



St. Mark's Episcopal Anglican Church – Fairland

Christmas Eve 2020

Holy Eucharist, Rite II
The Nativity of Our Lord

The Celebrant and LEM stand, maintaining physical distance. There is no procession.

Opening Rites

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

LEM: *And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever.*

Celebrant: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Celebrant: Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One,

LEM: *Have mercy upon us.*

The Collect of the Day

Celebrant: The Lord be with you,

LEM: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Celebrant says the Collect.

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Lessons

The Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

LEM: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 96

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song; *
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD and bless his Name; *
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations *
and his wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; *
he is more to be feared than all gods.
- 5 As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; *
but it is the LORD who made the heavens.

- 6 Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! *
Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples; *
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the honor due his Name; *
bring offerings and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; *
let the whole earth tremble before him.
- 10 Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is King! *
he has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; *
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
- 12 Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy
before the LORD when he comes, *
when he comes to judge the earth.
- 13 He will judge the world with righteousness *
and the peoples with his truth.

*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.*

The New Testament Lesson

Titus 2:11-14

^mFor the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all,^[a] ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and

the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior,^[b] Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

LEM: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

The Gospel

Luke 2:1-20

Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

LEM: *Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”^[c]

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and

found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Priest: The Gospel of the Lord.

LEM: *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

The Sermon: *God Rest You Merry*[†]

Well, Merry Christmas everyone! This year we, like the wise men heading west, watch from afar this, the 2020th anniversary of the birth of our Lord, seeing (if the clouds hold off) the confluence of the planets Saturn and Jupiter in the sky which seems to have generated the original Bright Star Shining over the manger where the babe lay in swaddling clothes, there having been found no room for him or his family at the inn. A star, a star, shining in the night. It will bring us goodness and light; it will bring us goodness and light.

Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear?

But that just rubs it in, I know. See, this year we can't gather to sing Christmas carols, and no-one can gather too near us to sing them to us, or for us. This is a harder pill to swallow, somehow, than the lack of trick-or-treaters at Hallowe'en, or the silence at Easter that descended when no children were hunting for Easter eggs in the churchyard, or much of anywhere else. A chance to hear happy children is not to be passed up, I've learned now that my children are grown, and the coronavirus will keep at least one of them in quarantine through the Christmas holidays, way up

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there in arctic wilds of upstate New York in winter. As though channeling the ethics of a mad or ancient king, or the blithe and wealthy villains of a novel by Tom Wolfe or F. Scott Fitzgerald, pandemic diseases care not a whit for what they take from us or what they make us to do avoid them, or what it costs us to do so – costs they will never bear, loves they will never feel, and lives they will never cherish nor mourn.

But for all its Grinch-like and Puritan behavior, seeking to rob us of Christmas cheer by fair means or foul, the virus did not deter some young people from my neighborhood from doing what they could to sing Christmas carols. Foul of mood because of having had to drive up and then down US Route 1 to wait in a drugstore line whose speed indicated that was clearly bent on losing a race with chilled molasses, I heard these kids caroling in the middle of the shopping district near my home the other day. They were on one of those hedged green medians with grass and mulch and a few benches that they use to separate westbound from eastbound parking lot traffic, dressed as Santa's elves in the weak afternoon light of late autumn, trying in four-part harmony to spread a little Christmas cheer to the shoppers walking and driving around them. They sang, without masks and with muted enthusiasm, into a microphone, presumably recording for later or maybe even as part of a radio broadcast to which I'd not been directed, and into which I was not tuned. Yet they sang – and so I, keeping physically distanced parked the car, opened the window, and listened.

I loved it. All ye faithful were called, in Latin and English, to come. *Adeste, fidelis*. The halls were decked with boughs of holly. Sleighbells even rang – are you listening? Herald angels – hark! – sang. We saw the little town of

Bethlehem still lying still. *Navidad*, we were assured, would again be *feliz*. Then came my father's favorite carol, and one which I always enjoy hearing, and which gives this sermon its title: "God rest you merry, gentlemen."

I'm not sure if I ever really listen to carols, any more than I'm sure whether I hear the Christmas story with fresh, hopeful ears every year. So, as what turned out to be members of choral group from a local high school sang, I listened: "God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay. / Remember, Christ our savior was born this Christmas Day / to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray. / O tidings of comfort and joy."

Well, that escalated quickly. Who thinks of Satan at Christmas? Apparently, whoever wrote this carol back in Ye Olde Merry. No-one knows for sure who wrote it – "18th century English" is about all one finds, though it might be 200 years older than that. Who whoever it was, though, they meant it; in verse 3, this Savior born "of a pure virgin bright" will "free all those who trust in him from Satan's power and might. / O tidings of comfort and joy". Which is good news – Good News – indeed, but kind of a lot to think about with a manger full of hay and a babe lying in it in swaddling clothes, for there was no room at the inn.

