



7092 Main Street, Gloucester, VA 23061 | 804-693-9098 | [www.apostles-elca.org](http://www.apostles-elca.org)



## **BLUE CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT SERVICE OF COMFORT, REMEMBRANCE, AND HOPE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025 | 7:00 PM**

Our Mission is to be a Caring Inclusive Christian Community responding to God's grace through Worship, Service, and Sharing the Gospel.



**RECONCILING *in* CHRIST**



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

*The winter solstice is the longest night and the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere.*

*In a few days many of us will gather to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, the arrival of Jesus Christ, God in human form. God arrives by way of deep darkness. Christians wanted to tell the world that God, the maker of the cosmos, chose to lovingly draw near to our broken world by way of a human birth on the longest night of the year. God's love for us goes deep and does not fade or change with the seasons. It is richer and more plentiful than the darkness of night, blazing brighter than the noonday sun of late June.*

*While Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or like celebrating. Feelings of grief, depression, loneliness, and loss may be heightened and magnified. Even those who are not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas time. This service is meant to provide a time and place of solace during the often hurried and overwhelming days surrounding the celebration of Christmas. We come together seeking healing and a safe space to share grief, sadness, loneliness, or confusion when these emotions often feel out of place during the holidays.*

*As we gather this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ child this Christmas season. May the Christ child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and refugee, bring light, comfort, peace and joy to you this holiday season.*

## **RESTROOMS**

A restroom can be found by exiting the rear door of the worship space. It is directly in front of you to the right. Additional restrooms can be found in the back corner of the fellowship area, near the Pastor's office.

## **FOR PASTORAL CARE**

Pastor Jay Serafin can be reached at 570-205-7506 or at [j80j84@msn.com](mailto:j80j84@msn.com).

## **RESOURCES**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255, a free, 24-hour hotline.

**COPE Crisis Line:** 1-800-542-2673

**Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741

# GATHERING

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

## PRELUDE AND SILENT PRAYER

*Martin Luther said of music: "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world." Please take a moment to **silence all cell phones**.*

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### GREETING

The light of our Lord Jesus Christ, the warmth of God, and the hope of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

### THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you called light into being, and you set lights in the sky to govern night and day. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night you let your people into freedom. Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may your Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are merciful, and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### MUSICAL INTERLUDE

**ELW #279**

**"O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

### LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES

This first candle we light to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past. We offer it to God, asking that from His hands we may receive the gift of peace.

**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

This second candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

We remember ...

**May God's eternal love surround them.**

This third candle we light to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember these past weeks and months: our grappling for faith, our anger and pain, our struggles, our bittersweet memories, the welcome and embrace of family and friends and all who stood by our side during difficult moments. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

**Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

The fourth candle we light to remember our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

**Let us remember the One who shows the way, who brings the truth, and who bears the light.**

## **MUSICAL INTERLUDE**

**ELW #282**

**"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"**

## **DIALOGUE**

"Comfort, O comfort my people," says your God. (*Isaiah 40:1*)

**"The Lord binds up the brokenhearted and comforts all of us who mourn."**

(*Isaiah 61:1-2*)

Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest." (*Matthew 11:28*)

**"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength."** (*Isaiah 40:31a*)

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (*Revelation 7:17*)

**We gather tonight in the name of Emmanuel, which means God is with us.**

**O Come, O Come Emmanuel. God is with us today and every day. Shine**

**Jesus shine on us!**

## MUSICAL INTERLUDE

**ELW #257**

**"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"**

## PRAYER

Creator of the stars of night, bless the long hours of this night with the warmth of your presence. Come to all who suffer in any way. Grant rest to the weary, freedom to those who are burdened, and bright hope to those who despair. Strengthen us as we await your coming once again, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

## WORD

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

## READING

**PSALM 80:1-7, 17-19**

<sup>1</sup> Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;  
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

<sup>2</sup> In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,  
stir up your strength and come to help us.

**<sup>3</sup> Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

<sup>4</sup> O Lord God of hosts, how long will your anger fume when your people pray?

<sup>5</sup> You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have given them bowls of tears to drink. <sup>6</sup> You have made us the derision of our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

**<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

<sup>17</sup> Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one you have made so strong for yourself.

<sup>18</sup> And so will we never turn away from you; give us life, that we may call upon your name.

**<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

## READING

## MATTHEW 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife <sup>25</sup> but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

## ANTHEM

**APOSTLES CHOIR**  
"Hymn of Promise"

## REFLECTION

**JANET GOMEZ**

*Silence is kept after the reflection.*

# HYMN

ELW #257

## "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (verses 1-4)



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive  
 2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things  
 3 O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on  
 4 O come, O Branch of Jes - se, free your own from Sa - tan's



Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here  
 far and nigh: in strength and beau - ty come and stay;  
 Si - nai's height in an - cient times you gave the law  
 tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell your peo - ple save,



un - til the Son of God ap - pear.  
 teach us your will and guide our way. Re-joice! Re-joice!  
 in cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.  
 and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave.



Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

Text: *Psalterium Cantionum Catholicarum*, Köln, 1710; tr. composite

Music: VENI, EMMANUEL, French processional, 15th cent.

Text sts. 2, 6, 7 © 1997 Augsburg Fortress.

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## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we prepare for Emmanuel, God-with-us, let us pray for all people and places that long for God's presence.

*Each portion of the prayers ends with these words:*

Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Savior of the nations, come, and receive these prayers and the pleas of our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

### CANDLE LIGHTING REMEMBRANCE

**ELW #281**

**"Silent Night, Holy Night!"**

*During the song, please come forward, if you wish, light a candle, and place it in the crossbox as you remember your loved ones. You are welcome to return to your seat or stay for a moment of silence.*

1 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.

3 Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
radiant beams from your holy face,  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

2 Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight;  
glories stream from heaven afar,  
heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!  
Christ, the Savior, is born!  
Christ, the Savior, is born!



## **SENDING**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission back into the world.*

### **BLESSING**

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's holy darkness enfold you and grant you rest.

May God nourish a seed of hope among us.

**Amen.**

**IN OUR DEEPEST NIGHT, JESUS COMES TO EARTH:**

**RADIANT STAR TO LIGHT OUR WAY.**

**SUMMER'S HEAT OR WINTER'S CHILL,**

**WITH A WARM AND LOVING WILL,**

**TO A WORLD THAT NEEDS HIM STILL,**

**JESUS COMES.**

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### **WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS**

The Reverend Jay Serafin

David Leunig

Janet Gomez

Irene Albert

Heinz Albert

Apostles Adult Choir

Sue Turner (Choir Director)

Nina Buzby (cello)

Vanessa Fry (flute)

Janet Gomez (piano)

Doug Dalager (technology)

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the  
LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for  
our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be  
revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup>A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup>Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

<sup>12</sup>Who has measured the waters in the  
hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup>Who has directed the spirit of the LORD,  
or as his counselor has instructed him?

<sup>14</sup>Whom did he consult for his  
enlightenment,  
and who taught him the path of justice?  
Who taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?

<sup>15</sup>Even the nations are like a drop from a  
bucket,  
and are accounted as dust on the scales;  
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

<sup>16</sup>Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,  
nor are its animals enough for a burnt  
offering.

<sup>17</sup>All the nations are as nothing before him;  
they are accounted by him as less than  
nothing and emptiness.

<sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him?

<sup>19</sup>An idol? — A workman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,  
and casts for it silver chains.

<sup>20</sup>As a gift one chooses mulberry wood  
— wood that will not rot —  
then seeks out a skilled artisan  
to set up an image that will not topple.

<sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the  
beginning?

Have you not understood from the  
foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is he who sits above the circle of the  
earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a  
curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;

<sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as  
nothing.

<sup>24</sup>Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the  
earth,  
when he blows upon them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like  
stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me,  
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these?  
He who brings out their host and numbers  
them,  
calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God?"  
<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the LORD shall  
renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.



# **WELCOME TO APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH!**

It is an honor to worship God with you this evening. We pray you experience the loving presence of the Spirit as we share our words and our actions. Apostles is a church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. For us, this faith comes through the good news of Jesus Christ and gives us the freedom and the courage to wonder, discover and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person – questions, complexities and all. Apostles is a church that has a place for you.

## **RECONCILING *in* CHRIST**

We, the people of Apostles Lutheran Church, follow Paul's message to the Galatians (3:28): "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Believing that because we are all one in Christ, and created in God's image, all are welcome as beloved children of God. We welcome into the full life of the church all those whom God sends us. Rejoicing in God's amazing diversity, we welcome people of all ages, races, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, and physical and mental abilities. Centered in Christ, we commit ourselves to racial equity, breaking down dividing walls and building a community where all are beloved.

## **APOSTLES LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Today we gather on the original and ancestral homelands of the Pamunkey, Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Rappahannock, and Nansemond peoples and we give thanks for their presence here since time immemorial. We also wish to recognize and honor all our indigenous siblings who have and continue to call this land their home.

## **2025 CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES**

**Wednesday, December 24, 7:00 PM**

**THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, CHRISTMAS EVE**

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Holy Communion

**Sunday, December 28, 10:00 AM**

**FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS**

Lessons and Carols

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