the God who gave them life, they listened to their neighbors and followed their neighbors; they worshiped the gods of their neighbors, sacrificing their children to rain gods and sex gods thinking that would make life right for them.

What did it get them? The more they lived like their neighbors, the more their neighbors took advantage of them, squeezed them, crushed them. Not always right away, but sooner or later, always. The more they listened to the lies of Satan, the more Satan sucked the light out of them. Again, not always right away, but sooner or later, always. They gave up their God and sacrificed their hearts and their children to the ways of the world, and what did it get them? They lost their homes; they lost their Help; they lost their Hope. Not always all of them. But always, it seemed, God's faithful got caught in the cross fire.

Like today. We hear the call of the world to leave God behind and to live like the world. We hear the call of our neighbors to leave God behind and to live like them. And what do we see? A world more anxious, more stressed and depressed. A world more hurting and heart-broken. A world more and more dark, sliding deeper and deeper into the dark. Not always right away, but sooner or later, always. And what about us? More and more we see the dark; more and more we feel the dark - always around us, sometimes inside us.

But we don't need to give in to the dark; we don't need to stay caught in the dark. Isaiah promises a light. Not just a light, but a child, a son, God's forever King, who would establish a rule of peace and justice - life the way that it's supposed to be.

Imagine life the way it's supposed to be. Perfect peace - inside and out. Perfect justice all around. Everything done to us or for us - is right. Everything we do - is right. That's not just a hope, a piece of fake news, a piece of good news that won't come true. Today - in Christmas, in the birth of God's Son - we see the impossible miracle power of God to give us his Word, and so to keep his word.

He almost fell for it. He almost fell for the fake news, the fake news that his fiancé had been unfaithful to him, that she would make a fool of him, that he would be a fool for marrying her. It was true news that Mary was having a baby. But the father wasn't some boy messing around or some man of the world taking advantage. That was the fake news. An angel of the Lord brought Joseph the real news, the true news, the Good News - the baby that would be born of Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God. Mary's child would be the child, the Son of God promised through Isaiah, that child, that Son, that forever King who would make life right for his people.

Here is where we sometimes get caught up in fake news. The world likes to tell us that our biggest problem is that we don't get to do what we want. Or our biggest problem is cancer or something like that. Or our biggest problem is that we don't have the money, the fun, the whatever that they have. Or that our biggest problem is that people don't treat us the way we should be treated. Some of those "biggest problems that we need to be saved from" are real problems. Some of them are not problems. All of them are part of my life and your life - not all because of God, not all because of them - but because of my sin and your sin. We have done things, said things, thought things that are directly opposed to God and what God wants for us. And since God is God, and we are not - that's a problem, that's our number one problem because the soul that sins, it shall die.

But God so loved the world that he gave us his Son. Tonight we celebrate with the angels and the shepherds - a Savior is born. A child, a Son named Jesus because he will save us from our sins. Not just a Champion to fight for us and put the devil in his place. Not just a King to rule for us and give us life made right. But a Savior to take our sin and take our place as sinner. A Savior to face God's judgment for us. A Savior to pay the price for our sin with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. And from the manger to the cross to Easter, a Savior to live God's life for us, to give us and cover us with life the way we're supposed to be, so we can live with God life the way it's supposed to be.

What will that life be like? Free from fake news. Free from bad news. Filled with Good News. Every day hearing Good News. Every day sharing Good News. Every day making Good News happen. Yes, that's the life we get to live; that's the life we get to look forward to - with Christmas.



St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
A Family Connecting in Christ

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WELCOME TO ST. JOHN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

To Our Guests

- We pray that you receive a warm welcome and are blessed by the message of God's Word in our lessons and hymns. If you have questions, please ask!
- Our service is designed to focus us on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit does that by exposing our need for Christ and by showing us the wonders of God's grace in Christ – forgiveness and peace, help, and hope for life in this world, and life forever with God in heaven.
- Please join us after Sunday service for fellowship and Family Bible Hour.

Our Communion Practice

We practice close communion, the Biblical and ancient practice of the church. We invite our congregation members and visitors from sister WELS or ELS congregations to join us, but ask Christians from other denominations to kindly respect our practice. Further explanation is in the pew racks or from our pastor.

We Care about Your Children

We love to have children with us in worship.

- Children's worship bulletins and "church bags" (with paper, colors, and Bible story books) are available in the Narthex Gathering Area.
- If your children are crying loudly, our nursery, Gathering Area (back of church), and downstairs Fellowship Hall are audio-equipped for you and your young children. When your children are ready, come back so we can worship together.

We Care about Your Special Needs

- **Large Print** Service Folders are available from an usher.
- **Hearing Assistance** for those with hearing aids is provided through our Hearing Loop or personal hearing devices available at the "sound table."
- A **wheelchair lift** is available for your assistance; please ask an usher.



Our Facilities

Restrooms are in our Fellowship Hall, downstairs and to the right of the kitchen.

Our Ministry

St. John offers an excellent preschool-8th grade school program. We are members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) - www.wels.net.

Christmas Eve 2023
Candlelight Service

Good News of Great Joy

*In the spirit of the evening,
please be quieted when the music begins.*

PRELUDE

Once in Royal David's City - arranged by Valerie Floeter
Once in Royal David's City - arranged by H. J. Gauntlett
Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising - arranged by Valerie Floeter
Away in a Manger - arranged by Rachel Trelstad Porter
Away in a Manger - arranged by Valerie Floeter
Silent Night - arranged by Valerie Floeter
Silent Night - arranged by Chip Davis

OPENING HYMN (*Please stand after vs. 2*)

"Once in Royal David's City"
Hymn 343

M: Dear people of God, in this Christmas season it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us—the Christ Child lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the story of the loving purposes of God who in his right time sent a Savior to deliver us for all time.

