



# REFLECTIONS

ADVENT - CHRISTMAS

NOVEMBER 28, 2021 -  
JANUARY 5, 2022

HIGHER  
THINGS<sup>®</sup>

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# **Advent - Christmas**

## **NOVEMBER 28, 2021 - JANUARY 5, 2022**

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# **A Short Form for Daily Reflection**

## **ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM**

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*Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:*

**In the Name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

*Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).*

*Read "Today's Reading" if there is one listed.*

*Read the Daily Lectionary selections.*

*Read the Reflection for the Day.*

*Say the Apostles Creed.*

*Pray the Lord's Prayer.*

*Pray one of these little prayers:*

*(In the Morning)*

**I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

*In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.*

*(In the Evening)*

**I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

*If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.*

# The First Sunday in Advent

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Matthew 21:1-9

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 2:1-22; 1 Peter 1:13-25

*This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet... (Matthew 21:4)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today we begin the season of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word "advenire," which means "to come," and for the next 25 days, the Church will be preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. Preparing takes time and lots of hard work. Just like cleaning the house must be done before the arrival of a special guest, things need to be done over the next few weeks as the Church prepares for the coming of Christmas. Advent hymns are sung, a wreath is put up, and candles are lit. In our lives we should also set aside time to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Jesus' birth. A good way to do this is to spend more time in the study of Holy Scripture and in prayer.

On this, the first Sunday in Advent, the Gospel lesson relates the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus the King rides on a donkey, and, with great celebration, enters the Holy City so that He might die on the Cross for us and for all our sin. We must never forget that this was the purpose for which He came to earth. In the Gospel of Matthew you will often read, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet." In fact, Matthew points it out to us 16 times, and he quotes the Old Testament 68 times in order to drive home the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The promise made long ago in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve that a Messiah would come has now been fulfilled.

Matthew, moved by the working of the Holy Spirit, wrote down these things so that we might prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ. All has been fulfilled in Christ. As we begin our Advent journey, we look forward to the celebration of Christ's coming because this Child comes to fulfill prophecy. He comes to fulfill the Law perfectly. He comes to suffer and to die in our place. He comes to bring peace between God and man. What a great gift given freely for us! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy Power, O Lord, and Come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end. Amen. (Collect for the First Sunday in Advent)*

# Noah

## NOVEMBER 29, 2021

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**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 5:1-25; 1 Peter 2:1-12

*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.* (Hebrews 11:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever thought about how long it took Noah to build the ark? While we don't know for sure, many people guess that Noah was working on the ark for about 100 years. Day after day, this righteous man of God worked to build a huge boat without a storm cloud in sight. Hours upon countless hours of sawing, sanding, nailing, and covering with pitch. Years of ridicule and taunting by people who could not understand why he would waste his time or energy building a boat for a God whom they did not listen to and whom they could not care less about. Years passed, and Noah continued to build.

What kept him going? Why did he go out every day to that boat and continue to build? The author of the book of Hebrews gives us the answer: It was all because of faith. Martin Luther writes, "Faith is a living bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it." This was the faith Noah had; he trusted in the word of God and did what God commanded.

Now we know that Noah was a sinner just like all people born on earth. His calling by God was based not on who Noah was but solely upon grace and divine mercy. The Holy Spirit filled Noah with an active and living faith. It was a faith that trusted in the promises of God, including the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the One who died on the Cross to save us from all our sins.

