A Mission Congregation of the ELCA Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

P. O. Box 64 - 8520 Oakes Rd - Pitsburg, Ohio 45358



Luke 1:5-13, 57-80 December 24, 2023



Scan with your Smartphone and link to our web page, our Facebook page, and our YouTube Channel.

GATHERING

• Prelude Roxanne Groff

- Office of the Acolyte and Ringing of the Bell
- Welcome Pr Mel Musser
- Lighting of the Advent Wreath
- R: This day, Elizabeth and Zechariah welcome their son, John, who will be a prophet to the promised messiah.
- C: (*light candle 1*) This is the candle of hope, and it illuminates God's promise.
- R: (*light candle 2*) This is the candle of love, and its light leads us in God's way.
- C: (*light candle 3*) This is the candle of joy, and it shows us God's healing and wholeness.
- R: (*light candle 4*) This is the candle of peace, and it proclaims Christ's coming reign of justice, when we will make war no more.

* THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The assembly stands. All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

- P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, the fountain of living water, the rock who gave us birth, our light and our salvation.
- C: Amen.
- P: Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Water may be poured into the font as the presiding minister gives thanks.

P: We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family. Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all. We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. Shower us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

C: Amen.

* Please stand if able December 24, 2023

Please be seated

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* APOSTOLIC GREETING

- P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C: And also with you.

* PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Let us pray... God of all, you call us into one Body of Christ for the good of the world. Strengthen us through your word, that we might support and sustain one another in all that you call us to do. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen.

* Please stand if able

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WORD

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE



Theme: The Birth of John the Baptist

Materials: An Angel

Scripture: Luke 1:5-13, 57-80

Hello girls and boys! Have you been naughty or nice? I know all of you are nice...

There were two people back in the Bible days that God said were nice people too. They were an old couple by the names of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. They were chosen by God for a very special assignment. I'll tell you about that in a minute...

First I want to play a game. Have you ever played the quite game, maybe at school? Here's how it goes. We all try to stay as quiet as we can. That means no talking, no whispering, no laughing or giggling either. If you make any sound, you're out of the game. Are you ready? Let's try it.

It's hard to stay quiet even for a minute. The Gospel writer, Luke tells us that when Zechariah was inside the most Holy part of the Temple, the Angel Gabriel came and told him he was going to have a son. When Zechariah didn't believe what Gabriel had told him, the angel made Zechariah mute. That means he couldn't talk. Not even a whisper. He was speechless for 9 months. After that, when the baby was born Zechariah could talk again.

Do you know who that baby grew up to be? Not Jesus... It was John the Baptist. John's purpose in life was to prepare the way for Jesus. When John was baptizing people in the Jordan river in Israel he saw Jesus and pointed out for everyone to see that this Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. John was sort of like an exit sign on the highway. Just like the sign points to the exit, John pointed all of us to Jesus. He had a pretty important job given to him by God.

Tonight we'll hear about the birth of another important person... Can you guess who? Yep! It's Jesus. I hope to see all of you tonight.

Let's pray... Dear God, thank you for the gift of speech. We like to talk! Thank you for giving us John the Baptist because he points us to Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. Thank you the most for giving us your only son, Jesus. Amen.

* Please stand if able

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• SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 1:5-13, 57-80

P: Our scripture reading for this day is from Luke, Chapter 1.

C: Glory to you O Lord.

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John."

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has

* Please stand if able

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remembered his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." ⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ (Spoken)

• SERMON Pr Mel Musser

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the true Light of the World, Jesus Christ, Our Savior, amen.

Did you notice we had 4 seconds more daylight yesterday than we did the day before? We're now officially past the shortest day of the year, Now all the days will be getting longer for a while. Even nature proves that light always overcomes the darkness... We all know the pattern. The daylight hours get shorter until December 21st. After that, they begin to get longer, until June 21st. Then the daylight starts getting shorter once again.

You might know the pattern, but I wonder how many of us have ever considered why this pattern exists in the first place. Yes, again we know it's because the earth is tilted on its axis. (SLIDE) Science tells us the earth is tilted at a 23.5 degree angle from the plane of its orbit. Because of this characteristic of our

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planet's axis of rotation we have seasons and this curious pattern of losing light until December 21st and then gaining light until June 21st. That's what science tells us, but the truth of the matter is God created this tiny planet in the midst of all the much more glorious planets. I mean, look at Saturn. (SLIDE) It's magnificent with all its rings. Look at Mars all red and ruddy. (SLIDE) Even in the most basic facts of science and nature you can see the hand of a God who seeks out the unexpected, the unique, the broken. God doesn't just seek out the weird and broken, God welcomes the unusual, the lost, the most cracked up to live under the reign of God as if God's Kingdom were already here on earth. If the earth wasn't tilted at all, if it were completely straight up and down, standing tall, there would be no life on this planet. If the earth were tilted at 20 degrees instead of 23.5 degrees, no life... If it were tilted at 25 degrees, no life... At 23.4 degrees the conditions were exactly perfect to set into motion the continual ebb and flow of the tides, the seasons, and the possibility of life.

