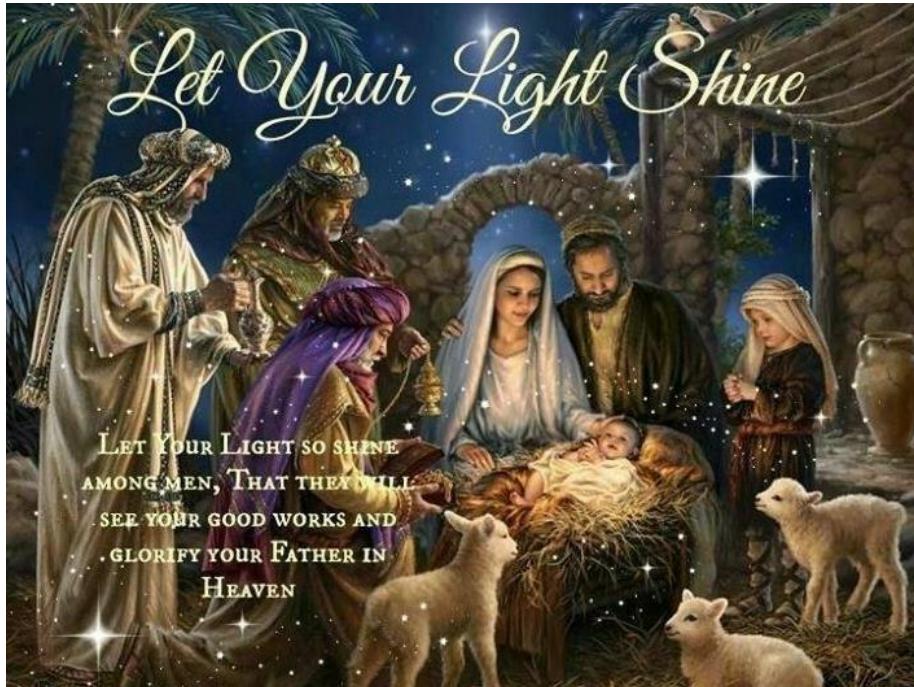


Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025 10:30 AM



Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church



4536 Hickory Lincolnton Highway, Newton, North Carolina 28658

Church Office: (704) 462-1035 email: gracenalcnewton@aol.com
www.gracelutheran-newton.org

Rev. Doug Hefner cell: (980) 234-8848 email: pastorhefner@aol.com

Sandi Tallant – Organist Todd Childers – Administrative Assistant

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 9am to 1pm

Tuesday and Thursday 12pm to 4pm

WELCOME TO ALL WHO WORSHIP at Grace Church this morning as we gather to worship the Father, + Son and Holy Spirit in truth. As you entered the sanctuary today, you received this bulletin containing the order for worship and announcements. Please also notice the Prayer List where you will find a listing of all the known prayer concerns. You are invited to use this as a guide for your personal prayers throughout the coming week. If you need information about our congregation or if you'd like to update your information, make sure to fill out the yellow Worship Today Form and place it in the offering plate at the time of the offering. If you have a prayer concern, indicate that on your Worship Today Form at the bottom or on the reverse side. If you are seeking a Church Home or would like more information about Grace, please contact Pastor Doug (980) 234-8848.

***Stand** *Hymnals in Pew Rack: LBW = Green WOV = Blue TCH = Burgundy*

PRELUDE *Please observe silence for meditation and prayer.*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

*** BRIEF ORDER OF CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

P: In this season of intentional waiting and watching for the return of Christ, we are gathered together to worship in the name of the Father, Son, + Holy Spirit.

C: Amen

P: A voice cries in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a pathway for our God.” Let us come humbly before our Lord, asking for forgiveness and mercy for our sins, known and unknown, trusting in God’s promise of reconciliation and new life in Christ. (Isaiah 40:3)

(Silence for self-reflection and examination)

P: God of grace,

C: We confess that we have not been attentive to the call to prepare for the coming of your Son. We have focused our vision on things of the moment and neglected to wait and watch for his return. We have neglected to notice the plight of our neighbors near and far, and instead we have thought more of ourselves rather than others. Grant us, we pray, the gift of your forgiveness and mercy, that we may be restored to a new and right relationship with you. Amen.