God used the ark to save Noah and his family from the flood that destroyed the earth. Today God uses the Church to protect you from this world and to keep you afloat in the floods of life. The Church is the Holy Ark that helps the people of God receive the Gifts God has given to us. Through preaching, teaching, and the right administration of the Sacraments, the Lord God strengthens our faith and protects us in this world of sin. So it is good that we remember Noah, a man of God and an heir of righteousness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty and eternal God, continue to help us live by faith, trusting in your righteousness for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.*

# St. Andrew, Apostle

NOVEMBER 30, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** John 1:35-42a

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 6:1-7:9; 1 Peter 2:13-25

*The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"*

*(John 1:35-36)*

In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen. John the Baptist's job was to point the way to Jesus, and he was good at his job. In John's Gospel we read about the calling of a disciple of John, Andrew, who heard the Word and followed it. The name Andrew means "manly" or "valor," and throughout his life, he accomplished many physical things. A fisherman by trade, he worked with his whole body, and this training helped him when he was called to be an apostle. Andrew's job was to proclaim the message of the Gospel and to bring people to Christ.

Right from the beginning, he did just that. The Gospel of John tells us, "He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah'" (John 1:41). This drive to bring people to Jesus filled the life of Andrew, and he continued to go forth into all the world to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world. Eusebius, a church historian, writes that Andrew went as far as Kiev, which is now in the Ukraine, in order that people might come to a knowledge of the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done. According to tradition, Andrew died after being tied to an X-shaped cross in Greece.

We remember Andrew this day because the Body of Christ should always remember and give thanks to God for the people He has called to share the Gospel of Christ. The apostle Andrew was a blessing to the Church and to the people of God, for the Lord used this simple fisherman to proclaim His message into the ears of people who were lost in sin and needed a Savior.

The Holy Spirit used Andrew, and He uses us today. As believers in Christ, we go to church and receive the Gifts God gives to us through preaching, teaching, and the Sacraments. These things fill us up and lead us to share the message of Christ. In so doing, the Holy Spirit works through us to proclaim the Good News to those still in darkness. In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen.

*All praise, O Lord, for Andrew, The first to welcome You, Whose witness to his brother Named You Messiah true. May we, with hearts kept open To You throughout the year, Confess to friend and neighbor Your advent ever near.*

*("By All Your Saints in Warfare" LSB 517, st.5)*



# Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 1, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Husbands  
**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 7:10-8:8; 1 Peter 3:1-22

*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. (Colossians 3:19)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther lays out Scripture passages that point out the duties Christians are to follow in their daily lives. This list has different categories for the stations or vocations that you might find yourselves in. There are two Bible verses in the section which pertains to husbands. The first one is 1 Peter 3:7, where husbands are told to be considerate of their wives and to treat them with respect so that their prayers might not be hindered. This is important because if a husband is sinning against his wife, then his prayers will be frustrated; one caught in sin is less likely to talk to God.

In the second verse (above), Paul tells husbands to love their wives. The English says, "Do not be harsh," but this does not get to the point Paul is trying to make. The Greek word means "make bitter." Scripture is telling husbands that the way they treat their wives will cause wives to react in certain ways. If the husband is rough or rude, then the wife will become sharp and cruel in response. This will lead to sin and to a damaging of the relationship that God established. Husbands must guard their words and pay attention to what they say. When they fall into sin, they must repent and ask Christ and their wives for forgiveness.

A marriage will only work well if it is undertaken with love, repentance, and the forgiveness that Christ has earned on the Cross. At the same time, these words are important for all people. The way we treat others affects them, and it can cause them to react. As children of God, you are called by God to love your neighbor, to show him the love and forgiveness that God has given to you. As you do this, you are bearing witness to the love of Christ that is in you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Oh God, our dwelling place in all generations, look with favor upon the homes of our land. Embrace husbands and wives, parents and children, in the arms of your love, and grant that each, in reverence for Christ, fulfill their duties You have given. Bless our homes that they may ever be a shelter for the defenseless, a fortress for the tempted, a resting place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home with You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

# Thursday of the First Week in Advent

## DECEMBER 2, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Jeremiah 23:5-8

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 8:9-9:7; 1 Peter 4:1-19

*The Lord is our righteousness.*

*(Jeremiah 27:7)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord promises that He will raise up from the righteous branch of David a King who will reign with wisdom and justice. Unlike earthly kings who are selfish, fallible, and unjust, this King will be perfect. His kingdom will have no end, and people will come into it from the ends of the earth.

