

The Incarnation of God

La Sierra University Church • Riverside, California • December 29, 2007

To Our Guests

Our Early Church liturgical service at La Sierra, now entering its fifteenth year, is a contemporary Seventh-day Adventist expression of a historic pattern of Christian worship. Its focus is Scripture, thoughtfully heard and prayerfully received. Its style is participatory, involving the congregation throughout the service. Its spirit is contemplative, including structured periods of silence for reflection and prayer.

The Scripture readings for each Sabbath are selected according to the Revised Common Lectionary, a widely used schedule of texts for Christian worship. Over the course of three years, the readings represent the whole range of Scripture. At the same time, each year we recognize the traditional Christian seasons, reflecting the life and mission of Jesus: his birth as the incarnation of God, his suffering and death as the supreme revelation of the character of God, and his resurrection as the confirmation of his identity as God's unique son.

In our service the homily, a brief meditation on one or more of the Scripture readings for the day, is important but not dominant. Like other participants in the service, our homilists include pastors of the church, members of the congregation, university faculty and staff, and occasional guests.

In this particular liturgy, the hymn numbers refer to the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*; the words are adapted from various sources. The text of the Lord's Prayer comes from the New Revised Standard Version.

Preparing

During the organ prelude, you may wish to think of ways in which you would like to grow in relation to God, your family and friends, and yourself.

Inviting

The pastoral host says:

May the reality of God's love made evident
in Jesus of Nazareth
be alive in you as we worship together today^L

We join in reading the words in bold type:

And also in you.

*The pastor expresses our shared concerns
as a community of faith,
and then says:*

The Word became human and lived with us,
full of grace and truth.

We have seen his glory. Alleluia

Let us pray:

O God of universal love and grace,
you have wonderfully created
and still more wonderfully restored
the dignity of humanness.

You have illuminated our lives
with the light of your incarnate Word.
May this light, kindled in our hearts
shine forth through us
as we live with integrity, courage, and compassion
in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

*We stand and join the cantor In singing the following stanzas
to the tune of hymn 167 (Hyfrydol):*

**Love divine, all loves excelling
joy of heaven, on earth be found,
Find in us a humble dwelling,
all your faithful mercies crown.**

**Jesus, you are all compassion,
pure, unbounded love impart,
Visit us with your salvation,
enter every willing heart.**

**Breathe, O breathe your loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;**

**Let us all in you inherit,
let us find your gracious rest.**

**Take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
Goal of faith, as its beginning,
guide our hearts in liberty.**

Please remain standing as the pastor prays:

Eternal God, let the radiance
of your incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth
pierce the darkness that covers the earth
and signal the dawn of justice and peace.
May the message of love and goodness
bless your human sons and daughters everywhere.
Lead us to know your presence and power
in our lives, through Jesus our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Please be seated.

Praying

The service leader begins our prayer:

Letting go of the past, we look to the future, knowing
that you, O God—
having become one of us in Jesus,
and having begun a good work in our hearts—
will bring it to fulfillment.

We confess the sin that,
in spite of our good intentions, remains in us.

**You gave us Jesus to reveal yourself
to all humanity as Immanuel, God with us.**

But our pride and selfishness
hide the reality of your love.

**We turn away from the poor
and ignore cries for justice.**

God of love, to whom all hearts are open
and from whom no secrets are hidden,
cleanse our thinking and our motives.

**Correct our words and improve our actions
by the power of your Spirit.**

May we truly love you.

**May we live your love in the name of Jesus.
Amen.**

*The cantor sings the following stanza
to the tune of hymn 100 ("Faithfulness"):*

Great is your faithfulness, O God, Creator,
With you no shadow of turning we see.
You do not change; your compassions they fail not.
All of your goodness forever will be.
Great is your faithfulness!
Great is your faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed your hand has provided.
Great is your faithfulness, God, unto me!

The service leader continues:

In the knowledge of God's infinite love
there remains a Sabbath rest for God's people.

Today we enter into that rest in Jesus Christ.

We trust not in our own goodness,
or even in our repentance.

**We trust in God's everlasting, universal,
and unconditional love demonstrated by Jesus.**

*The service leader may remind the congregation
of special blessings and special needs.
and then says:*

I invite you to kneel and join in the prayer
Jesus taught his disciples:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.**

**For the kingdom and the power and the glory
are yours forever.**

Amen.

Now we pray for the church and the world.

Grant, O God, that all who confess your name may
be united in your truth, live together in your love,
and reveal your grace to the world.

O God, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for our church family.

Silent prayer.

Guide the people of all nations
in the ways of justice, peace, and love,
so that your human sons and daughters
may honor one another and serve the good of all.

O God, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for leaders of governments.

Silent prayer.

Bless those whose lives are closely linked with ours,
and grant that we may serve you in them,
loving one another as you love us.

