



Mount Calvary Connected

December 16, 2021

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!

Pastor Scott Klimke

Cell-Phone: 570-367-3421

Email: sklimke6@gmail.com

Pastor Jonathan Adams

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit www.mt-calvarylutheran.org and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

"We Can't Run from the Emptiness in Our Lives"

By Tish Harrison Warren, Anglican Priest & Writer

Two years ago, my husband took up painting icons, an ancient and exacting devotional art form. In his first iconography course, he painted an icon that depicts Mary holding Jesus as an infant. It sits on our mantel, and I look at it every day. It exudes tenderness and love between Jesus and his mother. He is nestled against her, turned slightly toward her face. His hand rests intimately on her neck. Maybe as a tired mother myself I am just projecting, but I'm always drawn to her eyes, which strike me as deeply weary and kind with a touch of sorrow.

As we near Christmas, the church turns our attention to the story of Mary. In the Bible, we first find Mary as an adolescent in a relatively backwater town. She's a virgin betrothed to marry. Then, she encounters an angel and her world turns upside down. "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus," says the angel. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

To me, Mary embodies an idea in the Eastern Orthodox tradition: "bright sadness." This phrase names how gladness and grief are never easily disentangled, how we taste both longing and delight, simultaneously, in every moment of our lives.

The Catholic theologian Aidan Nichols argues that the typical translation in Catholic Bibles of the angel's greeting to Mary, "Hail, full of grace" (the inspiration of both the famous "Hail Mary" prayer and its namesake football pass), is better translated "rejoice" or "rejoice greatly" because this word typically "refers to the joy of the people." The first word, then, that the angel speaks to Mary is an explicit call to joy.

And what is Mary's response to this celestial call? She is "disturbed" or "greatly troubled." She's told to rejoice but she trembles in fear. Soon enough, she responds to the angel, "Let it be to me according to your word." Soon enough, she will be rejoicing. Soon enough, she'll be singing her famous Magnificat, which begins, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

But first, she is troubled. She sits in tension — a tension we all sit in when God is at work but pain is at hand.

In the story of Jesus' birth, we see the danger, chaos and poverty into which Mary brought her son. She hears cosmic messages from shepherds about the signs of God's peace. Then, soon after Jesus' birth, at his circumcision, she is told that "a sword will pierce through" her own soul. She could not have known all that this foreboding prediction might mean or that someday she would watch her adult son be tortured and die in agony, crucified alongside two criminals.

But as the Gospel stories continue through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we find in Mary's story that joy and pain constantly intertwine. Her heart is full of all kinds of unimaginable memories treasured up and her soul waits to be pierced. Her life story witnesses to the profound vulnerability of mothers in a world where deep love does not give us the ability to protect our children from all violence or pain.

Mary was called by God, and her life reminds me that the vocations that God calls us to inevitably involve both joy and pain. "Love and loss are a double helix this side of heaven," I write in my book "Prayer in the Night," "You can't have one without the other. God's calling on our lives will inevitably require us to risk both. We know this dappled reality in the most meaningful parts of our life: in struggling through marriage or singleness and celibacy, in loving and raising children, in our work, in serving the church," and in our closest friendships.

The late poet and songwriter Rich Mullins asked, "How do you know when God is calling you?" He continued, "To listen to the call of God means to accept some of the emptiness we have in our lives and rather than always trying to drown out that feeling of emptiness, we allow it instead to be a door we go through in order to meet God."

There is a lot of focus on emptiness and filling this time of year. In her Magnificat, Mary sings, God "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." In the Christmas story, empty wombs are filled. Empty skies are suddenly full of angels. Empty manger are filled with the Light of the World. But first, as we prepare for Christmas, we recall that we cannot run from the emptiness in our lives. We wait for it to be filled in the right time, in the right way.

When I feel loneliness, loss and the emptiness present in even my very good life, I rush to fill it up. Winds of emptiness echo in a hollow moment of my day, and I run to distraction. I stuff my waking moments with busyness, social media, argument, work and consumption. These can be cheap attempts at joy, or at least at numbing any sense of grief.

