

Prelude: Jenny Shaff

Words of Welcome: Doug Pierce

Introduction to the Hanging of the Greens Service: Travis

Welcome to this service of celebration! We are kicking the Advent Season off a week early, as we prepare our Sanctuary for the season. Some of you, like our family, spent the last few days pulling out the Christmas decoration boxes and decking your house with Christmas. Often, our Christmas decorations have special meaning to us, not just what they represent, but there are memories attached to them. Who made them, who gave them. We hang the stockings that grandma carefully crocheted for each of us. On the tree hang ornaments purchased for our first Christmas as a couple, made by the children, given to us to mark special occasions, passed down through the family. Outside, we hang lights, put up inflatables, hang signs--spreading cheer to everyone who passes by.

In my family growing up, we had a strange tradition. I don't know when it started, but every year, my brother and I, would draw something on the big cardboard box that held our family tree. The tree was an after Christmas special from Sears, but the box is what really held meaning. Every year, it was more tattered, but every year more colorful.

These moments of decorating for Christmas mean something special--at home and also at the church.

Today, we hang and place these decorations that are not only festive and pretty, but they have meaning. They represent for us Christmases past, traditions within our own church, people who made them and gave them to the church--but they also point us towards the heart of our faith. Nothing we place in this room is here simply because it is pretty. These items have meaning, and today we will tell their meaning again as we prepare this Sanctuary and prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord.

We begin our decorations by hanging our greens. A few days ago, church members lovingly put up our tree this year. And in a moment our children will come forward during our opening him and place the greens around the sanctuary. From ancient times, evergreens have been considered a symbol of eternity, a sign of God's everlasting nature. The Prophet Isaiah tells us that there will be no end to the reign of the Messiah. Therefore, we hang wreaths shaped in circles, and place garlands of green, as a sign of everlasting life. These are symbols of Christ's gift of eternal life and eternal love, without beginning or end are a Christian symbol of Christmas itself reflecting our eternal relationship with God. I invite you, now, to stand as you are able as we join in our call to worship.

***Call to Worship and the Lighting of the Tree**

One: How can we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah?

**All: With evergreen branches, whose ever living leaves
celebrate our eternal Lord.**

One: How shall we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World?

All: With candles and festive lights, shining light into our darkness.

One: How shall we prepare this house for the coming of Jesus, our Savior?

All: With nativity scenes and banners, telling the story of Jesus who has come,

is coming, and will come again.

One: How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, the Son of God?

All: **With songs and stories of old that speak of our faith, give us hope, and make room in our hearts for Jesus to come.**

*Opening Song: 148 - O Come, All Ye Faithful

Children bring in the greens during the singing of opening song and decorate.

The Paraments and Advent Wreath: Doug Pierce

“Parament” is an old Latin word given to cloths that are hung as beautiful pieces of art within a church. The Paraments we hang today for Advent were designed and made by our own Mary Johnson. This set of three depict the journey to Bethlehem for the birth and adoration of Jesus. As they are hung, notice that Mother Mary is still pregnant, for this is Advent, a season of waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

Next week officially begins Advent. We will then hang a new blue banner every week for the four Sundays of Advent. We will also light weekly our Advent Wreath, a vivid symbol of preparation. The lighting of a new candle each of the four weeks before Christmas reminds us that something is happening now, but more is yet to come. The four candles in a circle symbolize HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE. Each week we light the previous candles along with the new one, as the light grows and grows in our Advent Journey, until we reach Christmas Eve and light our Center white candle, the Christ candle, symbolizing the child who is the light of the world.

This year, our worship committee along with help from our Children have made Advent wreaths for you to have in your own home this season. These will be made available in the Fellowship Hall after worship today. Let us now sing 133, like a child, as we hang our paraments and bring in the Advent Wreath.

