

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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January 2, 2022

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas*

## Coming Events

Dec 24 – Jan 7 Office Closed

Jan 9 10:00 Finn. Worship †**Voima Hall**  
2:00 Eng. Worship † **Regent St.**

Jan 10 1:00 Worship & Music **Zoom**

Jan 11 2:00 Finnish Bible Study

Jan 12 10:00 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**  
6:30 Council Meeting **Regent St.**

Jan 13 6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**

Jan 16 10:00 Finn. Worship †**Voima Hall**  
2:00 Eng. Worship † **Regent St.**

**In our prayers** Ruth.

Opening Hymn – O Come All Ye Faithful (283)

[https://youtu.be/l1wHyMR\\_SCA](https://youtu.be/l1wHyMR_SCA)

Prayer of the Day

O God our redeemer, you created light that we might live, and you illumine our world with your beloved Son. By your Spirit comfort us in all darkness, and turn us toward the light of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Psalms 147:12 – 20

<sup>12</sup> Extol the Lord, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion.

<sup>13</sup> He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you.

<sup>14</sup> He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.

<sup>15</sup> He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

<sup>16</sup> He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes.

<sup>17</sup> He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast?

<sup>18</sup> He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.

<sup>19</sup> He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.

<sup>20</sup> He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. <sup>1a</sup> Praise the Lord.

First Reading “**Jeremiah 31:7 – 14**”

**7** This is what the LORD says: “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, ‘LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ **8** See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. **9** They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. **10** “Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’ **11** For the LORD will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. **12** They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. **13** Then

young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. **14** I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the LORD.

Second Reading “**Ephesians 1:3 – 14**”

**3** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—**6** to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, **9** he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. **11** In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel “**John 1:1 – 18**”

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn’t put it out. There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light. The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn’t even*

*notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. John pointed him out and called, "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word." We all live off his generous abundance, gift after gift after gift. We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving, This endless knowing and understanding— all this came through Jesus, the Messiah. No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.*  
*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

### Sermon

*By Rev. Charles Nolting  
"Be A Light in The Darkness"*

At first glance, today's gospel may seem like an odd choice to be used during the season of Christmas. I think the reason for that may be that we are used to the stories of Jesus birth, as told to us by Matthew and Luke, stories heard on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

But today we have the gospel of John, a read that is very different from the other gospels because John was written much later and explores a lot of symbolism, hidden meanings, and other things that – on the surface - seem to take away from the story itself because you actually have to think about what you are reading.

Take the beginning of John, our gospel for today. When John talks about Jesus physical arrival on earth he meanders on about the light, and the Word, and John the Baptist pointing Jesus out, and how the people of earth didn't even realize what was going on. For a lot of people, one quick glance at the opening verses of John usually means that we still don't know what's going on. We might summarize it by saying: "*Well, it appears Jesus arrived, but nobody noticed.*"

Our feelings about these verses might also be summarized by the story of a little girl who was put to bed one night by her parents. Unfortunately, it was one of those nights when the shadows in her bedroom assumed strange shapes, and the little one felt scared, so she went to her parents for comfort. They told her to go back to bed and remember that God was with her in the bedroom and would take care of her. She dutifully returned to her darkened room, only to find the shadows even more frightening. Seeking out her parents again, she said, "*I know God is in my room, but could you come too, because I need someone with skin on.*"

In many ways, this is what the introduction to John's gospel speaks of; God came to earth with skin on. It's just the way John goes about it can seem much more confusing than Matthew and Luke's stories about expectant parents experiencing hardships. We like stories we can easily relate to, stories that tell of hardships that were overcome, stories where the little people come out on top.

That's one reason we may not relate that well to John's introduction. It seems to be all over the map with its talk of light overcoming darkness and people not noticing. John however, is attempting to take us beyond tales of human hardship in order to drive home that God has done something about human hardship not once, but for all time, and for all people.

John points out that Jesus was promised long ago, to be a light. This is not a one-time only event, but has been in the making since the beginning of time. John loves the imagery of how light breaks up darkness, even if it is little by little.

Something else John points out is how Jesus is an example to us for how light works in this world to stamp out darkness. And this wasn't just a demonstration, but encouragement for us to also be light in the world when we face our darkest times.

You might say that the pandemic and the fatigue it causes are a dark time. We are tired of wearing masks. We are fed up with distancing and having to stay away from others. We find it exhausting not knowing when the next lockdown or restrictions will arrive. Personally, I miss the freedom of being able to offer people hugs.

It's like we are at war with an enemy we can't see and it has the ability to sneak up on us any time we let down our vigilance. And so we have to continue to be vigilant or risk becoming the bearers of sickness and possibly death to others. The situation drains us and tempts us to just let go and allow the chips to fall

where they may even if we wind up on our death beds. It certainly is a dark time we could never have contemplated even 3 years ago.

And that's one reason we need these complicated, symbolic, and mind-boggling words from John in our time. We need to be reminded that even a hint of light in our world can bring ourselves and others just enough hope to continue onward. We need to be reminded that God actually has come "with skin on" to save us from our dark thoughts, our dark contemplations, and our darkest temptations to just ignore all warnings and restrictions. We need to be reminded that even we have the power to shine light in dark places and bring hope to others.

During the Christmas season we remind ourselves that the light has already come and continues to shine on our lives. This we cannot simply forget, especially in these times of darkness. And one way to remember is to shine light in the lives of others whose personal darkness overwhelms them. We are to be the example of lights bringing hope in darkness, just as Christ is our example. Reach out to others in any way you safely can. Remain vigilant knowing that what we experience here is actually only temporary and will one day be little more than a memory. And may God be with us to inspire us, and to light our way in this world of darkness. Amen.

Hymn – Let Our Gladness Have No End (291)  
<https://youtu.be/OMZkKgKPwmk>

### Prayers

Joining our voices with the heavenly host and Christians throughout time and space, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

We give thanks today for the Word made flesh. Praise to you Lord for the coming of the Christ child into our midst. Help us to hold this child deep in our hearts, and continue to give thanks and praise. Merciful God, **receive our prayer**

Emmanuel, in your name we are assured that you are with us. Train nations and peoples to honor and respect one another, especially those whose names and identities have been mistreated, neglected, or oppressed. Merciful God, **receive our prayer**

You journey with us through change. Guide those assuming new roles in the congregation or making transitions in their families, workplaces or communities. As the seasons and the

calendar change, equip us for unexpected challenges. Merciful God, **receive our prayer**

Renew in us the commitment to use our gifts in the service of others, and especially those in need. Let us be your hands to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, comfort the weary and outcast, welcome the stranger, care for creation, and be loving neighbors to all people. Merciful God, **receive our prayer**

We pray for those who are suffering from **natural disasters** around the world. Be with them in these times of turmoil and loss, may our relief agencies effectively deliver food, housing, clothing, and water to them. Guide us all to remember these victims each and every day. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God of rebirth, give us a new vision of your **healing power** among us. Restore hope to those who are struggling with illness of any kind. Bring mercy and relief to those who are injured, sick, or suffering. Today we especially remember before you those whom we name to you in our hearts or aloud. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We give you thanks for all who modeled lives of loving service. Lead us in your grace until, with all your saints, we enter the fullness of your glory. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Rejoicing in your Word made flesh among us, we commend these prayers to you, confident of your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior, who taught us to pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn – Joy to the World (267)

<https://youtu.be/30OaM6b48k8>