

## *“I Was Glad When They Said”*

A SONG OF ASCENTS. OF DAVID. <sup>1</sup> I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” <sup>2</sup> Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! <sup>3</sup> Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, <sup>4</sup> to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David. <sup>6</sup> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you! <sup>7</sup> Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!” <sup>8</sup> For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say, “Peace be within you!” <sup>9</sup> For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good. (Psalm 122, ESV)

By the time you receive our latest newsletter, God willing, we will have returned to Sunday worship services. Our first service is set for Pentecost Sunday, May 31, and will follow strictly the guidelines prepared by the coalition of various Lutheran synods and Roman Catholic dioceses and that were given to the governor of Minnesota and shared with other politicians in the State of Minnesota.

We are encouraged to start out with one fourth capacity attendance (a compromise reached by the governor and various church bodies in MN). We ask our church families to call the church office and register for which service they wish to attend. At St. Paul, we will offer two services (9 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.).

The guidelines drawn up and shared in the “Protocols for Beginning Some Public Worship Services during COVID-19 Crisis” also suggest:

- Pews will be roped off so that people cannot sit closer than 6 feet (unless they are members of the same household living together).
- The space will be thoroughly sanitized before and after each service, including all entryways and doors. Hand sanitizer will be available at all entryways.
- Doors will be propped open and one-way traffic patterns will be introduced to ensure social distancing. Ushers will assist when necessary to help maintain physical distancing.
- Signs will be posted concerning social distancing and sanitation requirements and reminders will be offered.
- Collection plates and other items will not be passed person to person.
- People will be encouraged to bring their own protective wear including facemasks.
- People will be instructed not to greet each other with touching.
- At St. Paul, our church choir will not be allowed to provide additional music at this time.
- Signs and other instructions will encourage normal safe practices necessary to stop the spread (e.g. cough or sneeze into a shirtsleeve, handkerchief, or tissue; avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs).
- Hymnals usage is discouraged, please follow the service shown on the PowerPoint; a few large print services will be printed and if used they are to be taken home and disposed of by the user.
- Ventilation will be increased as much as possible, opening windows and doors, as weather permits.
- Facilities will develop a plan for restroom use to limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom maintaining 6-foot distance from each other.
- No one is obliged to come if they do not feel safe. Those over age 65 are strongly encouraged not to attend, and we will continue to provide online services so that they can still participate.
- Anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing symptoms of sickness should not attend; this includes our pastor and DCE.
- If leadership becomes aware of a clear, immediate, and imminent threat to the safety of the attendees or determines that the abovementioned protocols cannot be observed, the gathering will be cancelled until the protocols can be observed.

I imagine, if you are like me, you can hardly wait to come to our sanctuary and worship Christ with your extended church family.

In Psalm 122, David notes our excitement in coming to the Lord's House. By the Spirit's inspiration, he announces: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!' Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD" (vv. 1–4, ESV).

It is hard for us to be away from God's House and not gather with the saints of the Lord to worship His holy name on the Lord's Day. Like the children of Israel, who were scattered around the countryside of the Holy Land and who were living in faraway lands, the privilege of going up to the Temple was anticipated with great joy and elaborate plans were laid out in advance for their gathering in Jerusalem.

In a way, we have been living in isolation and far removed from the House that was dedicated to the Lord's glory due to the coronavirus. Thus, after a long period of isolation, we anticipate the joyous return to worshipping the LORD, hearing of Christ's blood bought peace that brings us reconciliation, and giving thanks to His holy name with others.

The sainted Dr. Walter Roehrs explains, "The attitude exhibited in this psalm of David reveals what a thrilling experience and sacred privilege it was for an attendant at one of the great festivals of Israel to *go to the house of the Lord* (1–2). Within the holy city he sensed the elation of communion with *the tribes of the Lord* as they joined to give thanks to the name of the Lord (3–5). Grateful to God for establishing *Jerusalem* to be His dwelling place, he prays that its holy precincts be preserved for all who seek *the peace* it affords. (6–9)" (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, Vol. 1, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978], p. 400).

It is "truly meet, right, and salutary" that our first gathering for corporate worship occurs on Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Holy Christian Church. For here, the Spirit distributes the peace that surpasses all understanding as the message of Christ is shared and proclaimed in word and song. The peace we hunger for is spoken into our ears and enter the hearts of others as we sing praises to Jesus for His glorious redemption.

Although we are keeping social distancing, we are no longer isolated from the LORD's House nor do we need to live in fear. The peace of the LORD is our hope; this hope does not disappoint us. For God is at peace with us and we are at peace with Him by the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ. We can reflect this God-given peace to others and forgive one another as God first forgave us. Furthermore, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, not even an unseen virus, cancer lurking around the corner and creating havoc in our body, or worries about our business surviving the self-inflicted agony of a shutdown.

As we return to the Lord's House, instead of shaking hands and giving others a hug, extend this old greeting to one another on Pentecost Sunday, "Peace be to you!" Remind your fellow believers, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!' For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!' For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good" (Psalm 122:6–9, ESV). This peace is available to all because the LORD our God sought to dwell with us in the person of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And so, I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" (v. 1, ESV).

As we assemble in God's House, the precautions listed above will be taken seriously by us. No exceptions allowed. If you have concerns or health issues, please stay home and watch our worship service as it is lived streamed on Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. Feel free to drop by the church office and sign out a hymnal to follow along with the live streamed services from your home.

Finally, this is my final newsletter article as your pastor. It has been my privilege and honor to have served you as the Lord's undershepherd for the past 11 years and 7 months. With David, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" For God graciously allowed our paths to cross for His holy purpose and permitted me to share "the blood bought peace of the Lord Jesus Christ" with you. To Him be all the glory!

– Pastor Cliff Adair