St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
First Sunday of Christmas
December 31, 2017

Rev. Arden Dorn, Transitional Minister
Rita Jordan, Organist
Rita Jordan, Lay Reader

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Gathering
The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

In the psalm all the natural world praises God, including all humanity, male and female, young and old. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon’s song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God’s salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we speak of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The assembly stands.

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the Holy One of Israel, the Word made flesh, the Power of the Most High, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Gathered in the name of Jesus, let us confess our sin against God and neighbor.

The assembly shall stand, or kneel, as they are able.

Gracious God,
in Christ Jesus you come among us
as light shining in darkness.
We confess our failure to welcome this light.
Forgive us and renew our hope,
so that we may live in the light of your grace,
and welcome the truth of Christ the Lord. Amen.

I bring you good news of great joy for all the people:
To you is born a Savior, Christ the Lord.
Your sins are forgiven in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN (ELW p. 288) Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

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

And also with you.
In peace, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. Amen.
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.
PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 
Amen.

The assembly is seated.

Word

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:10--62:3

To the people who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, the prophet proclaims that the Lord’s salvation will fully come to pass. Jerusalem will become a shining light to the nations and righteousness and praise will spring up as surely as the earth puts forth vegetation.

10 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.

11 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.

62:1 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.

2 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.

3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Word of God, word of life.
Thanks be to God.
RESPONSIVE READING: Psalm 148

R  The splendor of the Lord is over earth and heaven.

1Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise God in the heights.
2Praise the Lord, all you angels; sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.
3Praise the Lord, sun and moon; sing praise, all you shining stars.
4Praise the Lord, heaven of heavens, and you waters above the heavens.
5Let them praise the name of the Lord, who commanded, and they were created,
who made them stand fast forever and ever, giving them a law that shall not pass away. R
6Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps;
7fire and hail, snow and fog, tempestuous wind, doing God’s will;
8mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;
9wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds;
10sovereigns of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the world;
11young men and maidens, old and young together. R
12Let them praise the name of the Lord, whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.
13The Lord has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful servants,
the children of Israel, a people who are near the Lord. Hallelujah! R

SECOND READING: Galatians 4:4-7

Paul seeks to show the Galatians that the purpose of Christ’s birth was to liberate us from the law’s condemnation so that we would be fully adopted into God’s family as sons and daughters.
4When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Word of God, word of life.
Thanks be to God.

The assembly stands.
Luke’s narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus’ connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ!

The assembly is seated.

SERMON

Rev. Arden Dorn

The assembly stands.
NICENE 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,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly 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,*
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who 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.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn near to God as children and heirs of Christ’s promise, we pray for all people of God, for our nation and our world, and for those in need.

For the faith communities of this city/town/village and for faith communities throughout the world. Help us to see ourselves in our neighbors, especially those who differ from us, and draw us together in common service to those who are hungry, poor, and oppressed. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
For the well-being of the earth as we begin another year entrusted with its care. Give us lively imaginations to see ways to conserve its limited resources, harness its renewable energies, and conform ourselves to its natural goodness. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For peace among nations, for peace in our homes, and for peace in our hearts. Urge us to cry out at injustice and inequality among your people until vindication comes and righteousness prevails. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who wait in the shadow of death, for those who are ill, for those who struggle to see the future, and for all who lack even their basic needs. Transform our love toward them with the vision of eyes that have seen the salvation of God. We pray especially for Elvira, Lorain, Pauline, Shane, Linda, Norma, Ann, Helen, Linda, Jack, Steve, Evalena, Francis, Carol, Ella, Peyton, Charles, Eli, Steve, Tom, Marlane, Yvonne, Mary Ruth, Kyle, Cody, and Norma. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who cannot see, for those who cannot hear, for those who have varied use of their limbs, and for those able to exercise all the senses. Help us to appreciate the fullness of God’s gift of life in our varied abilities, and to celebrate the diversity that reveals a more complete image of the one who makes us all family. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for those who have gone before us in this year and now rest in you. Led by Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, let us live in your praise until the day we depart in your peace. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into your outstretched arms, O God, we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in Jesus Christ, the light and life of the world.
Amen.

SHARING OF THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always. 
And also with you.

Peace is shared among the assembly, and then the assembly is seated.

Meal
God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

OFFERING An offering is gathered for the mission of the church, including the care of those in need.
The assembly stands.

OFFERING WORDS (ELW p. 692) We are an Offering
OFFERING PRAYER

God with us:
You came as a baby to a manger.
You slept on straw and greeted shepherds.
You come again in bread and wine.
Remind us how good you are at blessing ordinary things. And then, through these gifts, help us to bless the lives of others in the strength of your holy name.

Amen.

Gott mit uns:
Sie kam als Baby in einer Krippe.
Sie schlie ß auf Stroh und begrü ßt Hirten.
Sie kommen wieder in Brot und Wein.
Uns daran erinnern, wie gut Sie sind, die die Segnung von gewöhnlichen Dingen.
Und dann, durch diese Geschenke, die uns helfen, das Leben der Anderen in der Kraft deines Heiligen Namen zu segnen.

Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.
It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ.
In the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh you have opened the eyes of faith to a new and radiant vision of your glory, that, beholding the God made visible, we may be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see.
And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:
THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

LORD’S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us: (The assembly joins hands to pray)

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, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let every heart receive your Savior.

The assembly is seated.

DISTRIBUTION – All are WELCOME at the table of the Lord.