Oh, what a great day for God's people! No longer will they fear those around them. No longer will there be bloodshed, pestilence, and war. This King shall set up a wall around His people that no one can breach. Naturally, the people look forward to that day. They want to know when it will come and who that King will be. In grace and mercy the Lord tells Jeremiah the Name of this great King: "The Lord is our righteousness."

What a title. God is telling His people that the King will come one day to lead and save them. This King will, by His very name, point out the truth. In the "Formula of Concord" we confess, "Christ alone is our Righteousness, who is true God and man, because in Him the divine and human natures are personally united with each other." Jesus is the true King for whom the people of old have waited for so long.

It is the same for us today. During the season of Advent, we await the coming of the Lord. The days pass, and the anticipation builds as we all wait for Christmas. The day that the Child born of Mary was laid in the manger is the day that "the Lord is our righteousness" came into this world.

Our sin has destroyed our relationship with the Father and has made us His enemy. You and I can never make ourselves righteous before God. It is only because of the true King and the sacrifice that He offered on the Cross that we are made right. Jesus is true righteousness for all mankind. Without Jesus, no one can ever be right with God, for Christ alone has died and been raised for the forgiveness of all our sins and has brought us into His kingdom. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, we give thanks that Your righteousness has come into this world of sin. We pray that you would send forth Your Gospel into a world that needs to hear about the King. Continue to guide and direct us by your Holy Word so that we might remain alert until you return again. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.*



# Friday of the First Week of Advent

DECEMBER 3, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Romans 13:11-14

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 9:8-10:11; 1 Peter 5:1-14

*For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Wake up! He is coming! He will be here soon! Get ready! The days of Advent pass quickly, and soon Jesus will be here. Christmas is in 21 days; will you be ready? The Church is always in a state of tension. Eagerly awaiting the coming of the Savior, we recognize that "salvation is nearer to us now" than ever before. Each day that passes on this earth is a day closer to when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. It is on that day that we will see our salvation face to face.

What a day of great joy that will be, for no longer will we live in a land of darkness, a land filled with sin and death. Given a new heavenly body perfect in every way, all who are baptized and believe in Christ will receive everlasting peace because of His death on the Cross. Living in the new heavens and earth, we will no longer struggle with the things of this world.

Until that time, however, we will daily continue to struggle against our own sinful flesh. Because of the faith we have been given by the Holy Spirit, we are called by God to walk properly and live as forgiven sinners. Children of God, you and I must fight against the passions of the flesh. We cannot do it on our own, so we return each and every day to our Baptism. There we drown the old Adam and put on the new man in Christ. Then we go forth speaking and acting as God intends us to, keeping the commandments of God, living in the forgiveness we have been given.

This time of waiting passes quickly, but we have preparations to make. Things must be done. Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ means we must return each day to the pages of Holy Scripture. It is there that we read, mark, learn, and take all the things God wants us to know and to do to heart so that we might live in the light of Christ while we await His return. Our salvation is near. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Hurry. Do not delay in bringing the blessed day when the hope of happy redemption will be fulfilled. For this reason you have ask us to pray: Your kingdom come. Since you have so commanded us to pray, give us grace and help to pray diligently, firmly believing that we shall finally come to such glory. Amen.*  
(Luther's Prayers)

# Saturday of the First Week of Advent

DECEMBER 4, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Introit for the Second Sunday in Advent

(Psalm 25:4–5, 21–22; antiphon: v.25:1–3a)

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 10:12–27, 33–34; 2 Peter 1:1–21

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. (Psalms 25:4)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If you are out walking in the woods, you want to find a clear path. Without a path, the way can be treacherous. Branches, brambles, and loose stones cause you to stumble and will impede your progress. Tripping and sliding with every step, you are in real danger of twisting an ankle or breaking a leg. After a while, you grow weary of all the work. Then you become discouraged, and in the end, you wonder if it is really worth the effort.