But first, let us pray for people all over the world who would delight with us to know the good news of Jesus Christ, and who would join with us in singing his praises. Let us pray for the people of Lake County and for all those in our own congregation.

And, because this would please our Lord, let us remember, in his name, the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and those who are sad, the lonely and the unloved, the elderly and the little children. We especially remember all those who do not know the Lord Jesus, or who do not love him, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Finally, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light than we, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, who died in faith, and who live before the throne of God and praise him each day in his temple. We confess that we are united with them as we are united with one another. To sum up all these petitions, let us pray as Christ himself taught us.

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.

SOLO

"Jesus Is His Name"

Soloist – Monica Wintrone

Words and Music – Timothy Samelson

*Jesus is His name; Innocent He came;
Word made flesh and dwelled with us on earth Born in humbleness;
Loved with tenderness, See the angels celebrate His birth.
Savior of us all; Needed since the Fall;
Who can fight to save us from our sins, our sins? God-man from above,
Sent to us in love; Watch Him as God's perfect plan begins, begins.*

*Angels swell the sound, Harmony profound;
See the newborn babe, but so much more. Shepherds in the field,
Saw love now revealed; Awestruck, went to worship and adore.
Wise men from afar, Following the star,
Came to see the baby long foretold, of old. Frankincense and myrrh,
For the infant pure/poor; Worshiping the Gift worth more than gold, than gold.*

*He defines God's grace: punished in our place;
Sent the Son to do what we could not. Destined for the Cross,
Suffered sin's full cost, Oh, the price for our redemption bought.
Temple curtain torn, rose on Easter morn;
Barrier 'tween God and man is gone, all gone. Love can not refuse;
Go and share good news, Heaven is your home because He won, we won.*

LESSON

Genesis 3:6-15, 20

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel." ...

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

HYMN

"Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising"
Hymn 362 vs. 1-4, & 6

LESSON

Isaiah 9:2,6, 7

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

HYMN*"Where Shepherds Lately Knelt"***Hymn 345****LESSON**

Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

HYMN

“Peace Came to Earth”
Hymn 330

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 1

Luke 2:1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

HYMN

“Away in a Manger”
Hymn 340

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 2

Luke 2:8-14

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;

he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

HYMN

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

Hymn 346

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 3

Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

HYMN

"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"

Hymn 331 vs. 7, 8, 13-15

Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes, and see what in the manger lies.
Who is this child, so young and fair? It is the Christ Child lying there.

Welcome to earth, O noble Guest, through whom the sinful world is blest!
You came to share my misery, that you might share your joy with me.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, prepare a bed, soft, undefiled
within my heart, made clean and new, a quiet chamber kept for you.

My heart for very joy must leap; my lips no more can silence keep.
I too must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle song:

Glory to God in highest heav'n, who unto us his Son has giv'n,
while angels sing with pious mirth a glad new year to all the earth!

Distribution of candles (See back page.)

Once your candle is lit, always hold it upright.

Please stand

HYMN

“Silent Night! Holy Night”

Hymn 337

Silent night, Holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar; Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, Holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth, Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

PRAYER

M: When all was still in the midst of the night, Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, descended from the almighty throne to dwell among us. May we receive him in the peace of forgiven hearts and proclaim your gracious goodwill to all people on earth, for he is God with us, Emmanuel, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good, render to no one evil for evil, strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honor all people, love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God Almighty—the Father, the Son, † and the Holy Spirit—be upon you and remain with you forever.

C: **Amen.**

Extinguish candles (please hold upright until the wax hardens)

CLOSING HYMN

“Joy to the World”

Hymn 353

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
let ev’ry heart prepare him room and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

POSTLUDE

Joy to the World – Sam Ellison and Tedd Smith

OFFERING – A Gift for Our Savior

If you would like to leave an offering for your Savior, we have an offering plate near the front door and our old wood church in the Narthax.

If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code with your mobile device.



Thank you to our choir and musicians this Christmas week!

*Monica Wintrone: keyboards and solo; Beth Rockwell: flute and keyboards;
Tim Samelson: piano and guitar; Justin Wintrone: trombone; Louis Luedtke: trumpet*

Join Us In Worship This Christmas Season!

Christmas Day Sunday Worship - 9 am
New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm



Acknowledgments

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For Your Safety During the Candle Lighting in This Service

- The Village of Libertyville and the Libertyville Fire Department require us to follow some rules when using hand-held candles. This is for your safety and the safety of all who worship here.
- The ushers will hand out wax candles only to adults and teenagers. Children under 10 should not be allowed to hold a lit candle. LED candles are available for children and all who prefer them.
- Ushers will be stationed to observe the whole worship area while the hand-held candles are lit. They are ready with fire extinguishers should any problem develop.
- Note where the exits are. In case of a fire, calmly proceed to the nearest exit.
- **Once your candle is lit, always hold it upright.**
- Keep the flame away from hair and clothing.
- When the lights come on after the prayer, blow the candle out and hold it upright until you exit. After the service ushers will be waiting at the exits for candle disposal.
- Please keep pieces of wax from falling on the floor. It will make the after-service cleanup much easier.

***In the Peace and Joy of the Christ-child,
Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year***