But Mary's story recalls that joy can't be gotten cheaply. The pain of the world cannot be papered over in a sentimental display of tamed little angels and a cute, chubby baby Jesus. The emptiness in the world and in our own lives can't be filled with enough hurry or buying power or likes or retweets. We wait for the birth of Jesus, who was called Emmanuel, God with us. We wait with Mary for our hunger to be filled.

Adult Sunday School

Adult Sunday School is ongoing! We were happy to see some new faces and hope that even more join us! We meet in the conference room/library each Sunday after worship.

Christmas Weekend Worship Schedule

Friday, December 24th:

4 p.m. service (designed for children & families)

7 p.m. service

10 p.m. service

**The 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. services will be broadcast on the radio on 88.3 FM and will be streamed live on our webpage: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org.

Saturday, December 25th at 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, December 26th at 8:45 a.m.

Upcoming Meetings

WELCA: Monday, December 20th at 6:00 p.m.

Council: Tuesday, December 21st at 6:30 p.m.

Evangelism Committee: Thursday, January 6th at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday school and confirmation will NOT meet on Sunday, December 26th.

2022 Offering Envelopes

Offering envelopes for 2022 are now available in the narthex. Thank you in advance for what will hopefully be a generous December. December is traditionally our highest offering month.

Help Wanted

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more.

Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859. Thank you!

Scheduled Worship Help

Saturday, December 18:

Greeters/Ushers: Todd Moss - **Communion Assistants:** Cindy Buday

Sunday, December 19:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed! - **Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

Saturday, December 25:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed! - **Communion Assistants:** Cindy Solarczyk

Sunday, December 26:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed! - **Communion Assistants:** Ray Leverknight

There are sign up sheets in the Narthex for Greeters/Ushers and Communion Assistants. Please sign up for the dates that would suit you best. We appreciate you volunteering. If you have questions about these roles, please contact Christine Koshute at [814-421-4921](tel:814-421-4921) or Chris Oleksa at [814-244-9851](tel:814-244-9851).



Youth News

Sunday School is ongoing for Pre-K through 8th grade: "Mount Calvary Kid's Crew" is our program for Pre-K and up that gathers at 8:30am in Sander Hall with Pastor Jonathan. Students focus on a bible story and have an activity or craft before rejoining their parents during the worship service.

Childcare is now available during Sunday morning worship: Hannah Salamon is a Richland Learning Center staff member who will be joining us each Sunday along with Pastor Jonathan and other volunteers to provide childcare for infants through age 5. For the time being, drop-off for this service will take place in Sander Hall. Speak with Pastor Jonathan for more information.

"Parents' Night Out" – CANCELED: The "Parent's Night Out" event originally scheduled for December 17th has been canceled due to limited interest. Look for a similar event for elementary aged youth in early 2022!

Christmas Pageant – December 19th: Our 2021 Sunday School Christmas Pageant, entitled "A Noisy Christmas" will take place during worship on Sunday, December 19th. There is still time for pre-k and elementary aged children to get involved, simply bring them to Sander Hall on Sunday December 12th and 19th at 8:30am.

Snow Camp 2022: Snow camp is BACK at Sequanota! Plans are in the works for the annual "snow camp" to return to Camp Sequanota on February 25th & 26th. This is an overnight event for youth in 6th through 12th grade. Registration opens January 15th, and we'd love to have a group. Contact Pastor Jonathan for details!

Junior/Senior High Lock-In: We're beginning to plan an overnight "lock-in" sleepover event for junior and senior high youth in January or February of 2022. If you have students in this age group, watch for information from Pastor Jonathan as we try to identify the best possible weekend for this event!

Pastor Jonathan LOVES to get out and see our Mount Calvary youth in action doing the things they enjoy! Be sure to share your schedules for sports, concerts, recitals, etc. You never know where he might show up!

Pastor Jonathan's office hours at Mount Calvary are Mondays & Wednesdays, 10am-3pm. He is available outside of those hours via email (RevJonoAdams@gmail.com), cellphone (412-817-6704), or Facebook.

