

**Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY**

25<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Day

**HYMNS:** 25 624 627 634

**INTROIT: Psalm 2**

Why have the nations been restless, and why do the peoples plot for no purpose?

The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together, against the LORD and against His Anointed One,

“Let us tear up their chains and throw their ropes away from us!”

The One enthroned in heaven laughs. The LORD ridicules them.

Then He speaks to them in His anger and terrifies them in His

glowing anger, saying: “Nevertheless, I Myself have consecrated My King on Zion, My holy mountain.”

“I shall proclaim the decree of the LORD: He has said to Me: “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You.

“Ask Me, that I may make the nations Your inheritance and the ends of the earth Your property.

“You will break them with an iron rod. You will smash them to pieces like a vessel of pottery.”

Now therefore, kings, act with insight! Take advice, judges of the earth!

Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling!

Fervently kiss the Son, that He may not become angry, and that you may not perish in your way! For His anger may blaze up in a short time. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

**COLLECT:** Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## READINGS:

Isaiah 52:7-10    The good news about salvation  
Hebrews 1:1-12    God reveals Himself through His Son.  
John 1:1-14        The Word became a human being.

### Isaiah 52:7-10

<sup>7</sup> **How beautiful** on the mountains **are the feet** of the messenger **who brings the good news**, who **announces peace**, who tells the good news of good things, who proclaims salvation and who tells Zion, “Your God is King!” <sup>8</sup> Listen! Your watchmen have raised their voices and are shouting together joyfully. For eye to eye they will see it when the LORD returns to Zion. <sup>9</sup> Be happy and shout joyfully together, ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth **will see the salvation of our God.**

### Hebrews 1:1-6 (7-12)

<sup>1</sup> God has long ago spoken at many times and in many ways to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. He has made Him the Heir of all things and through Him He has also made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being. He maintains all things by His powerful Word. After He had made purification for sins, **He sat down at the right hand** of the Majesty on high.

<sup>4</sup> He has become as much greater than the angels are as the name that He has inherited is superior to theirs. <sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels has God ever said, “**You are My Son. Today I have begotten You**”? Or again, “**I shall be His Father, and He will be My Son**”? <sup>6</sup> Again, when God brings His First-born Son into the world, He says: “**And let all the angels of God worship Him!**” <sup>7</sup> With reference to the angels He says, “**Who makes His angels spirits and His servants flames of fire.**” <sup>8</sup> However, to the Son He says: “**Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Your kingdom. <sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, Your God, has put You above Your companions by anointing You with the Olive-Oil of gladness.**” <sup>10</sup> He also says, “**Lord, in the beginning You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but You continue. They will all become old like a garment. <sup>12</sup> You will roll them up like a robe and like a garment, and they will be changed. However, You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.**”

## **John 1:1-14 (15-18)**

<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> Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him. <sup>4</sup> In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The Light is shining in the dark, and the darkness has not understood it. <sup>6</sup> A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light that through Him everyone might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light. <sup>9</sup> The genuine Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world and He had made the world, and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup> He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> However, to all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God. <sup>13</sup> They have been born not of blood or of an urge of the flesh or of a husband's desire but of God. <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> John testified about Him when he cried out: "This was the One about whom I said, 'He who is coming after me has been before me, because He has been before me.'" <sup>16</sup> For from His fullness we have all received and grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. The only God, who is in the lap of the Father, has made Him known."

### **IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD**

#### **Sermon for Christmas Day, 2024**

#### **John 1:1-14**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from our Gospel reading for today, John 1:1-14: **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> Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him. <sup>4</sup> In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The Light is shining in the dark, and the darkness has not understood it. <sup>6</sup> A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light that through Him everyone might**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

From the second chapter of Luke, we hear Mary being with her Child, bringing forth her first-born Son, wrapping Him in swaddling cloths, and laying Him in the manger. We hear of the angel who brought glad tidings to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, saying with the host of angels: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, good will toward men.*” These are the events we all grew up knowing, and they are the events that we heard our children telling us about in their Christmas program.