However, if you are walking through the woods on a deer trail or a man-made path, the going is much easier. A path that has been traveled over and over is smoother. The branches are pushed back, and loose stones are not in the road. As a young boy, King David was a shepherd, so he knew the importance of a good path in the wilderness of this world. In the psalms, David tells us that there is one path that will lead us out of every trouble.

The path that we need to follow is the path of the Lord. Only God can teach us His path. In the pages of Holy Scripture, we have a path that leads us through the wilderness of this land. On this path there is truth, life, and salvation. By following this path, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and into the true light of heaven. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, you have been brought to this path. All who believe in Christ and who have received by faith the sacrifice that He offered by His death on the Cross have received the salvation of the Lord. Because of Jesus we will never be put to shame, for He leads us into the way of His truth and onto the path of life everlasting.

David asks that the Lord would make known to him His ways and to teach him His paths. We also need to make this request each day to the Lord. God promises to lead us on His path, and this path can be found in the pages of Holy Scripture and in church where we hear and receive all the Gifts God has for us. In the preaching, in Absolution, and in the Lord's Supper, we receive all that we need to support us as we walk on the path of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Help us, dear Lord, to continue to walk on your path. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.*

# The Second Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 5, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Luke 21:25-36

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 11:1-12:6; 2 Peter 2:1-22

*"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As the Day of Judgment draws near, the world in which we live will become even more chaotic. There will be signs and wonders. We will have wars. There will be storms and plagues. The earth will quake, and the whole world will be in turmoil. At this time, there will be many people in this world who will be terrified. The life they once knew will be coming quickly to an end, and even the heavens will be shaken. During a situation like this it would be easy for us to run around in a panic, to throw our hands in the air and give in to fear for what is about to happen. It would be a natural thing to do because deep down, we know that all this is happening because of us and our sin. Sinners will always face judgment, and, as we have learned, the wages of sin is always death.

However, Jesus tells us that on that day when the Son of Man comes in a cloud and with great power and glory, we are not to fear. Instead of being sinners terrified by what we have done, you and I are to lift up our heads and look to the heavens because on that cloud comes our redemption. What a great comfort this is for us! You see, the great Judge who is coming on that day into this world is Jesus, our redemption. He alone paid the price necessary to save us from our sins. His blood shed on the Cross has brought us forgiveness, peace, salvation, and everlasting life.

No longer do we need to fear the Day of Judgment. On that day we will not see an angry judge; instead you and I will see and hear the voice of our dear Shepherd. He will say on that day, "Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest."

So we watch and wait, gathering together as the Body of Christ, encouraging one another through songs, prayers, and by the Word of God. We're staying awake until Jesus returns, and He will come soon. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.*

*(Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent)*

# Nicholas of Myra, Pastor

## DECEMBER 6, 2021

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**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 14:1-23; 2 Peter 3:1-18

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If you were to look at the stories that surround the birth and life of Nicholas of Myra, you will very quickly begin to think, "What a great man!" If one can believe the tales, during his Baptism as an infant, he stood in the baptismal font for three hours on his own in reverence to the Holy Trinity. Then he refused to drink milk from his mother on Wednesdays and Fridays until after evening prayers so as to begin a life of fasting in honor of God. Later on, Nicholas cast purses down chimneys so that a poor man's daughters might have dowries. According to the legends, Nicholas was a saint his whole life. So it should not surprise us that he eventually became modeled into Santa Claus because of all the gifts he would give to those in need.

Nicholas's life story seems a bit far fetched, and perhaps not all of the stories are true. But what is true is that Nicholas, the archbishop of Myrna, was a child of God, and throughout his life he grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. His life and all the great things he did were not for his own glory. Instead, all that he accomplished pointed to the faith that he had received from the Holy Spirit. Nicholas was a sinner just like you and I. He died, and his death testified to the fact that he failed to perfectly keep the Law. Nicholas needed Jesus and the gift that He purchased by His innocent suffering and death on the Cross. Nicholas needed Christ to forgive him of all his sins.