Giving Tree

The December donations will be given to The Helping Hands Mission in Portage.

Thank you for your continued support!

Backyard Ministries' Socks and Toy Collection

We will be collecting socks and toys again this Christmas for the children of Coopersdale. There are more bags than we had for the hat and glove collection because one of their providers was not able to assist this year. Mt. Calvary, along with another congregation, offered to take the extra bags. Please take a labeled bag or bags in the narthex and return it filled with a pack of socks and a \$1 toy to the bin before December 22nd. All items will be picked up on Thursday, December 23rd.

Thank you for your continued support!

Tornado Relief

On the night of Dec. 10th and early morning of Dec. 11th, an outbreak of at least 30 tornadoes swept through six states. So far, 90 people are reported dead across five states, more than 80 of those in Kentucky, and even more are unaccounted for. Homes and businesses were destroyed and over 24,000 people remain without electricity.

Lutheran Disaster Response is collaborating with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to assess the damage and develop a long-term response plan. Given the extent of the damage, recovery will take years as thousands of homes will need to be rebuilt or repaired.

If you would like to donate to help the survivors, please make a check payable to Mount Calvary and mark in the memo line "U.S. Tornadoes". Because the overhead expenses of Lutheran Disaster Response are covered by ELCA mission support, 100% of donations will be used to assist those affected by the tornadoes.

"Songs of the Season" Advent Devotional

"Songs of the Season" is an Advent Devotional organized by Mt. Calvary member, Kadiya Lingenfelter, including devotions written based on popular Christmas and Advent hymns for every day of December. It is available to download as a PDF in two formats: one pre-organized into a booklet for those who are able to do double-sided printing with their home computers and one with the devotions on single pages for those who wish to view it on a computer or print with a less-advanced computer.

Please refer to the emailed weekly newsletter for the download links or visit Mt. Calvary's website.

Committee News

In anticipation of our annual meeting on February 5th, the council appointed a Nominating Committee at its August meeting. The Mutual Ministry Committee will once again fulfill this function with the advice and counsel of Ray Leverknight, who is our only outgoing council person this year. The Nominating Committee has met and identified a number of candidates for our one council vacancy and one vacancy on the Mutual Ministry Committee. Once contacts have been made, the Nominating Committee will eventually announce the results of its efforts. Current members of the Mutual Ministry

Committee are Harold Ashcraft, Shirley Sholtis-Glova, Mark Williams, Debbie Thomas, Tom Rohrabough, and Joan Bunnell who will be rotating off the committee in 2022.

Annual Report

In anticipation of our annual meeting on February 5th, Erin Powell will be compiling and editing this year's annual report. If you are a council officer, committee chair, or ministry leader, please email your written report to Erin no later than Friday, January 14th. Erin's email address is epowell@mt-calvarylutheran.org.

ELCA Good Gifts

ELCA Good Gifts is a great opportunity to provide critical support to the ministries and programs of the ELCA in nearly 80 countries around the world.

How it works:

- Choose a gift (food, medical care costs, school supplies, etc.)
- Receive a card to share the news of your gift
- Make a difference in someone's life!

Visit goodgifts.elca.org for more information on how to donate!

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: December 19 – December 25, 2021

Dec. 19 - Jerry Benford, Barbara Berk, Leighton Williams, & Eric Wingard

Dec. 20 - John Pullin & Jacob Wasnick

Dec. 21 - Sydnee Dusack & Jeff Hill

Dec. 22 - Nancy Elliott, Jessica Hershberger, Jamie McMullen, & Michael McQuaide

Dec. 23 - Jane Hagins

Dec. 25 - Holly Yarnick

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Jennifer & Ryan, Linda & Dick, Dolly & Chiz Palm, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Maria, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Midge, Shirley, Jennifer, Debbie, Jill McEntee, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner and Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Florence Barker, Bob Trotter, Jean Pellon, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Swartz, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Annabelle, the Teplitz Family, Ethel Warshel, Melanie, the Elaine Sterner Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Don, Marilyn, Bill, Linda, Landon, Dorothy, Irene, Karen, and Susan Dyers.