Song 133: like a child

Passing of the Peace

Children’s Sermon: The Creche

Offering

Doxology

Prayers of the People: Travis

The Chrismon Tree Story: Marti Stanley

The Chrismon Tree traces its roots back to 1940. During the Christmas season that year, Reverend George Pass, an elderly minister, visited the home of Mrs. Frances Kipps Spencer, a child of missionaries. Rev. Pass pastored a very poor church, and stopped by Mrs. Spencer’s house to see if she would donate her discarded Christmas wrappings so he could take them to his church, make meager decorations with them, and share them with his church. Mrs. Spencer agreed, and never forgot that elderly pastor’s love and simplicity. From then on, inspired by Rev. Pass, she and her husband hand-made their own ornaments to decorate their tree.

Later, in 1957, Mrs. Spencer volunteered to be in charge of the decorations for her church, The Ascension Lutheran Church of Danville, VA. She was troubled by the over-commercialism of Christmas, and wanted to resist the flashiness of department stores in the church sanctuary. So, instead of traditional balls and coloured lights, Mrs. Spencer carried on her tradition of making handmade ornaments, this time for her Church tree.

Mrs. Spencer began to study the monograms of Christ, various symbols that speak of Jesus and the church, and soon she coined the term Chrismon (CHRIST+MONOgram). She made these ornaments out of white and gold, each design featuring a different Christian symbol. Some Chrismons are symbols of Christianity from its earliest days; others are new symbols that reflect various cultures and images that have meaning for Christians.

It didn't take long for Mrs. Spencer's Chrismon tree to become widely know. She wrote books explaining the symbols and how to make your own, and today, Churches around the world have a Chrismon Tree of their own. Ascension Lutheran Church, still has an active Chrismon ministry, and put up their huge Chrismon tree every year. Half of the tree is decorated with their own ornaments, and half is decorated with Chrismons from around the world that churches have sent to this church to show off their own local traditions.

Chrismons are meant to be local, made by the local church, using the methods and symbols that have local meaning. Our Chrismons were handmade by Mary Johnson. When she was an Administrative Assistant at Meredith, she came across *Cross Stitch and Needlework Magazine*. In it, she saw Mrs. Spencer's designs, and began cross stitching a set of Chrismons for our church. And she's still making them today--she made 8 new ones for us this year!

Today, we hang our local Chrismons on our Chrismon Tree, and in hanging them, we tell again the story of Christ.

The Psalms - NCC Children

The first Chrismons we hang today are scripture readings from the Psalms. On our tree hang 8 verses from Psalms. The Psalms were the song book of the ancient Jews and of the early Church. These were the songs Jesus sang. We invite our children who are reading these psalms to come forward now, read your Psalm, and hang it on the tree.

Read by Hannah Emswieler, Caden Holst, Alison Lester, Nathan Mundil, Thomas Mundil, Finn Stanley, Taylor Stanley.

- Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things. Psalm 119:18
- The voice of the Lord strips forests bare. Psalm 29:9
- This is the day which he Lord hath made. Psalm 118:24
- We are His people and the sheep is His pasture. Psalm 100:3
- Sing unto Him a new song. Psalm 33:3
- Unto Thee, O God, do we give thanks. Psalm 75:1
- I will praise Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart. Psalm 9:1
- The heavens are telling of the glory of God. Psalm 19:1

Song - 119: O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Verse 1)

Group 1 - Symbols of Christ:

Travis Stanley: There are a number of symbols we hang on the tree today, all of which summarize for us our Christian faith. Some are symbols of Christ himself, some are images that tell the stories of Christ and the Gospels, and some are symbols that represent us, as Christ's disciples, and our response to this story. We begin by hanging the ancient symbols that represent our Lord, Jesus Christ. I invite our next group to come up and share for us the meaning of your Chrismon, and then hang them on our Chrismon tree.

Taylor Stanley: Chi-Rho

I hang the *Chi Rho* Chrismon. The *Chi Rho* is one of the most ancient of Christian symbols. To us it looks like an X and a P, but it is really the Greek letters "Chi" and "Rho", the first two letters of Christ. The Chi Rho can be seen throughout early Christian art. The Emperor Constantine had it emblazoned on soldier's shields. It's been found in the catacombs of Rome, and on pieces of pottery in ancient homes. Even today, we still use the symbol. Our own middle school youth group is called Chi Rho. And when people abbreviate "Christmas" as "X-mas", they usually don't realize they are following this ancient Chi Rho tradition. We hang the Chi Rho Chrismon on our tree to remind us that Jesus is the Christ, our Messiah.