Now years later we celebrate the life of Nicholas not because of who he was, but because of what the Holy Spirit led him to do. This man is a saint just as you and I are saints, but not because of our works, not because of all the great things we accomplish, but because of Christ our Savior. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Father in Heaven, we give thanks for the examples that you have given to us in the saints who have gone before. We ask that you continue to lead us to do good works so that we might also reflect Your glory and share the message of Christ with those around us. Amen.*

# Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 7, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Malachi 4:1-6

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 24:1-13; 1 John 1:1-2:14

*"But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."  
(Malachi 4:2a)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The prophet Malachi was told by God to proclaim the coming judgment of the Lord. On that day, the Lord would come with great glory and might, and the arrogant and all evil doers would be set ablaze. The day of the Lord was a day of judgment for the sins of the people. This day of the Lord came to the nation of Israel when the holy city Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

This day will also come on the final day when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. On that day all people who have lived on this earth will have to stand before the Judge and give an account of all that they have done. Can you imagine the feeling of dread and fear that will arise as the sins of a whole life are laid before the unrelenting gaze of the perfect Son of God? For those without Christ, it will be a day of great sadness. Their sins will condemn them. They will be judged and cast into the fires of hell to spend eternity under the wrath of God.

However, for all those in Christ, this will be a day of great healing. Malachi tells us that the sun of righteousness will arise with healing. Our sins will be no more because the blood of Jesus will cleanse us. This healing was bought for you on the Cross when Jesus, the true Son of righteousness, gave up His life willingly. He died so that you might be forgiven. You and I need never fear the Day of Judgment because on that day we will stand before the judge and hear that we are forgiven. Then we will be welcomed into heaven along with all believers because of Jesus's sacrifice. What a great gift that has been given to us through faith! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O Lord, I do not deserve a glimpse of heaven, and I am unable with my works to redeem myself from sin, death, the devil, and hell. Nevertheless, you have given me your Son, Jesus Christ, who is far more precious and dear than heaven, and much stronger than sin, death, the devil, and hell. For this I rejoice, praise, and thank you, O God. Without cost and out of pure grace you have given me this boundless blessing in your dear Son. Through Him you take sin, death and hell from me, and do grant me all that belongs to him. Amen. (Luther's Prayers)*

# Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 8, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, to Wives

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 24:14-25:12; 1 John 2:15-29

*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*

*(Ephesians 5:22)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the **Small Catechism**, Martin Luther continues to list out the duties that those who are in Christ are called by God to do. Under the category of wives, Luther simply points to Paul's letter to the Ephesians where Paul writes that wives are to submit to their husbands.

When many people hear the word "submit," they immediately get upset. How dare someone tell a wife that she should yield her power and authority to her husband! However, the Greek word that is translated "submit" means that the wife, through the working of the Holy Spirit, will put herself under obedience to her husband in the same way that she is under obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. For just as Jesus is the Head of the Church, and His Bride put Herself under His leadership, so the wife does for her husband.

Now the idea of placing oneself under the authority of someone else is hard for our sinful flesh. All of us want to be the boss. We want to be god and do what we desire. There are many times in the life of the Christian that we do not want to submit to Jesus and what He has written in His Holy Word. Instead we struggle and fight, trying to find a way to ignore the parts of Scripture we don't like. However, Scripture cannot be broken, and we all must repent of this sin. We must turn away from our failings and learn to submit ourselves to Christ, the Head, and to ask His forgiveness. Humbling ourselves, we confess our sins, and Christ forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