Financial Update

Mount Calvary continues to do well financially. After nearly two years of a worldwide pandemic, we have been incredibly fortunate. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! What remains for 2021 is to finish with a strong December which has traditionally been our strongest month of the year. As for 2022, maintaining current levels of support and increasing support where and when it's possible will continue to be important. Though we still have many, many blessings to count, we are not as well-endowed as

other congregations and the age and population decline of our community continue to present ongoing stewardship challenges. But thanks to you, we've overcome all of this thus far. Thank you!
Thank you! Thank you!

Condensed Worship for Sunday, December 12, 2021

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the preaching of John, that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing

¹⁸as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

¹⁹I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.

²⁰At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

This past week featured several reminders of the last sermon I delivered for you. Early in the week, I received a text from one of the people who have been worshipping with us through the online videos we’ve been making available. In response to the question repeatedly posed in my last sermon, they wanted to share their favorite promise of God. Like me, they couldn’t narrow it down to just one; instead sharing four promises of God which had proved to be meaningful. This was someone who understands the promises of God are to be our lifeblood; our stock and trade, if you will.

When all goes as the Holy Spirit intends, the promises of God are to animate us; directing our footsteps and our days. On Friday, I discovered accidentally that this part of the Spirit’s plan is in play here at Mount Calvary. As I ventured to the men’s room, I unintentionally knocked the door to the janitor’s closet ajar. Affixed to the door was a paraphrase of today’s reading from Philippians. Evidently, as she’s working, our janitor Kathy Ling likes to be reminded of the promise that the Lord Jesus is near and that he will fill us with a peace that surpasses all understanding when we take it to him in prayer.

Here too is someone who knows that the promises of God are to be our lifeblood and our stock and trade. Even better, our sister in Christ seems to understand that the promises of God are to animate and direct our lives. I mean: Why else do you affix a promise of God to one of your most visited workstations? Quite clearly, the intent is for that promise of God to influence the way your day goes by directing the manner in which you and your feet travel.

Now as it turned out, the promise of God affixed to the door of our janitor's closet turned out to be the promise of God most cited by those who responded to my last sermon. At the heart of our reading from Philippians is the promise that the Lord Jesus is near to us. This is the promise that makes everything else go. It's because the Lord Jesus is near that we can rejoice, again I say, rejoice. It's because the Lord Jesus is near that we can be courageous enough to do it his way and thereby become known for our gentleness and our kindness. It's because the Lord Jesus is near that we can take it to the Lord in prayer and receive in return the peace that surpasses all understanding. And more often than not the people who responded to the question raised in my last sermon understood this. They maybe didn't refer to today's reading from Philippians directly, but again and again they took up divine promises related to God's here and now presence in our lives. Quite often, the specific verse cited was from Matthew where the resurrected Christ promises to be with us until the end of the age. Quite clearly, there is a power in God's presence.

That this is so shouldn't be all that surprising to us. Even when God isn't involved directly, being in the presence of others can be profoundly powerful. Last Sunday, as I began to journey out of Wisconsin and back to Pennsylvania, I went out of my way by a good bit to visit two graves. First, I traveled to tiny, unincorporated Harrisville to visit the grave of my paternal grandparents Albin and Edna Klimke. Then outside of much larger Fond du Lac I visited the grave of my father Allen Klimke. Had I had more time I also would have traveled north towards Oshkosh to visit the grave of my maternal grandparents Orville and Beulah Potratz?

Why all this time with the dead? Aren't there better ways to spend one's limited time? There are surely are less emotional ways to do it. But if you're like me, you visit the resting places of the dead because you want to honor the power their presence had in your life. These folks were powerfully present for you and you miss the power of their presence. Visiting their graves is closest you can presently come to recapturing the powerful presence you miss. As I said a moment ago, even when God isn't involved directly, there's something about being in the presence of others that's unrivalled in life.

