



Year B (2023) – Christmas

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

SERIES EXPLANATION

We live in a world with a 24-hour news cycle. Between the countless cable networks or online sources or social media posts, news is flying at us constantly. Most of it seems awful. We doomscroll on our phones—bad news after more bad news. Our hearts grow heavy. Our minds grow anxious.

The world is starving for good news. And that is exactly what we get at Christmas. On that first Christmas Eve, the angel told the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10). News is not advice. The angel had not come to give advice about how to cope in a messed-up world. News is simply a report of facts. The angel reported a fact—the birth of One who would make everything right again. This child would remove all our fears and fill our hearts with joy.

Our worship follows this pattern.

Christmas Eve	<i>A Savior Has Been Born</i>
Christmas Day	<i>God Became Man</i>
First Sunday after Christmas	<i>Peace on Earth</i>
Epiphany of Our Lord	<i>For All People</i>



GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

“I bring you good news of great joy.... A Savior has been born.” Think of what the angel’s statement means. If you believe you are basically a decent person—not perfect, but good enough—you can still enjoy the carols and appreciate the pretty lights. You can still relish giving presents and gathering with family. But you will not have “great joy” this Christmas. For the angel said that the “good news of great joy” was the fact that “a Savior has been born.” One cannot truly celebrate Christmas unless one believes he needs salvation.

Let us then use this night to acknowledge that we *aren’t* good enough people in God’s eyes. Sin lives in our hearts and permeates our lives. We need to be saved—from the guilt of that sin, from the power of the devil, and from eternal death. So, Jesus came to do just that—save us. So great was his love for us, he left the throne of heaven, crawled into a manger, and would not stop until he reached the cross. Oh, come let us adore him!

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 7:10-14 – When confronted with King Ahaz’s sin, the LORD promises to send a Savior, born of a virgin.

Titus 3:4-7 – St. Paul tells us why Jesus appeared—to save us.

*Luke 2:1-20 – The account of our Savior’s birth.

HYMNS (standard service)

Opening	350 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
HOD	335 To Shepherds as They Watched by Night
Third/Distr	345 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt
Closing	337 Silent Night

HYMNS (lessons & carols option)

Opening	354 Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful - v1,2,3
1st	362 Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising - v1-5
2nd	333 O Little Town of Bethlehem - v1-3
3rd	345 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt
4th	352 Joy Has Dawned
5th	a version of the Magnificat, like hymn 975
6th	350 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
7th	346 Angels We Have Heard on High - v1-3
Closing	337 Silent Night

(continued)

SERVICE OPTIONS

A simple, modified version of Lessons and Carols can be a wonderful opportunity to invite the de-churched in your community. Christmas Eve has surpassed Easter as the number one service that unchurched people are willing to attend. Multiple studies have shown the majority of people will accept a direct invitation to Christmas Eve if asked by someone they trust. Those same studies show that de-churched enjoy singing Christmas carols that are familiar. The selected hymns contain five that are on most lists of favorite Christmas hymns. The lessons could be read by lectors. Most would have short, one-sentence introductions. The pastor's lesson would serve as the basis for a sermonette. The suggested hymns (played at the proper tempo) and lessons allow for a fifteen-minute sermonette with the service still concluding in 60 minutes. Another option is to incorporate greater use of candlelight. Some congregations set up extra candelabra. (They can be rented.) Others order small personal candles for every adult, to be lit during the offertory before the final hymn.



GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
GOD BECAME MAN

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

How can an omnipresent God be held in his mother’s arms? How can an all-powerful God be too weak to walk? This is the mystery of the incarnation—that God took on human flesh. We cannot understand how it can be so. But the Spirit enables us to grasp that this incomprehensible truth is very good news. This is the Savior we need! As true man, he was born under God’s law, all the commandments that we have broken. Where we have failed, Jesus was perfect. As true God, when he laid down his perfect life, it was a sacrifice valuable enough to pay for the sins of the world, so that we might be adopted as God’s children.

Christmas Day fills us with wonder—that the Creator God *could* become flesh and dwell among us and that, in his great love for us, he *would* do such a thing. Let us marvel at this good news of great joy!

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Micah 5:2-5a – Bethlehem was a little town. Yet, it will be known throughout history as the birthplace of the God-man.

Galatians 4:4-7 – The Son of God was born of a woman so that he might redeem us and make us heirs of the heavenly Father.

*John 1:1-18 – The mystery of the incarnation—God became man; the Word became flesh.

RESOURCE REMINDER

CW21’s *Altar Book* contains eight seasonal prayers of the church. These are spoken by the pastor, not responsive. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of additional responsive prayers of the church. It also includes two Christmas dialogues that may be used to begin the service. To find these, “Insert / Rite.” Then find the dialogues in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. The occasional resource reminders in The Foundation do not mention every possibility, just a few to assure that users occasionally check for these options.

