

St. James Episcopal Church \* Morning Prayer

Worship Leader BC Franson

Processional

Hymn 78

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

ST. LOUIS



1. O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, How still we see thee lie!
2. For Christ is born of Ma - ry, And gath - ered all a - bove,
3. How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly, The won - drous gift is giv'n!
4. O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem! De - scend to us, we pray;



1. A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep The si - lent stars go by;
2. While mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep Their watch of won - d'ring love.
3. So God im - parts to hu - man hearts The bless - ings of his heav'n.
4. Cast out our sin and en - ter in; Be born in us to - day.



1. Yet in thy dark streets shin - eth The ev - er - last - ing Light:
2. O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er Pro - claim the ho - ly birth!
3. No ear may hear his com - ing, But in this world of sin,
4. We hear the Christ - mas an - gels The great glad tid - ings tell;



1. The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee to - night.
2. And prais - es sing to God the King, And peace to all on earth.
3. Where meek souls will re - ceive him, still The dear Christ en - ters in.
4. O come to us, a - bide with us, Our Lord Em - man - u - ell

Text: 86 86 76 86; Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893. Music: Lewis H. Redner, 1831-1908.

Opening Acclamation Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confession

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor

BCP 79

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us

**and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen**

Absolution Prayer

BCP 80

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

The Invitatory and Psalter

BCP 80

Lord, open our lips

**And our mouth shall proclaim your praise. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen**

Jubilate

BCP 82

**Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song. Know this: The Lord himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving' go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and call upon his Name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting' and his faithfulness endures from age to age.**

**Psalm** 147:13-21

[<sup>1</sup> Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! \*  
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

<sup>2</sup> The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; \*  
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

<sup>3</sup> He heals the brokenhearted \*  
and binds up their wounds.

<sup>4</sup> He counts the number of the stars \*  
and calls them all by their names.

<sup>5</sup> Great is our Lord and mighty in power; \*  
there is no limit to his wisdom.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord lifts up the lowly, \*  
but casts the wicked to the ground.

<sup>7</sup> Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; \*  
make music to our God upon the harp.

<sup>8</sup> He covers the heavens with clouds \*  
and prepares rain for the earth;

<sup>9</sup> He makes grass to grow upon the mountains \*  
and green plants to serve mankind.

<sup>10</sup> He provides food for flocks and herds \*

and for the young ravens when they cry.

<sup>11</sup> He is not impressed by the might of a horse; \*  
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

<sup>12</sup> But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, \*  
in those who await his gracious favor.]

<sup>13</sup> Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; \*  
praise your God, O Zion;

<sup>14</sup> For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; \*  
he has blessed your children within you.

<sup>15</sup> He has established peace on your borders; \*  
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.

<sup>16</sup> He sends out his command to the earth, \*  
and his word runs very swiftly.

<sup>17</sup> He gives snow like wool; \*  
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

<sup>18</sup> He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; \*  
who can stand against his cold?

<sup>19</sup> He sends forth his word and melts them; \*  
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.

<sup>20</sup> He declares his word to Jacob, \*  
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.

<sup>21</sup> He has not done so to any other nation; \*  
to them he has not revealed his judgments.  
Hallelujah!

## The Lessons

### **First Lesson** Isaiah 61:10-62:3

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

<sup>1</sup>For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. <sup>2</sup>The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. <sup>3</sup>You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

## Second Lesson: Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7

<sup>23</sup>Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

## Gradual Hymn 83

### O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL ADESTE FIDELES

*Adeste fideles*  
John F. Wade, ca. 1711–1786  
English tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1802–1880, alt.

ADESTE FIDELES  
John F. Wade, ca. 1711–1786  
Setting by James Chepponis

1. O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri -  
*1. Ad - e - ste fi - de - les, lae - ti, tri - um -*  
 2. † God of God, Light of  
 3. † Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul -  
 4. † Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py  
 um - phant, O come ye, O come ye to  
*phan - tes, ve - ni - te, ve - ni - te in*  
 Light, † Lo! He comes forth from the  
 ta - tion, † sing, all ye cit - i - zens of  
 morn - ing, † Je - sus, to thee be all  
 Beth - le - hem; come and be -  
*Beth - le - hem, Na - tum vi -*  
 Vir - gin's womb, Our ver - y  
 heav'n a - bove! Glo - ry to  
 glo - ry giv'n; Word of the  
 hold him, born the King of an - gels;  
*de - te, Re - gem an - ge - lo - rum.*  
 God, be - got - ten not cre - at - ed,  
 God, all glo - ry in the high - est;  
 Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing;  
 O come, let us a - dore him, O  
*Ve - ni - te a - do - re - mus, ve -*  
 come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a -  
*ni - te a - do - re - mus, ve - ni - te a - do -*  
 dore him, Christ, the Lord!  
*re - mus Do - mi - num.*

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### **Third Lesson** John 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And 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.

<sup>15</sup>(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.'")<sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

### **Sermon**

The first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John are certainly well-known—"In the beginning was the Word." But this passage can seem too floaty, too esoteric, too obscure, abstract, and idealized. It's poetry, yes, but it's not particularly helpful poetry, and when we read the Bible, most of us like to gather some sort of concrete idea of what to do in our lives on an everyday basis.

But if John thought poetry was the best way to introduce Jesus and encourage us to encounter Jesus, why was that?

This text reveals that we need to think differently about who we are. It's very easy as we go about our daily lives making our daily mistakes to get very down on ourselves, to believe we are constantly disappointing God and everyone else. And while it's important to never lose sight of our feet of clay, the fact is that God created us but a little lower than the angels, and sometimes we need to rise into the stratosphere with John and live into that a bit.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means being changed. We are born blessed by God, created in the image of God, but salvation makes us a new creation in Christ. Listen to how Isaiah talks about how God has changed him in our lesson today: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels...You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give."