Today, however, our Gospel Reading came from John, who writes nothing about the events surrounding the birth of Christ. In fact, when you read from the beginning of John, you will not find any words about Joseph, the Virgin Mary or the angels visiting the shepherds. Neither do you hear of events that took place to fulfil the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. No, John begins his Gospel in a time that goes *far before the nativity of Christ*. The opening words of this Gospel are set in a time that precedes the beginning of the universe itself, a time when there was only the Word.

John says, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**”

In the very first verse of his Gospel, John cuts to the chase to reveal the identity of the Child who lay in the manger at Bethlehem. He takes his hearers right back to creation and reveals that the Word who was with God *was* God. He declares that Jesus, the Christ, or Anointed One of God, is the everlasting Son, who was with the Father from all eternity, and further declares that this same Jesus is the Creator of all things. “**Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him,**” he says. The little Lord Jesus who lay

down His sweet head on the hay in the manger is, in fact, the Almighty God who fashioned and created the heavens and the earth! The Word, Christ, was not created; He did the creating. He is God. The apostle Paul in Colossians affirms this when he writes: *“By Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together”* (1:16-17).

Not only had Jesus created the heavens and the earth and all things that are in them, but He also is the sustainer of all things. He delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt and led them to the promised land. He, after the death of Moses and Joshua, governed them through the judges and then through the kings of Israel, the greatest of whom was David. The pre-incarnate Jesus guided them and gave them hope while they were captives in Babylon, and He was their joy when they returned to the holy city of Jerusalem and rebuilt His temple. He was the Messiah, the Holy One of God. He was the One whom the Old Testament prophets had proclaimed everlasting King and Saviour.

After declaring Jesus to be the Word who was God and the **“Light of mankind,”** John speaks of what happened when the Holy Spirit conceived Him in the womb of the lowly and most humble virgin: **“The Word became flesh and lived among us.”**

Jesus’ conception and birth were the initial events in time of His incarnation. The almighty, eternal God of the universe now accomplished something incomprehensible to us - **“The Word became flesh and lived among us.”**

The Greek word for **“lived among us”** is connected with the word used for ‘tent’ or ‘tabernacle.’ When Christ took on flesh, He dwelt, or “tabernacled,” among His people. This would have reminded John’s Jewish readers of the Tent of Meeting, which was filled with the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

This event was the stumbling block to both the Jews who lived in Jesus’ day and all who are perishing today - that the infinite God who created all things would humble Himself to the point of being made man. This is an unbelievable event that we, too, in our finite minds, cannot comprehend. We do not have the capability to understand how this could come to be. How could the infinite God and Creator of the universe take on flesh as a finite man? We cannot fathom this. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he described it *“as a great mystery that God was*

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 40:34-35

*manifested in the flesh*” (1 Tim. 3:16). God’s ways are above our ways, and His thoughts above ours.<sup>2</sup> But He has also revealed to us that with God, all things are possible, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, He has granted us faith to believe this and all that He has revealed to us in His Word.

But even more important than trying to understand how this miraculous incarnation could come to pass is to understand *why* it came to pass.

Christmas is indeed all about the incarnation and birth of Jesus, but even when we speak of the ‘true meaning of Christmas,’ we are fooling ourselves if we do not acknowledge the reason that Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us.

Jesus did this for one purpose - to save mankind from sin and its consequences. When an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph, he told him that the Child conceived in Mary’s womb would be named Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins.<sup>3</sup> ***The only reason God took on human flesh was to suffer and atone for the sins of the world.*** That baby Jesus, lying in the manger, would suffer and die on the cross.

Dear friends, the world and you need Christmas. You need Christmas and Jesus’ nativity because since the shameful fall of man, every single person - man, woman, and child, is born in sin and, therefore, is sinful and subject to sin’s final consequence: death. Man was not created to be rebellious and mortal but was originally created to be immortal and to live in perfect harmony with God and with one another.

How different it is! All are fallen sinners who do not, who cannot act as God first intended. Humankind is unable to attain God’s level. Man cannot reconcile himself to God. The only way for anyone to be called holy is if *God comes to him*. God had to reconcile Himself to the world.