Doris Cose: Alpha and Omega

I hang the *Alpha and Omega* Chrismon. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek Alpha-bet, and Omega is the last. In Revelation 22:13, the Lord says, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." We hang the *Alpha and Omega* on our Chrismon tree to remind us that Jesus is the beginning and end of all things--and all of history and all our lives are wrapped up in the eternal Christ.

Rachel Ritchhart: The Trefoil and Triquerta

I hang two symbols, the *Trefoil* and the *Triquerta*. Both symbolize for us the Trinity. The *Trefoil* is a symbol of three intersecting circles. The *Triquerta* is a symbol of three intersecting loops that make triangles. These symbols have been used throughout various religions, and come to Christianity through the ancient Celts. Some of our first Christian Cathedrals were built in the Trefoil shape. These shapes intersect each other, yet you cannot tell where one ends and one begins. We hang the *Trefoil* and *Triquerta* on our Chrismon tree to remind us that God is Trinity -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God exists in eternal community, and it's when we are in community that we can best recognize God.

Margo Murillo: Fleur de Lis

I hang the *Fleur de Lis*. It's a french term for "Lily Flower". It was a sign used for saints, the symbol of French royalty, and you can see it still today on the jerseys of the New Orleans Saints. In Christian usage, it been used to signify the purity of Jesus, Jesus' royalty, the humility and purity of Jesus' mother Mary, and (since it has three petals) the Trinity. We hang the *Fleur de Lis* to remind us that Jesus is our humble and pure king.

Song - 119: O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Verse 2)

Group 2 - Story of Christ:

Marti Stanley: The next set of Chrismons we hang today tell the Story of Christ, from his birth, to his baptism, his ministry, and then his death and resurrection, and on into the formation of Christ's church. I invite our next group to come up and share for us the meaning of your Chrismon, and then hang them on our Chrismon tree.

Mary Jo Fox: Stars

I hang the *Star* today. The *Star* is central to the Christmas story. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are told a star led the Wise men to Bethlehem to visit baby Jesus. Since then, the Star has become a central part of the traditional nativity scenes. The star lights the way to Christ. There are a few types of stars on our Chrismon tree: the Five-pointed star which often represent the wounds of Jesus on the cross. There is also the Eight-pointed star, which represents baptism and regeneration. We hang the *Star* on our Chrismon tree to remind us of the light of Christ, which always leads us to new places.

Doug Reed: Angel

I hang the *Angel* today. Angels are messengers of God, sent to humans to share Good News. Yet, always, the Angels begin their message by saying, "Do not be afraid." It would be scary, having an angelic visit. Yet, always, the Angels in the Gospels come to bring "Good news of great joy," like they delivered to the Shepherds on the first Christmas. We hang the *Angel* on our Chrismon tree to remind us that God has Good News for us--Jesus has come and Jesus will come again!

Rick Elkin: Shepherd's Staff and Lamb

I hang two ornaments today, the *Shepherd's Staff* and the *Lamb*. The Shepherds were the first ones told about the birth of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Jesus referred to himself as the "Good Shepherd", saying, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." The symbol of the Lamb has double-meaning for us. We are the lambs Jesus shepherds. But also, when Jesus arrived to be baptised by John, John looked at Jesus, and declared to everyone, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John the Baptist was comparing Jesus to the Passover lamb, originally slain by the enslaved Hebrews on the night of the Exodus, the blood of the lamb placed on their doorpost as a marker so the Angel of Death would pass over them. We hang the Shepherd's Staff and the Lamb today, to remind us that Jesus is the lamb of God, but also the Good Shepherd. And we are Jesus' sheep, whom he cares so much for that he would lay down his life.

