

St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church & Elementary School
Our Mission: Learn God's Truth, Share Spirit's Healing, Follow Jesus' Ways.
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany ~ Presentation of Christ
Virtual Prayer and Preaching Worship

February 2, 2025

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**The CHURCH'S GATHERING**



**WELCOME** *Theme of the day, Prayer concerns, & Praise time:*

**CONFESSION and FORGIVENESS**

We bless the † one God, our creator,  
our protector, our wellspring of life. **Amen**

Trusting that God receives our words and the meditations of our hearts, we confess our sin. *Silence is kept for reflection.* Merciful God, **you speak blessing and compassion into the world. Forgive us for the ways we act with judgment, cruelty, or indifference. We ignore the needs of our neighbors; we resist your call to oppose injustice; we give in to scarcity and fear; we assume the worst about one another. Cleanse us from our faults and release us from their grasp. Show us your lovingkindness. Restore our hearts and repair your world, that we may live in Christ's ways. Amen**

God proclaims these words of assurance: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine." In † Christ, you are forgiven. In Spirit, you are made free. Refreshed by the waters of mercy, live anew as beloved children of God. **Amen**

**GREETING and PRAYER of the DAY**

The love of Christ, the wisdom of God,  
and the light of Spirit is with you all.

**And also with you.**

Holy God, **hear our prayer.** *A brief silence.* Almighty and ever-living God, your only-begotten Son was presented this day in the temple. May we be presented to you with clean and pure hearts by the same Jesus Christ, our great high priest, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

**GOD'S WORD**

**FIRST READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

*The congregation at Corinth experienced division as people were comparing their spiritual gifts, thinking some to be superior to others. Paul invites this fractured community to trust that God's Holy Spirit has gifted them all perfectly for their mission together.*

This is a reading from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter.

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

This is the Word of God, word of life.

### **SECOND READING: Jeremiah 1:4-10**

This is a responsive reading from the prophet Jeremiah, the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter. Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
**and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."**

Then I said, "Ah, LORD God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy,'  
**for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.**

Do not be afraid of them,

**for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."**

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me,

**"Now I have put my words in your mouth.**

See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,

**to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant."**

This is the Word of God, word of life.

**HOLY GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40**

*This story is a study in contrasts: the infant Jesus with the aged prophets; the joy of birth with the ominous words of Simeon to Mary; the faithful fulfilling of the law with the presentation of the one who will release the hold over us. Through it all, we see the light of God's salvation revealed to the world.*

This is the Holy Gospel as the Word was given to Luke, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

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

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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too."

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, 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. 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.

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

This is the Good News of Christ's Victory.

**HYMN of the DAY: # 417 "In His Temple Now Behold Him"**

- 1 In his temple now behold him,  
see the long-expected Lord;  
ancient prophets had foretold him,  
God has sent the promised Word.  
Now to praise him, his redeemed  
shall break forth with one accord.
- 2 In the arms of her who bore him,  
virgin pure, behold him lie,  
while his aged saints adore him,  
ere in perfect faith they die.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Lo, the incarnate God Most High!
- 3 Jesus, by your presentation,  
when they blessed you, weak and poor,  
make us see your great salvation,  
seal us with your promise sure;  
and present us, in your glory,  
to your Father, cleansed and pure.
- 4 Prince and author of salvation,  
be your boundless love our theme!  
Jesus, praise to you be given  
by the world you did redeem,  
with the Father and the Spirit  
God of majesty supreme!

Text: Henry J. Pye, 1825-1903, alt.

**MESSAGE: WELCOMING**

*(silence for reflection follows)*

How do you know when anything is complete? There's a sense of relief when we've finished some household project, succeeded in getting a contract, a new position or promotion, or reached a milestone in our family's life. Some people are content to have gotten done what was ahead of them without worrying too much about the next thing on their plate, while others plunge right away into the next task. Will you complain about having too much to do, or do you feel restless unless you're getting something done? For most of us, we're glad when we've accomplished what we set out to do, & then, when we're recognized for our success, it's all the better to say, I did it!