Our trust and faith in God that we struggle so doggedly to maintain and renew makes us, who are already cherished by God, into souls who shine with new potential and the beauty of life immersed in God. *This is true even when we are sinning* because the underlying reality of our desire and hunger for God will always drive us to stand up again when we've fallen, to reach out again when we've lost contact with God, to open up again when we've hardened our hearts.

What can we learn about what *Jesus wants us to be* from what we learn about *who Jesus is* in John's prologue? John says, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." You were part of a process much greater than your parents creating a biological exchange. Jesus Christ himself, the great and eternal Word, was the vehicle of your creation, was the medium and the messenger that spoke a unique word into the universe that never was before and never will be again. That's you.

You might not believe little old you could be that special or important. But John says it himself: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." You are a child of God born of the will of God.

In fact, we were so important to God that Jesus chose to leave all his heavenly glory, emptying himself and taking on the form of a slave, as Philippians says. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory," John goes on. That's what we're celebrating today, on this first Sunday of Christmas. God chose to humble Godself to the level of a poor, limited, human creature. And more than that—notice that John adds, "And we have seen his glory." Jesus didn't just become human for a minute or an hour or a day and then go right back to heaven. He lived among us for thirty-three years, enduring the messiness, the heartbreak, the inconvenience, the joy, and the pain of human life.

And he never walked out on that pain. He could have used his power at so many moments to ease his way. It would never have affected his healing or his teaching. There was no reason for him to suffer the pain he went through, from getting sick to getting in arguments to having clueless disciples, to having friends die, all the way up to the excruciating suffering he experienced on the cross. But he did it because he loves us, and he would never abandon us to suffer alone.

He entered the pain willingly because he wanted to go to the darkest depths of human suffering, because that is where all of us end up at some point in our lives, some of us more than once. That is what John means when he says "and we have seen his glory." Not his glory in the sense of being powerful or mighty or wearing a robe that shines like the sun and ascending to heaven on a cloud. We have seen his glory as he dwelt among us because there never has been and there never will be any place of pain, lostness, suffering, or addiction that we can go and not find him there with us, bearing it with us and for us.

“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known,” John says. This can help us see the Incarnation and the Christmas season in a whole different way. If Jesus had not been born, that first sentence, “No one has ever seen God,” would still be true. Mary and Joseph and Peter and John would not have seen God, and we would not have seen God. But because God made the choice to share Godself with us in human form, we have seen God in Jesus Christ, and it is amazing.

And that second sentence, “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” This shows us once again what Jesus gave up and sacrificed to come to us, a completely different sacrifice from the giving of his life on the cross. He was close to the Father’s heart. That was where he lived, in the perfect Trinity of love. And he left that peaceful, radiant and loving place, the place close to the Father’s heart, for us. And why? To stay with us forever? Yes, but more than that. To bring us *to* that place. To bring *us* close to the Father’s heart. He told us so himself: “I go to prepare a place for you.” He doesn’t even take his special place back for himself. He gives it up for us. And this is the fundamental reordering of the universe that happened on Christmas that we celebrate today.

It’s worth living in the poetry sometimes. We can get frustrated when we don’t get concrete direction from a Bible passage. But the poetry is what explains the *why* of all the literal actions of discipleship we’re trying to do. What takes tithing and studying and praying and worshipping and serving from being rote, mechanical duties to being our offering of our very selves to the living God, is the cosmic story of God and humanity of which John sings. The beauty of the words, and underneath that, the beauty of the truth that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”—that poetry is what makes our souls catch fire for God and all God asks of us.

This is why scripture matters so much. Because when real life comes crashing in, when the divorce papers are served, when the job loss happens, when the cancer or Alzheimer’s diagnosis comes through, we have to have somewhere to anchor our souls. And we do, in a few simple words a man named John wrote a very long time ago. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” The hard knocks of life plus the poetry of scripture give us the chance to build our lives so that we become a word of poetry ourselves, one little phrase expressed by the great Word that is God.

*This sermon was written by **the Rev. Canon Whitney Rice***

The Apostles Creed

BCP 96

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He 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 and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again 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

Peace

Announcements

Offertory

### The Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

BCP 97

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Suffrage B

BCP98

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance;

**Govern and uphold them, now and always.**

Day by day we bless you;

**We praise your Name for ever.**

Lord, keep us from all sin today;

**Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.**

Lord, show us your love and mercy;

**For we put our trust in you.**

In you, Lord, is our hope.

**And we shall never hope in vain.**

### The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### The Prayers of the People, Form III 387

Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church;

*That we all may be one.*

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you;

*That your Name may be glorified by all people.*



We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons;

*That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.*

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world;

*That there may be justice and peace on the earth.*

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;

*That our works may find favor in your sight.*

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;

*That they may be delivered from their distress.*

Give to the departed eternal rest.

*Let light perpetual shine upon them.*

We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;

*May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.*

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

Silence

The General Thanksgiving

101

**Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for your creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.**

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom

**Amighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting**

**us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting.  
Amen**

**Recessional Hymnal 99**

Refrain:

Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere;  
go tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born!

1. While shepherds kept their watching  
o'er silent flocks by night,  
behold, throughout the heavens  
there shone a holy light. [Refrain]

2. The shepherds feared and trembled  
when lo! above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus  
that hailed our Savior's birth. [Refrain]

3. Down in a lowly manger  
the humble Christ was born,  
and God sent us salvation  
that blessed Christmas morn. [Refrain]

Go in Peace to love and service the Lord – Alehulia

**Thanks be to God – Alehulia, Alehulia, Alehulia**