The carol ended, and the high school choristers moved on, oddly for mid-afternoon, to something that "came upon a midnight clear," but I was still stuck on Satan. I mean, if there ever was a Christmas Grinch, let alone a Christmas Scrooge, he was of Satan's party – and if ever a Christmas had a Grinch or a Scrooge, this year's does. This wretched virus and its kin

one might consider Satan's handiwork, if such things have authors at all – and so perhaps ought one to consider the passel of lies told about it by people whom one can no longer consider honorable or good, and whose actions to protect their own from it, if inconstant, belie their belittling others' efforts to protect the rest of us. It is all of that, of course, that keeps us from resting (let alone feasting) merry together this year, or gathering in the bleak midwinter when frosty wind made moan. The church is still here, the candles are lit, the babe has arrived and the three kings (or wise men) are on their way, having seen a star, and we gather, Skype and Zoom as best we may across the digital miles. Satan's power remains diminished, and our salvation by all thus assured. God rest you merry, indeed.

It an interesting phrase, "God rest you merry." For years I thought it oh, so Shakespearean and twee, hearing it in my head as an archaic way of saying what Dickens changed it to in *A Christmas Carol*, "God bless you, merry gentlemen!" It's the carol that makes Scrooge stuff his ears and want to have the carolers' tongues cut out, and not because they couldn't sing. Old Ebenezer is chief of those who did not want any, gentle or no, to feel blessed on the 25th of December, or at any time, lest is dissuade them from working hard to make him more money. The very caricature of a work-ethic, he-who-does-not-work-shall-not-eat Puritan, he was of the party that once *banned* Christmas throughout England and New England as Catholic *cum* pagan revelry not fit for saintly company, on penalty of I can't even begin to tell you what they did. In Dickens's version of the carol, the gentlemen are already merry – hence Scrooge's complain – and the carol wants God to bless them. What's wrong with that? Nothing at all. But that is not what the original says.

No, the original, Elizabethan in origin, says, “God rest you merry,” meaning “God keep you merry” or even “May God keep you happy,” folks. “Let nothing you dismay” – that is, as Jesus said time and time again, “Fear not. Peace be with you.” The carol, that is, asks that God keep us happy and full of cheer, since he’s already gone to the trouble of saving us, coming into the world to free every single blessed and beloved one of us from the power of sin and death – Satan’s power, as we heard – so why not? Why should we not rejoice, jump for joy, go sledding down the hill or skating on the ice, eat, drink and be – yes, merry, because tomorrow, God-willing, we will not die, or if we do know where we’re going: home, into that peace that does not end in the land in which there no sorrow and no more sighing, no grinchies and no scrooges and no pandemics, either, not even a tear to dry or a snuffle or cough to muffle. God rest you merry, indeed.

And so, in closing: *Feliz Navidad. Buon natale. Heri ya Krismasi. Happy Christmas. Eku Odun keresi. Joyeux Noël. Melkam Genna. Fröhliche Weihnachten. Merry Christmas, indeed. Amen.*

Preparation of the Table

A musical offering may be made. The Deacon or Priest prepares the altar for the Eucharist.

The People make ready their gifts of bread and wine. The LEM continues

The Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

The LEM prays. In the silence after each bidding, the People offer their prayers without speaking.

I ask your prayers for all God's people; for our bishops, our clergy, and this gathering, and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church.

Silence

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all. Pray for justice and peace.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison.

Pray for those in any need or trouble.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of God.

Pray that they may seek, and pray that they might find.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the departed [*especially N.N.*]. Pray for those who have died.

Silence

I ask your prayers for those on the prayer list of this parish, and those whose needs are known to you alone.

Silence

The Celebrant adds a concluding collect.

The Peace

The People stand.

Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you,

Holy and gracious Father: In love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin, evil, and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you. He offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his friends, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

LEM Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O God, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ by whom, and with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Now, as Christ taught us, we are bold to say,

The LEM prays

*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,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread, and then keeps a period of silence. The Celebrant continues

Celebrant: [Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

LEM: Therefore, let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

Celebrant: The Gifts of God for the People of God.

The People consume their gifts. After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray. The Celebrant prays

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and

grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

The Celebrant says

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord be with you, this day and always, and give you peace.

The LEM says

Let us go forth, in peace, to love and serve the Lord.



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For information about St. Mark's, please visit our website:

www.stmarksfairland.org

www.stmarks-silverspring.org

We hope that this evening's service has been a blessing to you.

We are here to serve you, and hope to see you again.

Please feel free to call us, email us, or visit us online.