

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastor:

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## December 24, 2020 Christmas Eve Service

### Coming Events

English services have been paused,  
until January 17, 2pm at **Regent St.**

Finnish services have been paused,  
until January 24 10am at **Voima Hall.**  
Finnish sermon emailed and on website [nhlc.ca](http://nhlc.ca)

**In our prayers** Fred, Esme, Martha.

### Mission Statement

Encourage and support people in their Christian faith while reaching out, in love, to the community.

*We now have a **donate button** on our web site [nhlc.ca](http://nhlc.ca)  
Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found  
on the website.*

### Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down  
and there we wept when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there we hung up our harps.  
For there our captors asked us for songs, and our  
tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!  
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not  
remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

In these days Lord, we also weep.  
We weep for those who have been struck by pandemic  
illness.

In these days Lord we feel alone.  
Isolation has kept us apart from each other.  
In these days Lord, we live in fear.  
Fear of illness, fear of infecting our loved ones, fear of  
immense changes.

Chase away our tears, our loneliness, and our fears.  
Let us find hope in the birth we celebrate this night.  
Let your light come to us, in our homes, in our families, and  
to this earth.  
Let us find such extreme warmth and joy, that we will share it  
in this earth. Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the  
brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we  
may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence and in the last day  
wake to the brightness of his glory; we pray through your  
Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### Lesson “Isaiah 9:2 – 7”

<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on  
those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.  
<sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they  
rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as  
warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. <sup>4</sup> For as in the day  
of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens  
them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their

oppressor. <sup>5</sup> Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every  
garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be  
fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is  
given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he  
will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting  
Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his  
government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on  
David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and  
upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on  
and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish  
this.

### Reflection

The prophet Isaiah speaks of people who journey in  
darkness, having seen a great light, which is an image I think  
we can all relate to. There has been perhaps no other year  
in our lives when we have so longed for light. The light of  
seeing our extended family. The light of being able to travel.  
The light of holding loved ones in our arms. Isaiah predicts  
that we shall have that light, a light that will bring us joy and  
rejoicing.

That light predicted however, may not exactly be the light we  
want at this moment, but instead is the light that we need,  
especially at this time. We need this Wonderful Counselor,  
this Mighty God, this Everlasting Father and this Prince of  
Peace whom Isaiah speaks of. We need them in our lives so  
that we can find hope and comfort in our time of darkness.  
And so tonight – even as tonight engulfs us in darkness – we  
celebrate. We celebrate that Isaiah’s prophecy came true:  
for us, for our loved ones, and for all who have come to see  
Christ as the promised Messiah. The promise to us is that  
the light will, in time, overcome all varieties of darkness; and  
that is why we celebrate the coming of the Light of the World.  
Amen.

### Lesson “**Luke 2:1 – 7**”

<sup>1</sup> In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a  
census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This  
was the first census that took place while Quirinius was  
governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to  
register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth  
in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David,  
because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He  
went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be

married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

### Reflection

We are not the first people to have gone through a difficult year. We are not the first people whose plans have had to be rearranged due to events beyond our control. It happens all the time; to people whose homes have been destroyed by wild weather, to people displaced by war or famine, to people dealing with illness or the death of a loved one. For those people, their struggle requires immense amounts of effort, and uses so much of their (sometimes meager) resources.

When we compare our current struggle to those people, I find it surprising that the things we are asked to do in these times are so minor. Stay home and isolate as much as possible, and when you do go out, stay away from other people and wear a mask. Wash and sanitize your hands regularly. And that's about it. To hear some complaints however, you'd think those sacrifices were horrendous. Of course I realize that for some their livelihoods have been put in jeopardy, and others may have lost their homes. Throughout history, it has happened before, and it will happen again, and each time it happens it is an opportunity for the wider community to show how well or poorly they can support those in such need.

