

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

*Make straight in the desert
A highway for our God.*

ISAIAH 40:3



Immanuel Lutheran Church & School

1449 34th Street NW, Winter Haven, FL 33881

www.WinterHavenLutheran.com

Rob Sauers, Pastor (920) 602-3242

Neil Bernthal, Teacher (863) 967-5145

Katie Naumann, Teacher (253) 230-4184

As We Gather

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. In the midst of a weary world, the voice of the prophet Isaiah rings out across the centuries, calling us into the wilderness to prepare a highway for our King. But this preparation is not a matter of earth and stone; it is a matter of the soul. We all carry a spiritual geography—uneven terrain marked by the "rough places" of our human condition. While the glory of nations fades like withered grass, the Word of our God stands forever, promising that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. As we worship today, let us quiet our hearts to behold the Shepherd who comes with power to rule and a gentle arm to gather His lambs.

✠ Preparation for Worship ✠

Hymn

701 – Prepare the Royal Highway

Invocation

P In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Opening Sentences

Psalm 25:4-5; 85:7-8

P Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths.

C Lead me in Your truth and teach me.

P For You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.

C Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me.

P Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation.

C I will hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints.

Confession and Absolution

P Beloved in the Lord, Advent is a time of preparation. The prophet calls us to prepare the way of the Lord, yet in our hearts, we do not find a straight highway for God. Instead, we find the uneven ground of sin: mountains of pride, valleys of despair, crooked paths of deception, and rough places of anger. These obstacles hinder our faith and separate us from our neighbor. Therefore, let us draw near to God our Father, confessing our sins and asking Him, for the sake of His Son, to smooth the rough places of our hearts.

- P** O Almighty God, merciful Father,
- C** **We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have not prepared Your way, allowing rough places of conflict and crooked paths of selfishness to remain in our hearts. We have trusted in the world's withering grass rather than Your eternal Word. Like sheep, we have gone astray. Have mercy on us. Forgive, renew, and lead us, that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**
- P** "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned." Upon this, your confession, I, as a called servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you, and in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**

✠ The Service of the Word ✠

Salutation

- P** The Lord be with you.
- C** **And also with you.**

Prayer of the Day

- P** Let us pray...
... who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** **Amen.**

Epistle Reading

2 Peter 3:8-14

⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the

heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 85

- P** LORD, You have been favorable to Your land;
- C** **You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.**
- P** You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
- C** **You have covered all their sin.**
- P** You have taken away all Your wrath;
- C** **You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.**
- P** Restore us, O God of our salvation,
- C** **And cause Your anger toward us to cease.**
- P** Will You be angry with us forever?
- C** **Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?**
- P** Will You not revive us again,
- C** **That Your people may rejoice in You?**
- P** Show us Your mercy, LORD,
- C** **And grant us Your salvation.**
- P** I will hear what God the LORD will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints;
- C** **But let them not turn back to folly.**
- P** Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
- C** **That glory may dwell in our land.**
- P** Mercy and truth have met together;
- C** **Righteousness and peace have kissed.**
- P** Truth shall spring out of the earth,
- C** **And righteousness shall look down from heaven.**
- P** Yes, the LORD will give what is good;
- C** **And our land will yield its increase.**
- P** Righteousness will go before Him,
- C** **And shall make His footsteps our pathway.**

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:1-6

¹ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God

came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; ⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

Alleluia

P Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.



Confession of Faith

Luther's Explanation of the Second Article

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

He did this that I should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy; just as He is risen from death, lives and reigns in eternity.

This is most certainly true.

Hymn

61 – Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People

Sermon Text

Isaiah 40:1-11

¹ “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. ² “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD’s hand Double for all her sins.” ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵ The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the

mouth of the LORD has spoken.” ⁶ The voice said, “Cry out!” And he said, “What shall I cry?” “All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.” ⁹ O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.



Sermon

The Heart's Rough Places

Offertory

702 (1, 4) – As Angels Joyed with One Accord

1 As an - gels joyed with one ac - cord Up -
 2 In ev - 'ry age let praise a - bound. He
 on comes; the ad - vent of our Lord, So
 we hear His voice re - sound. His
 laud glo - we all and bless the name Of
 glo - rious gos - pel does not cease To
 Him who from the Fa - ther came.
 bring us com - fort, joy, and peace.

General Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer

C Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

- P** The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.
- C** Amen.

Hymn 66 – Hark the Glad sound! The Savior Comes

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✝ Announcements ✝

Upcoming Schedule		
December 10	2:00 pm	Midweek Advent Worship
December 12	10:30 am	Learning with Littles
December 14	8:00 am	Worship Service (Orlando)
	10:15 am	Worship Service (Winter Haven)
December 17	2:00 pm	Midweek Advent Worship
December 19	7:00 pm	Children’s Christmas Worship Service
December 21	9:15 am	Bible Class
	10:15 am	Worship Service

Upcoming Meetings: Here is a schedule of our upcoming meetings:

- **January 4** – Annual Voters’ Meeting
- **February 1** – Education/Elders
- **March 1** – Trustees/Church Council

In Our Prayers: Please keep our shut-in members in your prayers: Don Beymer, Bob & Joan Doriot, Johanna Jaehnigen, David & Elsie Kleinschmidt, Shirley Rosenberry, and Mike Sheffield.

We offer prayers of thanksgiving that our Lord has granted Kaitlyn Goodwin a successful surgery. Please continue to pray for her in the coming weeks, asking that God would strengthen her body and restore her to full health. *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Psalm 107:1)*

Looking Forward to Next Sunday: "How long?" It is the cry of the weary heart. In a season often consumed by frantic rushing, St. James invites us to slow down and look at the soil. "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth" (James 5:7). Next Sunday, we address the theme: "Coming Soon?" As we study James 5:7–11, we will see that Christian patience is not idle waiting, but a steadfast trust. The Judge stands at the door, yet He is "very compassionate and merciful." Join us as we learn to "establish our hearts" in the certainty of His return.

Midweek Advent Services – As the world fills with noise and hurried preparations, we are called to a different kind of preparation: to make our hearts ready for the coming of the King.

This year's sermon series, "Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room," is a call to move away from worldly self-sufficiency and toward true, repentant faith. Through God's Word, we will ask the Holy Spirit to open our "closed doors," smooth our "rough places," and give us the humble, receptive heart of a servant.

Service Schedule & Themes:

- **December 17 (2:00 PM)**
 - **Theme:** "Behold, the Servant's Heart"
 - **Text:** Luke 1:26-38

Make this special time of worship a part of your Advent preparation as we ready ourselves to receive our Savior in Word and Sacrament.

For those unable to join us at 2:00 PM, you can watch online. Visit <https://winterhavenlutheran.com/sermons/>

Southeastern Women's Retreat: Registration is now open for the Southeastern Women's Retreat, to be held in Sherrills Ford, NC, February 13-15, 2026. The theme this year is "Sisters in Christ". To register, please head over to women'sretreat.clclutheran.net, click on SOUTHEAST, and scroll down to the link for the online form. If you would like to register over email or you have any questions, reach out to southeasternwomensretreat@gmail.com. We hope to see you there!