God seeks out the lost and broken in order to give blessings and to make life come from what we think is beyond repair. Look at Zechariah and Elizabeth.

(SLIDE) A couple well beyond childbearing years. In the ancient times children were considered a blessing from God. They ensured your bloodline would continue, but also, they provided a social safety net for folks in their old age. The

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children cared for their parents. Those who had no children were thought to be broken or damaged, even forsaken by God. So, doesn't it make sense God would seek out a couple like Zechariah and Elizabeth? This certainly isn't the first time God used an unexpected couple to do great things. (SLIDE) Abraham and Sarah were 100 years old when God blessed them with a child. The Bible doesn't tell us how old Elkanah and Hannah were, but only that Hanna could not have children. She prayed for a son and God answered her prayers. (SLIDE) The child, Samuel grew up to be the priest who anointed both of Israel's first two Kings, Saul and David. There are others in the Bible as well. This isn't anything the people of God hadn't seen before, yet when God acts in our lives, sometimes we still get surprised. My question is, how do we learn to expect the unexpected from our God who is always doing the unexpected? (SLIDE) Like carrying an umbrella on a sunny day...

It was totally unexpected when God tapped me on the shoulder in Alaska. I was at a pretty low point in my life and feeling like a failure when God spoke to me through his angel. I didn't see Gabriel or smoke or even flashing lights (I'm still a little bummed out about that...), but God spoke to me just a surely through the Pastor at the church we had just started to attend. (SLIDE) He spoke words that penetrated my hardened heart and changed the entire path my life was

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heading. He was God's angel, sent to me on that dark day in a land known for nearly complete winter darkness.

Is God tapping on your shoulder this morning? You probably won't be struck speechless like Zechariah, (SLIDE) but God is nevertheless calling and speaking to you today, maybe even right now. No, you're not too old for God to use you for great things. Moses was 80 years old when God spoke to him through a burning bush. You're not too young either. God used young David, barely a teenager, to slay the giant Goliath. You're not too far lost in sin. God used Saint Paul, who held the coats and encouraged the people who stoned the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Paul went on to be the evangelist to the Gentiles and wrote more than two thirds of the New Testament.

There are times when it feels like you're spinning out of control and your axis is not straight up and down. Maybe you're at a time when it feels like the darkness is closing in. The good news for us today is the darkness is in full retreat. (SLIDE) We gained 4 seconds yesterday and we'll gain another 8 seconds today. By the end of the year we'll be gaining over 40 second of daylight. The truly great news is we have a faithful God who still uses the unexpected to do marvelous things. The darkness in your life will not win because God loves you and can't stop loving you, no matter who you are or what you've done or left undone. None

^{*} Please stand if able

of us are beyond God's loving reach. I thought I had run far enough away so God would never find me. I mean, Alaska, the land of perpetual darkness...

I hope you're not actively running away from God. I was a regular Church goer, but I was still running away from God. I guess I thought if I kept attending Church Services and trying to stay faithful, but still flying under the radar, God might forget about me and his call on my life. Just because you're here doesn't mean you're not holding God at arm's length. (SLIDE) Take it from me, there's no place you can run. There's no place you can hide. There's no place God can't find you. That's good news because when God finds you He will shower you with His love. He leaves the 99 other sheep on the side of the mountain to seek you out and to bring you home. (SLIDE)

When you encounter God's Holy Angel, I know you'll recognize the messenger and the message. I noticed Zechariah didn't see or hear Gabriel when he was working in the fields. He didn't see Gabriel in his home with Elizabeth. It took the complete aloneness of being the one chosen at random to enter into the Holy of Holies, (SLIDE) the inner Sanctuary of the Temple where only one person can enter only once per year. The priest who was chosen for the honor of burning incense had to have a rope tied around his waist to pull him out if the presence of God overwhelmed him. That's how alone you had to be to enter into the presence

^{*} Please stand if able

of God almighty. I don't know how many times Zechariah had prayed for a son. I assume it was a lot! Now, stripped of all his earthly trappings and totally alone God sent, not just any angel, but his archangel, Gabriel with this message of hope for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

I wish our world would stop all the nonsense and listen to God's Word of Hope this Christmas. I pray you will stop to listen to God's Word of Hope for you. Zechariah and Elizabeth received an unexpected answer to their prayers. They were probably looking for a child that would care for them in their old age. Instead, they received a child in their old age who would be the prophet of the most high God. Their child would be one who would prepare the people for the coming of the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ. (SLIDE) The Lord hears our prayers and answers every one of them. Sometimes we get exactly what we pray for. Most of the time the answer is more like what Aladin gets when he makes a wish to his Genie. (SLIDE) It's usually an unexpected answer. In Alaska I prayed for a better assignment that would use my gifts and talents better than I was currently doing. Instead of a better job, I received an invitation into a completely different vocation.