Herein lies the answer as to why we celebrate Christmas. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ*” (2 Cor. 5:19). He who knew no sin became sin for us and was cursed unto death to pay the price for our sins. When Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant, He humbled Himself. He made Himself of no reputation and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.<sup>4</sup> This is important to remember because,

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 1:21

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:8

you see, Jesus' manger and His cross have no significance without His cross. ***The cross is where the incarnation receives its significance***. Jesus Christ, the everlasting Son of God, had to suffer and die to save that which was lost. The only way for mankind to be redeemed was for Christ to be crucified. As the Law of Moses declared, *without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins*.<sup>5</sup>

Dear friends, Christ Jesus died to redeem you from your sins. He has paid for you the ransom to buy you back from Satan. Furthermore, He has declared that though He has died for the sins of the whole world, only those who receive His gift in faith will be saved. Whoever believes in the Lord will not perish but have everlasting life.<sup>6</sup> Through holy Baptism, God has placed His stamp of ownership on you. Through the washing of water and the Word, you have received the most blessed gift possible - the gift of faith and the forgiveness of sins, and every time you receive Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, you are receiving the most precious Christmas gift of all - Christ Jesus Himself.

The incarnation did not end when Jesus was resurrected bodily and received into heaven. He still remains in human, bodily nature among you today until the end of the world. Through the sacrament of His body and blood, Jesus gives you Himself to eat and drink. Jesus tells you that His body and blood are given and shed for you. He has given Himself to His church as a tangible assurance of His promised forgiveness.

When Jesus was presented at the temple 40 days after His birth, Simeon held Him in his arms and blessed God. It was promised to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. Gazing down upon that babe, Simeon had said: *"Mine eyes have seen Your salvation."* Simeon was ready to depart in peace.

Throughout the history of the church, the faithful have received the sacraments and recognised them as the visible Gospel. With their own eyes, they have seen the promises attached to the elements of water, bread, and wine. The Word who in the beginning was with God and who was God, who became flesh to dwell among us still dwells among you today. You have freely received the forgiveness of all your sins and have the assurance of everlasting life through Christ Jesus your Lord. Remember this, and you will have the true meaning of Christmas. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22

<sup>6</sup> John 3:16

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the angels and all the redeemed we worship, praise, and thank You for all Your goodness. Especially we give thanks for Your Christmas gift to the world, Your own Son our Saviour, who has become man and lived among us, full of grace and truth.

Help us all to possess the true joys of this festival and to welcome the Saviour into our lives. Open our hearts to receive Him whom You have sent to us, so that we may know You and have eternal life, and may be Your special people, redeemed from all sin and eager to live in ways that glorify You.

We sing Your praises for the great miracle and mystery of Christmas: that He who was born in the manger is Lord of all. Grant that the whole world may kneel before the Manger Child, and know Him as Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace, so that His government over redeemed people may increase, and the influence of His peace may extend everywhere. Make His light shine on the nations, and especially direct all those in authority.

We glorify You for this supreme gift of Your Son. In Him give us all other blessings for this life and the life to come. Let the true light of Christmas shine on our homes, and bless all families through Him. Grant that every gift we make to each other may be more precious and meaningful because we know and remember this gift from You, which is beyond description, the Holy Child Jesus.

Put the light, peace, righteousness, and joy of this holy festival into the homes of the sad, the sick, the poor, the lonely, the dispossessed, the loveless, and the sinful. Let the Good News of triumphant life and hope in Jesus drive away all depression and despair. Make Your generous love shine through in the lives of all Your children. Help us to show compassion and generous love to all in need.

Loving Father, we offer our praise and thanksgiving before the manger-throne of Your Son Jesus. We offer our lives, our love, and our service to You in grateful devotion. So help, protect, and keep us through Him, that, when He comes in glory on the Last Day, we may rejoice and share in the perfect life and happiness of His eternal kingdom. Amen.



## Article: Lift up your Heads, ye Mighty Gates!

In verse 1 of this well-known hymn (LH 18), we sing, “Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold, the King of Glory waits.”

