

First Sunday after Christmas, December 31

The Collect: Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 61:10-62:3 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Anglicised

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 147 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! * how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2 The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; * he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted * and binds up their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars * and calls them all by their names.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; * there is no limit to his wisdom.

6 The Lord lifts up the lowly, * but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; * make music to our God upon the harp.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds * and prepares rain for the earth;
9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains * and green plants to serve mankind.
10 He provides food for flocks and herds * and for the young ravens when they cry.
11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse; * he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;
12 But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, * in those who await his gracious favor.
13 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; * praise your God, O Zion;
14 For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; * he has blessed your children within you.
15 He has established peace on your borders; * he satisfies you with the finest wheat.
16 He sends out his command to the earth, * and his word runs very swiftly.
17 He gives snow like wool; * he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.
18 He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; * who can stand against his cold?
19 He sends forth his word and melts them; * he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.
20 He declares his word to Jacob, * his statutes and his judgments to Israel.
21 He has not done so to any other nation; * to them he has not revealed his judgments.
Hallelujah!

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7 read from the Revised Standard Version Bible

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian;

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: John 1:1-18 read from the God's Word Bible

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was already with God in the beginning.

Everything came into existence through him. Not one thing that exists was made without him. He was the source of life, and that life was the light for humanity. The light shines in the dark, and the dark has never extinguished it.

God sent a man named John to be his messenger. John came to declare the truth about the light so that everyone would become believers through his message. John was not the light, but he came to declare the truth about the light.

The real light, which shines on everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into existence through him. Yet, the world didn't recognize him. He went to his own people, and his own people didn't accept him. However, he gave the right to become God's children to everyone who believed in him. These people didn't become God's children in a physical way—from a human impulse or from a husband's desire to have a child. They were born from God.

The Word became human and lived among us. We saw his glory. It was the glory that the Father shares with his only Son, a glory full of kindness and truth.

John declared the truth about him when he said loudly, "This is the person about whom I said, 'The one who comes after me was before me because he existed before I did.'"

Each of us has received one gift after another because of all that the Word is. Laws were given through Moses, but kindness and truth came into existence through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. God's only Son, the one who is closest to the Father's heart, has made him known.

The Word of the Lord

**Closing Prayer: On January 3rd we celebrate the life of William Alfred Passavant
Prophetic Witness read from A Great Cloud of Witnesses**

William Passavant, a Pennsylvania Lutheran pastor, was born in Zelienople, Pennsylvania, on October 9th, 1821. He attended Jefferson College and later Gettysburg Seminary.

Passavant was a parish pastor at heart and served in that capacity for much of his ministry, even while pursuing other duties. Passavant was the founder of numerous hospitals, orphanages, and other charitable organizations, principally in Western Pennsylvania, but the reach of his efforts extended from Boston and New York in the east to Chicago and Milwaukee in the mid-west. Many of these institutions continue to this day.

On a visit to Germany, Passavant came into contact with Theodor Fliedner, the founder of the reconstituted deaconess movement among German Lutherans, and, in 1849, he invited Fliedner to come to Pittsburgh and bring four of his deaconesses to serve in the hospital there. A year later, in 1850, the first American Lutheran deaconesses were set apart by Passavant, and thus began the renewed deaconess movement among American Lutherans.

Passavant was driven by a desire to see the consequences of the gospel worked out in practical ways in the lives of people in need. For Passavant, the Church's commitment to the gospel must not be spiritual only. It must be visible. For him, it was essential that gospel principles were worked out in clear missionary actions. Passavant also knew the importance of education and was the founder of a number of church schools scattered across the mid-west, principal among these being Thiel College, a Lutheran affiliated college in Greenville, Pennsylvania.

In addition to his charitable, philanthropic, and educational work, and his guidance of the early years of the deaconess movement, Passavant was also a cutting-edge communicator of his time. He founded two church newspapers, *The Missionary* and *The Workman*, both designed to interpret the church's mission, in consonance with the Lutheran confessions, for the purpose of provoking the desire of the faithful toward loving service to those in need without concern for race, color, creed, or national origin. Later generations of Lutheran communicators look to Passavant as one of the trailblazers of the field of religious journalism.

Let us pray: Compassionate God, who raises up ministers among your people: May we ever desire, like your servant William Passavant, to support the work of equipping the saints for service among the sick and the friendless; through Jesus Christ the divine Physician, who has prepared for us an eternal home, and who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. **Amen.**