Facebook can make you smile and laugh, but not like someone across the table from you. A phone call can calm you down, but not like someone who comes through the door to restore a missed connection. The presence of others is powerful and with God being God this is all the truer when it comes to the presence of our Creator, our Savior, and our Advocate. It's no wonder that promises related to God's presence meant so much to those who responded to my last sermon.

God's presence, as well as the presence of others, can cheer us. This is our reading from Zephaniah. In our reading from Zephaniah, the presence of God leads people to respond with "Joy to the world, the Lord is near." God's presence, as well as the presence of others, can also calm. This is our reading from Philippians. In this reading, the presence of God leads people to respond with "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright." But the presence of God, as well as the presence of others, can also convict and lead us to repentance. This is our reading from Luke. In this reading God is on the way and people

flee the wrath that is to come. They do this in part by asking how they should respond now that God draws near.

In our reading from Luke, there's the widespread sense that the mice have played while the cat's been away. But now that the cat draws near the mice know it's time to shape up or ship out. When it's not cheering us or calming us, this is how the presence of God and others can affect us sometimes. Sometimes, being in the presence of others, whether they be God or neighbor, can convict us and drive us to repentance; in the process reminding us that there's a power in our presence; that we matter a whole lot more than we sometimes think.

Just put the pieces together! Why does John the Baptist need to tell people something as basic as it's important for them to clothe the naked and feed the hungry? It's because we can forget or minimize the power of our presence; the power of what we say and do when we enter other people's lives. And why does the same prophet have to tell tax collectors to be honest and soldiers not to abuse their power and their position? It's because regardless of what our role or vocation might be we can forget or minimize the degree to which we're powerful; that we matter and bring a lot to the table; that as the Church we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. And so, when the powerful presence of God or someone else isn't calming or cheering, may it convict and inspire repentance. Otherwise, we'll forget how much we matter; that there's a power in our presence; that we ourselves can calm, cheer, and convict as much as anybody else.

As one indication that I plan to practice what I'm preaching today, let me tell you about a check I'll be writing out on payday this week. Upon leaving my paternal grandparents' grave on Sunday, I feared I was running late for a brunch date with some old high school friends in my hometown. The thought of being across a table from them cheered me. I was also calmed by memories of how their presence had helped me through a whole lot in life, with my father's death being one example of this. But in the midst of my calm and my cheer, I forgot how much I mattered. When I decided to take a backroad and put the pedal to the medal in order to make up for what I feared was lost time, I endangered myself and others. As God or others can do sometimes, a cop was powerfully present to convict me of this and I won't contest the conviction; instead paying the associated fine on payday this week. Again, there's a power in the presence of God and others. Sometimes it convicts us. Sometimes it cheers us. Sometimes it calms us. May God's presence and the presence of our siblings in Christ do whichever of these things is needful for each of us today.
Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

Holy God, renew your church and raise up leaders who announce your good news. Grant peace to congregations and seminarians in the midst of transition. Guide the work of candidacy and call committees. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creating God, your Spirit brought forth the earth and all that is in it. Breathe life into us, that we are inspired to live in harmony with one another and the planet. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Shepherding God, you lead your people in paths of righteousness. Raise up prophets in our own day who warn against captivity to greed and point us to the freedom found in generosity. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Nurturing God, you come near in times of worry and need. Cradle us in your arms, that we trust you and are not afraid. Attend to any who are hungry, imprisoned, or ill this day (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Rejoicing God, you exult over us in singing. Enliven the song of this assembly and bless the ministry of church musicians (*especially*). With instruments and dance, join our voices to the song of all creation. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We give you thanks for your servants who showed us your goodness and grace (*especially*). By the power of your Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith until we make our home with you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Blessing

May God, who gathers us in love, lead you in pathways of righteousness and justice. May God, who knows us more deeply than we know ourselves, lead you in pathways of forgiveness and freedom. May God, who fills us with good things, lead you in pathways of equity and abundance. The blessing of the Holy Trinity, † one God, be upon you and remain with you forever. **Amen.**