This meal gives you strength for your journey of faith & life. Go forward as the body of Christ in your family, community and the world. Children or anyone choosing not to commune, but wishing to be blessed, may indicate this by folding their arms across their chest. Anyone who is unable to come forward may indicate to an usher that you wish to receive communion where you are seated.
Following Communion, the assembly stands.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

On this day, O God, you gave us Christ the Son to save us. As you sent the one foretold, send us now with good news for all people. Let the gladness of this feast have no end as we share with others the joy that fills us; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

*Amen.*

**Sending**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

**BLESSING**

May Christ, who by his incarnation has filled us with grace and truth, give you peace this Christmas and always. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

*Amen.*

**SENDING HYMN**  *(ELW p. 282)*  *It Came upon the Midnight Clear*

**DISMISSAL**

Glory to God in the highest!

*Peace to God’s people on earth!*

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.

*Thanks be to God.*

**DOXOLOGY**  *(ELW p. 884)*  *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow*

*Welcome!*

We have all come to St. Paul’s by different paths, and from various walks of life. Through worship, study, prayer and fellowship we each seek to deepen our faith, comfort and encourage one another and dedicate our lives more fully to sharing Christ in our homes, our community and the world. All are welcome at St. Paul’s. We are eager to know you, and we invite you to get to know us.

*A Nursery* is located at the rear of the sanctuary in the overflow area.

*If you are unable to hear, require a bulletin, or need any other assistance,* please signal an usher.
For Prayerful Consideration

**Ill or Injured**

**For those in the military**
Nick Adams, Allen Bowles, Justin Chandler, Justin Elkins, Rodney Foreman, Jamaica Goodhue, Jacob Jones, Felipe Leal, Jr., Garrett Peterson, Michael Rosales, James Skinner, Chris Sustaita, Kassie Thompson, John Vasquez, and Delmiro Villanueva.

**Birthday**
Marvin Witte (Jan. 2), Lynette Jonas (Jan. 6)

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 7 IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE SERVICE**
Everyone will gather to remove and store the Christmas decorations.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 21: ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING** immediately following worship.

**BUSINESS ITEMS TO BE ADDRESSED**

**CURRENT: ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING**
The regular congregation meeting shall be held annually on the third Sunday of January. The time and place convening shall be announced in two services immediately preceding the meeting.

**PROPOSED: ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING**
The regular congregation meeting shall be held annually any Sunday of January. The time and place convening shall be announced in two services immediately preceding the meeting.

**Council positions are available.** If you’d like to participate on the Nomination Committee, as a Council Person, or would like to nominate someone for Council, please contact Ronnie Retzloff.

**Representatives are needed to attend the Synod Assembly Conference, May 4-6 at the Embassy Suites, San Marcos.** The 2018 theme will be *Seeds of Hope Beyond All Imagination.*

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**TLU performing arts center to open Jan. 26**

The Caroline M. Weston Center for the Performing Arts at Texas Lutheran University will have its grand opening from 2–3:30 p.m. on Jan. 26. All are invited to participate in this historic occasion. Thanks to many of the university’s generous alumni and friends, this is the most ambitious construction project in TLU history with highlights including:

- a 32,000-square-foot School of Music
- a separate black box studio theatre with theatre and video production space and additional dressing room and green room space; and
- the renovation of the Jackson Auditorium lobby and restrooms.
FROM THE BISHOP

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Change! That can be disconcerting for our lives and for the Church. In this article I want to share three things that will change and are interconnected. Before I begin, however, please remember that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

The first change is that this is the final issue of The Vista. Deacon John Dillis, who has served as its editor for 29 years and eight months, will resign from this position when his contract ends on Jan. 31, 2018, so he can wholeheartedly pursue his work with the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest. The Synod Council has surveyed a number of congregations, looked at the annual cost of The Vista, approximately $37,500, and prayerfully considered options.

It has been decided that the four printed issues will be replaced with a monthly PDF page that can be distributed in congregational newsletters, either printed or electronically. We trust that you will receive more timely news of synod events and activities in this manner through your own congregational communications, not just four times a year but every month. We hope that this process, accompanied by the synod’s weekly electronic news, will keep communication clear and open for everyone.

The second change is in the synod’s future and strategic plan. Since 2011, we have been using as our focus, “GOD’s People—Growing in faith, Outwardly focused, Doing Mission.” For the last one and one-half years, we have participated in a process of gathering information for a new Purpose Statement, thanks to LEAD (Living Everyday As Disciples) and the ELCA’s Department of Research and Evaluation. We held conversations in conference and deanery meetings, at the synod assembly, and through an electronic survey. In September, the Synod Council approved a new Purpose Statement, “God’s grace transforms and connects us to learn, to love, to lead.” As the synod’s strategic plan is built around this statement, we will work together to bring this to life in congregations, conferences, and throughout the synod’s ministries. It will help the new bishop have a plan in place that he/she can move forward in a timely and confident way.

Which brings us to the third change, the election of a new bishop at our Synod Assembly on May 5–6, 2018. As I approach the end of 18 years in the Office of Bishop among you, I will now entrust this calling to a new bishop. Not only will this mean change for the synod, but there will be change for me and Debbie as well. My plan is to retire, but I hope to reconnect with parish ministry in some way. We will continue to live in Fredericksburg, and I plan to get my certification as a Master Gardener, a hobby I have enjoyed throughout my life.

My prayer for our synod is to stay focused on our Savior and to be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading. While much changes around us, even in us, trust in God’s grace to provide for the Kingdom.

Bishop Ray Tiemann