Joseph Mundil: Crown

I hang the *Crown*. In the Psalms, it says, "Do not put your trust in kings and princes," but put your trust in God. We hang the crown on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that Jesus is our king. Though we may be citizens of the United States, our true citizenship is in the Kingdom of Christ, and we should live by Christ's rule above all else

Sarah Pratt: Crosses

I hang the *Cross*. There are several different crosses on our Chrismon Tree: the traditional cross on your program, along with the the Upsilon, Latin, Celtic, Victorian, Saint Alban's, and Loconian Crosses--and a few more. The cross is the most widely used symbol of the Christian faith. Various cultures have depicted the cross in different ways, each symbol having additional meaning. Though the cross was a tool of death, for Christians it is a sign of victory. We hang the cross on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that, in Christ, we have the victory over sin and death and nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gary Gesaman: Dove

I hang the *Dove*. The Gospels tell us that a dove appeared at the baptism of Jesus. Since then, the Dove has been associated with the Holy Spirit, and the sign of Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church. We hang the Dove on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that God's Holy Spirit is alive in us. The Spirit comes upon us at Baptism and is alive in our church.

Song - 119: O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Verse 3)

Group 3 - Disciples of Christ:

Doug Pierce: The final set of Chrismons we hang represent us, the church. The story of Christ is not just one we hear, reflect on, and then go about our life. This story changes us. Everytime we enter into this story, we leave different and changed. This story sends us out into the world to share the light of Christ with everyone. I invite our next group to come up and share for us the meaning of your Chrismon, and then hang them on our Chrismon tree.

Glen Tyler: Candle

I hang the *Candle*. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world. People do not light a candle and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." We hang the Candle on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that we are the light of Christ, and we're gonna let Jesus' light shine wherever we go.

Brenda Ludlow: Keys

I hang the *Keys*. Jesus told his disciple Peter, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom." While some have thought that was specifically addressed only to Peter, we believe that Jesus has given all of keys to the kingdom. We--the church--are given the power to unlock the mysteries of God and let loose Jesus' presence in our world. We hang the *Keys* on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that we are called to unlock and share God's message and love with this world.

Larry Cose: Ship

I hang the *Ship*. Jesus' first disciples were four fishermen, and in the Gospels, Jesus is often on a boat with his Disciples, traveling from one side of the sea to the other to share the message with more and more people. The *Ship* has come to symbolize the church, on a mission for Jesus. We hand the *Ship* on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that like those early fishermen disciples, we are called to follow Jesus on a mission, crossing the sea and every other barrier and border, going wherever we need to go, to share God's love.

Alison Lester: Butterfly

I hand the last Chrismon, the *Butterfly*. In nature, caterpillars cocoon themselves and then emerge as beautiful butterflies. The *Butterfly* is nature's image of transformation. They point us to Spring, new life, and Easter. Though we are entering into the Christmas season, we are always an Easter people, and we hang the *Butterfly* on our Chrismon Tree to remind us that Jesus is always transforming us and calling us to transform the world.

Song - 119: O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Verse 4)

Invitation to Communion: Wheat, Grapes, and Chalice - Travis

There is one more group of Chrismons we have not hung yet. We have three more: Wheat, Grapes, and Chalice. While the images of mangers and angels, shepherds and wisemen are central to this time of year, central to us all year are the images of wheat, grapes, and the chalice. Wheat, scattered on the hillside, gathered together to make bread, signifying that Christ's church, though scattered, are brought together as one in Christ at this table. Grapes, grown with care, their taste improved by stress, picked and stomped, made into juice that can be fermented over time, the longer it waits the better the taste. And so it is with us. We grow on the vine of Christ. Stress, difficulty, challenges increase our faith. And the longer we grow in the Lord, the sweeter we are. The stronger we are.

Finally, this image of chalice. It is the image that's been chosen as our denominational logo. It signifies the cup of Christ, shared at the table. But it also signifies the cup of suffering. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night he was betrayed, "Please, if possible, let this cup of suffering be taken from me. But not my will, but yours be done."

Today, as we look towards Jesus' birth, we look back to his death--and we celebrate the life of Christ.

As we prepare to join with Christ in communion, we will be blessed with special music singing "We Will Know Him."

Special Music: "We Will Know Him" (Larry Cose, Katie Routh, Ron Routh, Jenny Shaff)

Words of Institution - Marti
Blessing of the Elements - Doug
Sharing in Communion Together

Benediction

Parting Song: 143 - Joy to the World (Verses 1 and 3)