HYMNS

Opening	353 Joy to the World
HOD	366 O Rejoice, All Christians, Loudly
Third/Distr	342 O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is
Closing	363 Now Sing We, Now Rejoice

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SERVICE OPTIONS

Consider using a special Gloria on Christmas Day. There are many options where a choir/cantor sing the verses, and the congregation joins in on the refrain. Another option is simply using hymn 347 "Angels from the Realms of Glory" in place of the Gloria.

Also note that *Service Builder* has a Christmas litany that can be inserted in place of the confession of sins and Kyrie.



**GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
PEACE ON EARTH**

NOTE

This year the First Sunday after Christmas falls on December 31st, New Year's Eve. Hypothetically, a congregation might look at the readings for the First Sunday after Christmas in the morning and then utilize readings for New Year's Eve in the evening. (Christmas Worship offers three different sets of readings for New Year's Eve.) Some worship planners may offer only one or the other service on December 31. If that is the case, it is recommended that the congregation utilizes the readings for the First Sunday after Christmas, staying within this worship series, which all focus on the few texts that tell us about Christ's pre-adult life. A Sunday morning service, utilizing those readings, could still incorporate end-of-year themes at appropriate points in the service: the Prayer of the Church (at the close of the year), in select hymns (CW21 368-369), etc. Moreover, it is relatively easy to find application in Simeon's song that help us face the unknowns of the coming year.

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

On Christmas Eve a choir of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." So, where is this peace on earth? Between nations? There are always wars going on somewhere. In our country? Disagreements have only grown more contentious, one group screaming angrily at another group. We might not even have perfect peace in our homes! So, what were the angels singing about?

They were singing about peace between a holy God who hates sin and human beings who sin every day. Because of what Christ did as our Savior, there is no hostility between us and God, only peace and love. We have the peace of salvation in our hearts. As we draw near the end of life, like elderly Simeon or Anna, we have the peace of knowing of the glorious eternal life that is to come. As this peace with God fills our hearts, it moves us to live in peace with each other too.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Kings 8:6-13 – King Solomon dedicates the temple, a place where the glory of the LORD would be revealed as the peace of salvation was proclaimed.

Colossians 3:12-17 – As the peace of Christ rules our hearts, we are moved to live in peace.

*Luke 2:22-40 – God allows elderly Simeon and Anna to see their Savior with their own eyes. This fills them with peace.

HYMNS

Opening	356 God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen
HOD	355 Let All Together Praise Our God
Third/Distr	330 Peace Came to Earth
Closing	950 Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace



**GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
FOR ALL PEOPLE**

NOTE

This year Epiphany falls on a Saturday. Some worship planners may focus on Epiphany on Saturday, January 6 and then focus on the Baptism of Our Lord on Sunday, January 7. Others will observe Epiphany for the entire weekend. If your congregation goes that direction, it is recommended that Epiphany be observed on January 6 and 7, rather than on the weekend of December 31. This keeps the season of Christmas closer to its normal length, rather than passing quickly in a few days. If this option is chosen, it is further recommended that the worship planner move the readings for the First Sunday after Epiphany (The Baptism of our Lord) to the weekend of January 14. The readings for the Second Sunday after Epiphany would just not be utilized this year. On the weekend of January 21, the readings for the Third Sunday after Epiphany would be used as normal.

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

On Christmas Eve the angel told the shepherds, “I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10). One wonders if those words struck those Jewish shepherds as odd. For centuries, God had given special attention to one nation—Israel. There were Jewish religious leaders who taught that only members of that special people would be saved. Not according to the Christmas angel! The birth of the Savior was good news *for all people*.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning “reveal.” When the Savior was born, he was first revealed to Israelites: the shepherds, Simeon, Anna. But today, the Lord miraculously guides foreigners across countless miles, so the Savior could be revealed to them as well. How did the magi respond? “They were overjoyed” (Matthew 2:10). Epiphany is sometimes known as “The Gentiles’ Christmas.” We Gentiles (non-Jews) rejoice in the good news that this Jewish baby is not just the Savior of Jews. He is for all people—the Savior of the world.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Numbers 24:15-17a – God compels the heathen magician Balaam to prophecy that out of the nation of Israel would come one who would shine like a star for all peoples to see.

Romans 11:13-15,28-32 – Paul writes about his passion for sharing the good news with all people.

*Matthew 2:1-12 – Magi from the east are miraculously led to their Savior, and they worship him.

HYMNS

Opening	372 As With Gladness Men of Old
HOD	370 How Lovely Shines the Morning Star
Third/Distr	347 Angels from the Realms of Glory
Closing	344 What Child Is This