When your life is spinning out of control and you're totally off your axis, remember you are not alone. Even our planet is with you. (SLIDE) The good

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news for you today is in those times when you're spinning out of control, God will find you and God will invite you, with all your personal baggage, into a relationship of love. When you enter into that relationship, God will open your mouth to speak, just like old Zechariah. May you own your quirks. Instead of being a scarlet letter you wear on your chest of all your failings, may your slightly off kilter axis become your strength in Christ and may God use all your mistakes and errs to proclaim the glory of his love and forgiveness.. (SLIDE) Merry Christmas! Amen.

Silence may be kept for meditation...

"Would I Know My Savior?" **Larry Harter** SPECIAL MUSIC

^{*} Please stand if able



* NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed is said on all festivals and on Sundays in the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. The Apostles' Creed is said at other times. The Creed is omitted here if the service of Holy Baptism or another rite with a creed is used.

C: 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 man. For our sake he was crucified under

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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.

> Or, He descended to the dead.

* PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: In anticipation of the coming messiah, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of song, we praise you for all the ways you show up and surprise us, calling us into your loving service for the sake of the world. Inspire us to carry the gospel message as John the Baptist would. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

L: Guide all who strive to bring endangered species back from the brink through captive breeding and reintroduction programs, so that all creatures you have made might flourish. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

L: Strengthen all leaders of faith communities in their call to serve you and the whole Body of Christ, that they might inspire your people to proclaim the gospel in all they say and do. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

L: We pray for all those in our lives, named and unnamed, who struggle with physical or emotional challenges, (*especially...*) Grant them your healing grace. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

L: Inspire and support all teachers, so that they might fill their students with wonder and equip them to think critically about the world around them. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

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L: In gratitude we remember all the saints who have filled our churches with joyful song. May we lend our voices to your praise in their honor until we are reunited in the great choir that sings around your throne. God of Promise,

C: In mercy, hear our prayer.

L: We lift all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, into your loving arms, trusting in your love and mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C: Amen.

* SHARING OF THE PEACE

(The Sharing of the Peace that began when the congregation arrived is now shared with the Pastor at this time...)

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: And also with you.

MEAL

OFFERING

P: As we collect our offering here in person, those worshipping with us through the internet, may you go to our website located at www.pitsburgtlc.org where you'll find a button labeled "Give to Trinity." You can make your offering to God through our secure website.

OFFERING PRAYER

When the congregation is standing say:

P: Let us pray for the offerings we receive this day.... With Elizabeth and Zechariah, we rejoice in all that God has given to us. Accept, O God, our gifts in response, of our resources, our time, and our skills, and dedicate them to the service of all the world.

C: Amen.

* THE LORD'S PRAYER

- P: We're united together by our Savior Jesus Christ. So, let us pray as Jesus taught...
- C: 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, forever and ever. Amen.

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SENDING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

* SENDING BLESSING

P: The God of peace bless you, the love of Christ sustain you in hope, and the anointing of the Spirit remain upon you now and forever.

C: Amen.



- * Please stand if able
- Please be seated

* DISMISSAL

P: Until the next time we gather together as God's people to offer our worship and praise, depart in Christ's Love.

C: Seeking, welcoming, and serving all. Amen!

* POSTLUDE Roxanne Groff

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Trinity Worship Assistants and Staff

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Ministers	All the People of Trinity
Organist	Roxanne Groff
Lector	
Parrish Nurse	PJ Musser
Custodian	Mark Groff
Secretary	Sharon Fourman
Facebook Live Recorder	PJ Musser

This Week @ Trinity - December 24 thru December 31

DATE	TIME	EVENT
Sun, Dec. 24	9:30 am	Christian Conversations (Coffee/Juice and Donuts)
	10:30 am	Worship Service
	4:00 pm	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
	10:00 pm	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
Mon, Dec. 25	CHRISTMAS DAY	
Fri, Dec. 29	3:30 pm	FISH Choice Food Pantry
Sun, Dec. 31	9:30 am	Christian Conversations (Coffee/Juice and Donuts)
	10:30 am	Worship Service w/Communion

* Please stand if able

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TRINITY TRUMPET – Please pick up your January issue of the Trinity Trumpet.

Health Tips for the Week

Mind: Take a nap. Body: Go to bed early.

Spirit: Read Luke Chapter 2:1-20.



Trinity is on the Air at FM 88.3

If you are near the Church on Sunday morning, you can tune in to FM 88.3 at 10:30 AM and hear the sermon from your car.

Holy Communion Delivery Available to ALL:

If you or anyone you know would like to have Holy Communion delivered to a home or place of business, please call Pastor Mel at 937-626-7100. He will bring a prefilled communion chalice including both sanctified wine and a morsel of bread all prepackaged from the Concordia True Vine company. This is a safe way to stay connected to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Trinity Contact Info:

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