Many of us have sung these words so often, and we have such fond memories of past Christmases connected with them, that we hardly pause to think of what the words mean—they are just part of a hymn that we love to sing.

The first line of this hymn comes from Psalm 24, verse 7: “*Lift up your heads, you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!*”

Bible scholars have different opinions about what these words mean. Some believe that the words “gates” and “doors” do not actually refer to real gates and doors; rather, they stand for something else.

Martin Luther wrote that this psalm “...calls on the “doors” of the world, that is, the kings and princes, to make way for the kingdom of Christ. They and those who for the most part rage against Him (Psalm 2) ask, ‘Who is this King of glory?’ as if they were to say, ‘This beggar!’ ...” [we shall not submit to him!]. If we accept Luther’s interpretation, we are singing out and declaring that unbelieving world leaders and rulers should get out of the way, because the King of Kings is coming!

Another interpretation of these words says, “*Here the gates and doors stand for the people who go in and out through them. Ancient Jerusalem is surrounded by a high wall in which are a number of gates. The psalmist, thinking of the people with their heads down, assumes that they are in distress and are downhearted. He therefore shouts to them that they should lift up their heads and be lifted up; for then the King of Glory will come in.*” If we accept this interpretation, we are telling one another that we should rejoice in our knowledge that the King of Kings is watching over us, and that we should never be downhearted or in distress.

Regardless of whose interpretation is accurate, we sing the hymn joyfully as a way of welcoming Jesus into our hearts as our King, Saviour, and Best Friend.

## Children's Message:

Merry Christmas, kids! This is one of the greatest days of the year because today is all about Jesus being born to be our Saviour!

I'm sure you love singing Christmas hymns as much as I do! We've already sung some in church today, and we're going to sing lots more! Remember, that's what we were also doing during our services through Advent—singing hymns that helped us get ready for today, for Jesus being born.

Are you a good singer? I know you are! Everybody can sing, and the more we love it and the more we do it, the better we get at it. But you know who I reckon the best singers are—besides, of course, God Himself, who's the best at every good thing? I reckon the best singers are the angels! The angels are in heaven with God, where everything is done perfectly. There's no sin in heaven to mess things up, even mess up singing. The holy angels have no sin, so they always do the things they do perfectly.



So, if the angels are the best singers, you know they sing the best songs. And on Christmas night, they sang a wonderful one! Jesus was born! So the angels sang a song to tell us why that's so wonderful. They sang, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace*" (Luke 2:14). "Glory to God in the highest" means that God, who rules over everything, is the best! And "on earth, peace" means this: Our sin separated us from God because sin is a way we hurt God, disrespect God, and act as if we don't want God around as we'd rather be at war with God. But of course, if we didn't have God around, everything would be terrible for us because God is the one who gives us every good thing. So Jesus was born on Christmas to grow up and die on the cross to take away our sin. And when our sin is taken away, we're back together with God, not at war with God, but instead, He's at peace with us. He's back with us to give us every good thing, even life in heaven some day—where we'll be perfect singers too.

*Thank You Jesus for being born for me. Like the angels, may I use my voice to sing praise to You! Amen.*

# WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

29 December 1 Christmas	1 January 2025 New Year' Day	5 January 2 Christmas
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR <b>9.00am GRN HC</b> <b>10.45am AUB HC</b> 9.00am LOWOOD LR <b>Downs members: Please note the change</b>	10.00am AUB HC	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC
<b>Sunday, 29 December</b>		
READINGS: Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:22-40		
HYMNS: 46 26 44 (22 364) 29		
<b>Wednesday, 1 January 2025</b>		
READINGS: Number 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-27; Luke 2:21		
HYMNS: 554 36 324 151 (tune 67) 291 508		
<b>Sunday, 5 January</b>		
READINGS: 1 Kings 3:4-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Luke 2:40-52		
HYMNS: 556 39 588 (181 840) 20		

If you haven't already, please take home with you today a copy of the 2025 Service Schedule, and Pastor's Christmas Letter.