O God, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for those
for whom you care most deeply.

Silent prayer.

Comfort and heal all who suffer
in body, mind, or spirit,
Give them hope in the midst of trouble
and bring them the joy of salvation.

O God, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for those who need healing
in body or spirit.

Silent prayer.

God with us, so draw us to yourself,
so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations,
and so liberate our wills
that we may live your love
by the power of your Spirit
and in the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Please be seated.

Listening

The first reader says:

Listen for God's word to you today
in the words of the prophet Isaiah,
chapter 63, verses 7 to 9.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words.

*After a period of silent reflection on the reading,
the pastor says:*

I invite you to join in reading responsively from
Psalm 148 on the sheet you received
with your worship folder.

*After a period of silent reflection on the Psalm,
the second reader says:*

Listen for God's word to you today
in the words of the New Testament letter
to the Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 10 to 18.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words.

*After a period of silent reflection on the reading, we join
the cantor in singing another stanza of hymn 100:*

**Pardon for sin and a peace so enduring,
Your own dear presence to cheer and to guide.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all ours and ten thousands beside.
Great is your faithfulness!**

Great is your faithfulness!

**Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed your hand has provided,
Great is your faithfulness, God, unto me!**

The service leader says:

I invite you to stand and listen to the Gospel.

Listen for God's word to you today
in the Gospel according to Matthew,
chapter 2, verses 13 to 23.

After the reading:

The gospel of Jesus Christ!

Thanks be to God for the gospel.

Please be seated and reflect silently on the reading.

Giving

The service leader says:

We do not give reluctantly or legalistically.

We give in the fullness of our gratitude to God.

Because we have so freely received, we freely give.

**Because we are so richly blessed,
we want to bless others.**

Our tithes and offerings are received by the ushers.

Singing

The cantor or the service leader says:

I invite you to stand and join in singing hymn ____.

*After the hymn, please remain standing
for the homilist's invocation.*

Considering

The homilist says:

In the name of God our Creator, Redeemer,
and Guiding Presence.

Amen.

*Please be seated and listen to an exposition
Of one or more of the Scripture readings.*

Affirming

*After a period of silent reflection on the homily,
the service leader says:*

Where possible, please stand
and join in our affirmation of faith.

**You, O God, have created everything
that is or was or will be.**

You have created humanity, male and female,
in your own image.

**You have established Sabbath time,
sign and source of liberation, rest,
renewal and fulfillment.**

You have called prophets and rulers—
to proclaim truth and enact justice.

You have become human and lived with us—
**announcing grace, granting freedom,
ministering to the poor;**

Empowering women, breaking down barriers,
building community;

**Suffering and crucified, risen and glorified,
ministering now and always on our behalf.**

You called the church to proclaim your love—

**To accept all people, to practice reconciliation,
to embody hope.**

You preserve our past—

**Keeping rich memories alive,
making the past present in new ways,
ensuring that nothing good is ever lost.**

You draw us toward our future—

**Presenting new possibilities of grace,
offering new challenges for action,
creating new opportunities for joy.**

We look forward to the redemption of history
and the defeat of death—

**To the end of enmity
and the ultimate triumph of love.**

Please remain standing.

Blessing

The pastor says:

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you
and be gracious to you.

May God look upon you with kindness
and give you peace.

Amen.

*After the organ chimes, please be seated,
remaining in silent prayer until the conclusion of the postlude.*

Sending

The pastor says:

Go in peace, courage, and joy,
and in the security of God's love.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Scripture Readings for Coming Sabbaths

Christmas Season

December 29	Isaiah 63:7-9	<i>Psalm 148</i>	Hebrews 2:10-18	Matthew 2:13-23
January 5 (<i>Epiphany</i>)	Isaiah 60:1-6	<i>Psalm 72:1-7,10-14</i>	Ephesians 3:1-12	Matthew 2:1-12

Ordinary Time

January 12 (<i>Baptism</i>)	Isaiah 42:1-9	<i>Psalm 29</i>	Acts 10:34-43	Matthew 3:13-17
January 19	Isaiah 49:1-7	<i>Psalm 40:1-11</i>	1 Cor. 1:1-9	John 1:29-42
January 26	Isaiah 9:1-4	<i>Psalm 27-1,4-9</i>	1 Cor. 1:10-18	Matthew 4:12-23
Feb. 2 (<i>Transfiguration</i>)	Exodus 24:12-18	<i>Psalm 99</i>	1 Peter 1:16-21	Matthew 17:1-9

Anticipating the Passion of Christ

February 9	Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	<i>Psalm 32</i>	Romans 5:12-18	Matthew 4:1-11
February 16	Genesis 12:1-4a	<i>Psalm 121</i>	Romans 4:1-5,13-17	John 3:1-17
February 23	Exodus 17:1-7	<i>Psalm 95</i>	Romans 5:1-11	John 4:5-15