P: Our Father who loves us with an everlasting love promised of old that he would send us a sign saying, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” God is with us in Christ our Lord, the word made flesh, and hears our

confession and grants us undeserved mercy; be confident in his forgiveness, in the name of the Father , and of the Son + of the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 7:14)

C: Amen

*** GATHERING HYMN “O Come All Ye Faithful” (verses 1 & 2) LBW 45**

The congregation may be seated.

LITANY FOR LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES: THE CANDLE OF LOVE

L: We have lit the candles of hope, peace and joy so far in our Advent journey to remind us of God’s gifts of hope, peace and joy that bring light to our darkness. Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and we light the candle of love. With this flame we signify the love of God that surrounds and fills us at all times, which we recognize in a special way in the Christmas story. There is no greater power than love. It is stronger than rulers and empires, stronger than grief or despair, stronger even than death. We love, because God loves us.

C: Jesus shows us God’s perfect love. He is God’s perfect love in human form. Those who believe in him and live in him, live in love. Love transforms and perfects all things. It never ends.

L: Jesus calls us to walk in His love and to love one another as He loves us.

C: Beloved, let us love, not just in word or speech, but in truth and action. By our love, the world will know that we are disciples of Christ.

We sing “A Candle is Burning” (tune: Away in a Manger) as we light the Candle of Love

*A candle is burning, a candle of love,
A candle to point us to heaven above,
A baby for Christmas, a wonderful birth,
For Jesus is bringing God’s love to our earth.*

L: Let us pray – O God of Love, Emmanuel, send your light into our hearts at this time. Help us to be ready for the time of Christ’s appearing. Grant that we may so dwell in him that His perfect love fills our entire being. Bless our worship as we celebrate your love and are made ready to show that love to the whole world – both today and forevermore; in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Introduction to the Christmas Story

SCENE 1: Gabriel Speaks to Zechariah in the Temple that his wife Elizabeth will have a baby (John). Luke 1:5-7, 13-17, 24, 25

“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming”

LBW 58

*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flower bright,
Amid the cold of winter
When half-gone was the night.*

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind:
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright
She bore to men a Savior
When half-gone was the night.*

SCENE 2: Angel Gabriel's Announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

LBW 71

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains, And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain: Glo-o-ria, in excelsis deo; Glo-o-ria, in excelsis deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see, him whose birth the angels sing; Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord the newborn king.

Refrain: Glo-o-ria, in excelsis deo; Glo-o-ria, in excelsis deo.

SCENE 3: Mary Journeys to visit cousin Elizabeth; Mary sings Magnificat (Luke 1:39-56)

ANTHEM: Mary, Did You Know?

SCENE 4: The birth of John the Baptist; Zechariah writes the name of John and His mouth is opened to sing Zechariah's song of praise. (Luke 1:57-79)

“Once in Royal David’s City” (verses 1 & 2)

WOV 643

*Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.*

*He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and His shelter was a stable,
and His cradle was a stall:
with the poor, and meek, and lowly,
lived on earth our Savior holy.*

SCENE 5: Angel Announcement to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-24)

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” (verses 1 & 2)

LBW 41

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and
fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above, While mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love. O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth, And
praises sing to God the King, and peace to all the earth!*

**SCENE 6: Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem to be registered for the census.
While there, Mary gives birth to the Lord Jesus. (Luke 2:1-7)**

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing” (verses 1 & 2)

LBW 60

*Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.' 'Peace on earth and mercy
mild, God and sinners reconciled.' Joyful, all you nations rise; join the triumph of the*

skies; With angelic hosts proclaim, 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.' Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.'

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord, Late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail incarnate deity! Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel! Hark the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King.'