As we grow older, our social relationships will mature, becoming deeper thru time spent together. But some people grow apart, when our aims or desires are different than our friend or spouse. That's when that relationship may come to an end, when we can't reconcile our differences. As changes occur within our families, parents will take pride in reaching that graduation day which will make a difference in their children's lives – yet these young ones we've been responsible for may just choose goals & a way of life that we may not understand or appreciate. In many circumstances, what works for us isn't what others choose to do or believe, & what becomes possible & desirable for the younger generations seems far from what we've valued in our lives. Today, life has been changing so much & so fast that it isn't easy to see whether we'll ever reach a satisfactory or safe conclusion. As the goals among the various parties & ideologies in our society clash, it's become harder to see an outcome that works for the common good.

As we meet these 2 elders who encounter the infant Jesus, we hear them responding to the fulfillment of what was promised them by God's Spirit. Simeon is content – 'It's enuf to know that the Messiah is here; I can see it, this child in my arms is going to do God's will for all people.' Anna cannot contain her prophetic joy at finding the redeemer of Israel in this otherwise unremarkable child. Here's a little detail that may show us that difference between those who are glad to be done with their work, & those who are ready for the next step in the plan for their lives. Simeon gives thanks to God, ready to see his reward, to *rest in peace*. But Anna reaches out to anyone in her beloved temple who will listen; she continues her praise of God & the proclamation of the good news, as she had done for so long. Yes, naming her a prophet is right, just as Simeon prophecies the harsher part of the future mission of this child, that Jesus will help many & hurt some.

Yet that is what the truth will do. It confirms the hopes & expectations of God's people, who've suffered under many a tyrant. Jesus' coming role as Messiah will also upset the plans of the powerful, & 'send the rich away empty', as Mary had sung. His leadership would never be like theirs. Jesus will provide hope for those, like Anna & Simeon, who seek to live under God's righteous care. He calls disciples who don't match what we might expect in a rabbinical school of his day. Scribes may be able to read God's word, but Jesus' neighbors know these words by heart as they've been taught in their meeting places. Even more, Jesus embraced those labeled as *sinner*s by those who promote a purity unavailable to the common person.

They complained of him, "Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" Tho Jesus meets with the leaders of the faith, it's more often because they want to contend with his teaching. Some will hear, & welcome him to dine, but others prove that they don't need what Jesus has to share from God.

To put it simply, Jesus will save those who cannot save themselves. The Pharisees, the priests, & scribes may have a plan that describes a godly life, fulfilling the rules, the ordinances & statutes written for keeping a righteous household & making sacrifice for sin in the Temple. But ticking off that to-do list of religious practice is like completing a task without appreciating the accomplishment. Jesus pushed back against that sort of thinking: "How terrible for you Pharisees! You give a tenth of your mint, rue, and garden herbs of all kinds, while neglecting justice and love for God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others." If that's their attitude, then I'd have to believe their dinners are dry affairs. I'd rather eat with sinners who have experienced the joy of being listened to & cared for as Jesus would!

There's a deeper sense of fulfillment that we see from these righteous elders of Jerusalem. They've been waiting throughout their long life for what God is bringing to fruition in Jesus. The salvation & redemption of God's chosen is the hope of so many, in Jesus' time, & for us today. Many live today wishing all they have ever wanted would come true. That can be for the good of their family & those they love. For those who trust in God, it is a hope that God's will is seen in our world as well as in the world to come. It's alright that we should be glad that we'll rest in peace & rise in glory, when Jesus returns to bring us all to our new home on the resurrection day for all creation. But we do well to work for the well-being of our neighbor, & all the suffering, the oppressed, & the outcast of our society. For a salvation that isn't shared is empty, just like James said that faith without good works is dead. I've said before that it's what we're talking about when we say that we have integrity. Simeon & Anna knew what they believed, & were moved to share their confession of faith in the Messiah with Mary, Joseph, & all those who would welcome the hope that was given by God's Spirit for the good of all things.