But the hardships we endure today are nothing compared to the year Mary and Joseph experienced. First they had to deal with all the social aspects of an unexpected pregnancy. Then they were informed that they had to leave their home for an extended period due to the whim of a ruler in a far off land. They travelled using some of the most rudimentary means of transportation. And when they finally arrived, there was no place for them to stay except for a cave used to house animals. And to top it all off, it was right about then that the baby had to be delivered.

For those who find it difficult to isolate, wear masks and keep distance, perhaps the most important question to ask is; how did they manage? They had no home to speak of, Joseph had no job, and they had a newborn son, a baby proclaimed to be the Son of God!

And yet, in essence, that image is the blessing of Christmas. At Christmas, we celebrate that God came to be present with those who suffer, those who are living in agonizing circumstances, those who are desperately in need of hope. And this process was begun with the Son of God being born in the most miserable of circumstances. Right from the beginning God was telling all who feel the burdens of life; "I am here with you in your suffering and misery". Being with those who suffer is what Christmas is about, and this is what we are to be about. So, as much as we may feel suffering in our time, let us also feel hope and joy in knowing that God who suffers, and willingly suffers along with us as well. Amen.

### Lesson "Luke 2:8 – 20"

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." <sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." <sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

### Reflection

I'm always amazed at the reactions of the shepherds. As these verses unfold, their feelings go from fear and terror, to curiosity, to absolute joy. Now, I get the fear and terror; the

appearance of an angel, the glory of the Lord, and then an entire angelic choir would probably have me shaking in my shoes as well. But I'm not sure if I could move on from there as the shepherds did. In the aftermath, I think I'd still be in shock and unable to move. I'd probably be the one shepherd who would volunteer to be left behind to keep an eye on things because I've seen enough for one night. Several years ago I visited what are known as "the Shepherd's Fields" outside of Bethlehem. There's not much to see, but the place is littered with caves, good sized holes in and underneath the stony ground. If I would have been present on that special night, I probably would have stayed behind and hidden in one of those caves with a bunch of sheep for company, and told the rest of the shepherds: "*You guys go on to Bethlehem, I'll be fine hiding right here in a hole in the ground.*"

Of course, in doing such a thing, I would have missed the greatest event known to humankind. I would have missed being a witness to the one infant sent by God for our salvation. I would have heard the angels, heard the announcement, and probably heard from my fellow shepherds; but would have missed out on the one thing all that commotion was about.

You may think that's kind of sad, and you're right. But, like the shepherds, people have been telling everyone and anyone they can about this wonderful event, yet only a certain number respond to it. We have been given a message that we are not alone, regardless of how miserable life has been, and that God cares deeply for us. This is a message that should fill us with hope and joy rather than send us into hiding away from it. So, tonight, let's hear that message of God who came to earth in human form - and respond to it with all the love, hope, joy, and faith that the original messengers had. Amen.

### Apostle's Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.\* On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is**

**seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

The shepherds sing, "Jesus Christ is born!" Let your church throughout the world proclaim this good news, over the hills and everywhere. Unite the voices of all your faithful people in songs of praise and rejoicing. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Heaven and nature sing, "Joy to the world!" Give respite to flocks, fields, and those who tend them. Come near to us in the beauty of nighttime, the shining of the stars, and the hush of a world at rest. May our wonder at your creation rouse our care for all the earth. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

The angels sing, "Peace on earth!" Come quickly to still the strife of this world. Hush the noise of war and violence in places of unrest. Inspire leaders of nations to seek lasting peace and sustainable provision for all in their care. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Mary sings melodies of comfort to her newborn child. Bring rest and reassurance to those facing struggles this night. Shelter travelers and those without homes. Console those who lie awake due to pain or anxiety. Heal those who are sick or hurting. Bless those who have struggled on the front lines of this pandemic. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus, 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**

Blessing

May Almighty God, who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary, proclaimed joy through the angels, sent the shepherd with good news, and led the magi by a star; bless you this day through the Word made flesh. **Amen.**

*We wish you a blessed Christmas season!*