SCENE 7: The Angels announce the Good News to the Shepherds and they find the baby Jesus to worship him. (Luke 2:8-20)

“The First Noel” (verses 1 & 2)

LBW 56

The first Noel the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay; In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, On a cold winter's night that was so deep. Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the king of Israel!

They looked up and saw a star, shining in the east beyond them far, And to the earth, it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night. Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the king of Israel!

SCENE 8: The wise men follow the star to Jesus and worship Him and present their gifts (MATTHEW 2:1-12)

“We Three Kings” (verses 1, 2, & 4)

WOV 646

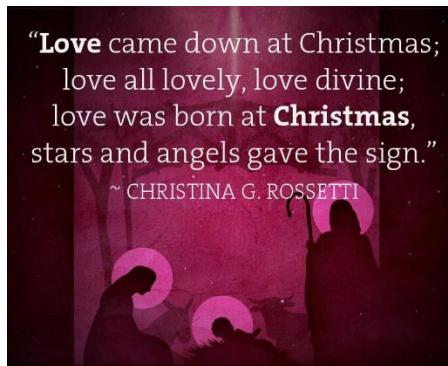
*We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.*

Refrain:

*O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign. [Refrain]*

*Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb. [Refrain]*



“Love came down at Christmas;
 love all lovely, love divine;
 love was born at **Christmas**,
 stars and angels gave the sign.”

~ CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI

***THE APOSTLES' CREED**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again 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**

Response at the end of each petition. P: Lord in your mercy, C: Hear our prayer.

***SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

P: The peace of Christ be with you always. **C: And also with you.**

Worshipers may greet one another with “the Peace of Christ.”

The assembly may be seated.

* **OFFERING** In response to God's blessings, we offer our tithes to the Lord
HOLY COMMUNION – MEAL OF GRACE

* **OFFERTORY** **What Child is This?**

*So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;
joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!*

* **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

P: Good and loving God, C: we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with your gifts that we offer now with thanksgiving, let them be blessing for others. We rejoice to be invited to your table of grace and with all earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

* **WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

* **LORD'S PRAYER**

* **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

P: The Gifts of God for the People of God. C: **Thanks be to God!**

The assembly may be seated.

All are invited to receive Holy Communion.

COMMUNION SONG **Lamb of God**

Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the
world; have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the
sin of the world; grant us peace.

The congregation is invited to stand.

*** COMMUNION BLESSING AND PRAYER**

P: Let us Pray. Radiant God, with our eyes we have seen your salvation, and in this meal we have feasted on your grace.

C: **May your Word take flesh in us, that we may be your holy people, revealing your glory made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace. Amen.

***SENDING HYMN “Go Tell It on the Mountain”**

LBW 70

***DISMISSAL**

P: Like the Shepherds, let us go in peace to share the good news of the birth of Christ and to love and serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.



In the Grace Church Family:

Jeffry Bivens, Rick & Cindy Bivens, Glenda Childers, Pat Dietz, Allen and Kay Hatchett, Larry Heavner, Lorene Heavner, Larry & Brenda Jarrett, Martha Johnson, Faye Lane, Harvey Leatherman, Phil & Malinda Leatherman, Tim Leatherman, Betty Matheson, Joe Momier, Jane

Moss, Christine Norman, Michael Norman, Tricia and Dan Panek, Mike, Debi & Stephen Pisko, Helen Smith, Ethan Starnes, Sandi Tallant, Libby Travis, Shirley Warlick, Ken & Tirzah Welch, Scott & Carolyn Whisnant, and Nancy Willis.

Nursing Home: Juanita Haas (Trinity Village), Ted Whisnant (Trinity Village)

Friends and Relatives in our Prayers: Pray for Peace in Israel and the World, New Covenant Lutheran Mission Church, Ashlee Bumgardner, Bill Bumgarner & family, Jessica Cassells & family, Clinton Childers, Evelyn Childers, family of Tim Childers, family of Wendy Cloninger, Sonya Elliott & family (car accident, recovering at home now), family of John Lentz, Ryan McMullen & family, David Moses, Randy & Rita Neill, Anita Sabino, Scott Speagle, Donald Smith, and Todd Wilfong. Prayers for world peace and for our church, the United States of America, and especially the families of those who have given their lives in the service of our country and those who continue to protect our

freedoms and for all members of our Armed Forces. Prayers also for an unspoken prayer request and for visiting family.

HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAY TO:

December 3 – Dan Panek, Matthew Hefner	December 4 – River Stainback
December 22 – Susan Setzer	December 25 – Faye Lane
December 28 – Kim Parker	

COMING UP AT GRACE THIS WEEK

Today: Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:15am – Play Practice	
9:30am – Sunday School	10:30am - Worship Celebration

Wednesday

4:00pm – Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Holy Communion

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wed, 12/24/25 Christmas Eve Communion Candlelight Service 4pm

Sun, 12/28/25 First Sunday after Christmas

Sun, 1/4/26 Celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord (Matthew 2)

Wed, 1/7/26 Fred T Foard Senior Luncheon All Invited 12 noon at Hebron United Methodist Church – Vale

Sun, 1/11/26 The Baptism of Our Lord (Matthew 3:13-17)

Sun, 1/18/26 Grace hosts first service of Week of Christian Unity
(we provide soup, sandwiches, dessert afterwards)

Wed, 1/21/26 Grace Senior Luncheon and Program 12 noon All Welcome

Wed, 1/21/26 Ebenezer hosts Christian Unity Service at 6pm, Dinner following

Sun, 1/25/26 Daniels Lutheran hosts Christian Unity Service at 6pm, Dinner following

Sun, 2/8/26 Friendship Sunday, Everyone asked to invite your friends to worship. We will have a special gift for friends who join us. Theme of the service and sermon will be about the blessings of Christian friendship!

Sun, 2/15/26 Transfiguration Sunday

Wed, 2/18/26 Ash Wednesday Service, Imposition of Ashes/Communion

Christ is
Here
Right
Inside the
Stable
tonight in a
Manger
And angels
Sing

Ministers of Grace – All the People of Grace

Pastor – Reverend Doug Hefner Board President – Tim Eckard

Lector – Tim Eckard Youth Leader – Stormy Shull

Altar Preparation – Cindy Bivens

Communion Assistants – Sheila Drum & Lula Ingle

Ushers – Jeff Scronce & Jason Yoder

Offering Counters – Todd Childers & Jason Yoder

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 21, 2025

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

– Isaiah 7:14 –

Just before Christmas in 1867, an Episcopalian pastor by the name of Phillips Brooks penned the beautiful Christmas hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. Nothing about Phillips Brooks was small, neither in the physical sense nor in his personality. He stood at about 6'6" tall and weighed over 300 pounds. His preaching was known to have a similar impact as his physical appearance. Nevertheless, he was known to be one of the greatest preachers of his time, serving in Boston and Philadelphia.

In 1865 when he was 30 years old, Brooks visited the Holy Land, where he attended a five-hour Christmas Eve service. He was deeply moved by the music and hymns giving praise to God throughout those five hours.

Two years later in 1867, Brooks wanted to write a special Christmas hymn for the children in his congregation to sing on Christmas Eve. He wrote a poem, and his organist Lewis Redner composed music to go along with it. What was born was the beloved Christmas hymn we still sing today: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

The third verse poignantly directs us to the very heart of Christmas. *No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.* Jesus came into this broken and sinful world to rescue us, to save us, from our sin and death and then give us eternal life with him.

God chose to come to into this world in the flesh. One of Jesus' names is the Hebrew name *Immanuel*, which means “God with us.” God is with us even here and now. He lives in us and through us. Every time we share the Good News of the Gospel, (Christ came to live among us; he suffered; he died; he was buried in a tomb; and on the third day he rose from the dead, so that we might have life with him), we witness Jesus Christ among us. Jesus is with us no matter what. He promised us, before he ascended into heaven, that he would be with us to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

We can give the gift of God's likeness through us. When our lives reflect the God who lives in us, we can be different from the world, and that difference can bless others with the transforming presence of his love and grace.