### **The CHURCH PRAYS**

#### **PRAYERS of the PEOPLE**

With the Spirit of Christ shining upon us, let us boldly pray for the church, the world, and all of creation. *A brief silence.*

God of generations, you instilled in Anna and Simeon faith, dreams, and the welcome of a child. Bless elders who embody faith and hope; bless the

newly baptized Energize us to share faith from generation to generation.  
God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

God creation, in you the sparrow finds a home and we find lush valleys and living water. Bless the birds of the air, the animals of the valley, and renew our stewardship of this bountiful creation. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

God of the nations, strengthen our resolve to care for all children and strive for peace among nations. Refine our nation where we have failed to root out racism even as we honor Black History Month, and so guide us in truth-telling and reconciliation. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

God of the people, you are made known in caring ministries. Bless those who serve as communion servers, homebound visitors, baptismal sponsors, confirmation mentors, and as prayer support. Reveal yourself in the neighborly care we give and receive. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

God of hope, many long to see your presence revealed amid challenging circumstances. We hold in prayer all longing for sustainable housing, secure employment, access to medical care, and health and wellness. We pray for John, Greg, Genevieve, Mary Lue, Lori, our at-home worshippers, Joe, Lynn and Jack, .... God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

God of life, we thank you for Jesus' life and for his death that has destroyed death. We remember in our spirits the dearly departed ... even as they dwell with you in your holy courts now and forever. God of grace,

**hear our prayer.**

We entrust our prayers to you, O God, in the sure and certain hope that your promise is revealed among the people. **Amen.**

### **LORD'S PRAYER**

Waiting in hope for Christ's appearing, we pray as he taught us.

**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**

**WE are SENT to SERVE**

**PRAYER for MISSION**

Holy God, hear our prayer. *A brief silence.* Strengthen us for service, and send us out to embody your good news of liberation and healing for the sake of the world. In the name of Christ we pray, **Amen**

**BLESSING**

God's Spirit, dwelling with us in our hearts  
and in our minds, bless † you with joy,  
anoint you with compassion, and send you in love. **Amen**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ is always with you. **And also with you.**

We go with Christ's peace to love and serve all!

**We will Learn God's Truth. We will Share Spirit's Healing.**

**We will Follow Jesus' Way. Amen**

*Please greet your household and friends online with Peace.*

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At the time of this writing, please keep the following in your prayers: ELCA Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Synod Bishop Bill Gohl, those hospitalized or at home recuperating, and our at-home worshippers.

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Today's Worship Folders are Given to the Glory of God

In Loving Memory of my father, Henry Milke,
and my brother, Charles Milke.
Given by Arlene Roth.

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Attendance for January 26, 2025: 35

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Presentation of Christ

Forty days after the birth of Christ we mark the day Mary and Joseph presented him in the temple in accordance with Jewish law. There a prophetess named Anna began to speak of the redemption of Israel when she saw the young child. Simeon also greeted Mary & Joseph. He responded to the presence of the consolation of Israel in this child with the words of the Nunc dimittis. His song described Jesus as a "light for the nations."

Because of the link between Jesus as the light for the nations, and because an old reading for this festival contains a line from the prophet Zephaniah, "I will search Jerusalem with candles," the day is also known as Candlemas, a day when candles are blessed for the coming year.

Learning, Serving, & Fellowship Opportunities

February Annual Meeting to discuss the missions and life of the church is scheduled for Sunday, February 23rd. Please plan to attend to find out about exciting upcoming events and plans for St. Peter's church and school!

2024 Offering Statements will be mailed.

Sponsorships Available: Altar flowers for the 8:45 am. worship on 2/16 and bulletin for 2/9, and 2nd set of altar flowers for 2/23 (contact the church office). Altar flowers for the 10:15 am. worship on 2/16 (contact Nancy Barnes).

PLEASE NOTE: In 2025, pricing on floral arrangements will increase to be more in-line with pricing from the florist. Until pricing is finalized, please "pay as you go" using current pricing for floral sponsorships. Also, when you return the vases for Rose Vase sponsorships, the church receives a discount!

Studio Apartment for Rent: First floor of a two-story brick house. Studio has two-rooms, includes full bathroom and a full kitchen. It has a private laundry room/utility room and a parking pad. Rent includes utilities: heat, air conditioning, water & internet. Security Deposit \$1,250 and first month's rent \$1,250 due up front. Located in Parkville section of Baltimore. Interested: 410-444-5171.

For every NEW regular deposit account opened at Eastern Savings Bank (Fullerton branch only) St. Peter's Lutheran Church receives \$5! Visit the Fullerton branch at 4113 Wholesale Club Drive, Suite 130 or go to EasternSavingsBank.com.

News from St. Peter's Elementary School

Enrollment for the 2025-26 school year has begun! Contact the office at 410-665-4521 if you have questions, want to schedule a tour, or to register. Referrals are always welcome!