In order for marriage to work in a God-pleasing manner, the wife is called by God to submit to her husband. In doing so, she is simply doing the task that God has given to her. So also, all Christians are called by God to submit to Christ, to place ourselves under His authority, and to listen to all that He has spoken to us. When we do this, we are living as God has called us to live, and this is good and pleasing to Him. For as we submit to Christ through faith, we are freely given His grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord, help us all to submit to the authority that you have placed over us. Forgive us when we fail and continue to guide us into the way of all truth. In Jesus's Name we pray. Amen.*

# Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 9, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Romans 15:4-13

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 26:1-19; 1 John 3:1-24

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,  
that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures  
we might have hope.* (Romans 15:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever wondered why the Old Testament was written? All those pages of names and actions of people who rebelled against God? Now once in a while, we read about a fairly good guy--maybe an Abraham, Moses, or David--but more often we read about a Cain, Samson, or Ahab. Books of the Old Testament are filled with life stories of men and women who knew the truth. They heard the voice of God in the wilderness. They saw the pillar of fire. They had eaten the bread of heaven. The prophet of God had come and had spoken to them, yet they kept right on falling into sin.

Why were all these sinners written about in the Old Testament? Why did God choose to share with us the stories of all these imperfect people? Well, in the book of Romans, Paul tells us that Scripture was written so that we might have instruction, encouragement, and hope.

The Bible has pages upon pages of instruction so that we might see what God requires of us. The Bible is filled with the stories of men and women who failed to listen to God so that you and I might see that we are in good company because we, too, fail to listen to the Lord. The pages of Holy Scripture are filled with the encouragement of the grace, mercy, and long-suffering love of God. For God so loved the world that even before the fall into sin, He planned to send His Son to redeem us from all our sin.

The pages of Holy Scripture are written so that we might have hope. In the Bible we receive the glorious message of salvation. We learn that Christ came, took our place, and suffered our punishment. Jesus died on the Cross to forgive us and all those sinners in the Old Testament who had faith and trusted in the Lord. Instruction, encouragement, and hope--these are the reasons that the Holy Spirit caused the men of God to write the Bible. What a great gift we have received by the hand of God! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O Holy and most merciful God, who by your Word has taught us the truth of who we are and what we need. Continue to pour out your grace and mercy upon us so that we might live for you. In Jesus's Name we pray. Amen.*



# Friday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 10, 2021

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**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 26:20-27:13; 1 John 4:1-21

*In this the love of God has made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the World, so that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The love of God is made known to us by the coming of Jesus. During the season of Advent, we prepare for the coming of the Messiah. In John's first epistle, we read about true love, the love that your Father in heaven has for you. God loved you in that He sent His only Son into this world of sin. Jesus is the clearest picture of love that we will ever see. His life, His actions, His words, His miracles--everything that He did on earth proclaimed the love that He has for us men even though we did not deserve this love.

All of us were dead in our sins and enemies of God. We were the most unlovable people you could ever imagine. Our nature is selfish and filled with sin. As children of wrath, we love ourselves first. We hate one another, and we most certainly do not love God. Without a Savior we could never be right with God. Our sins have condemned us, and left on our own, we would be in hell.

Jesus knew that without His love we would never love one another and we would never love God. So He willingly gave up His throne and came to earth. Born of the Virgin Mary, Christ came out of the womb, born in the same way as all men. Yet He was unique, for He came into this world without sin. Loved by His Father, He loved perfectly in return. Doing the will of Father, He set out to fulfill the Law by loving the Lord His God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength and by loving His neighbor as Himself. Jesus went to the Cross, suffering all shame and facing the divine wrath of His Father on account of sin. Jesus suffered in our place and paid our price. Jesus died for you. Jesus' love flowed down in the blood and the water. His love brought forth life and salvation to all who believe. The love Christ had for you kept Him on the Cross, and His sacrifice was accepted.

Jesus died. However, the grave could not hold Him, and because of His love for you, the grave will not hold you either. This is the love of God--sinners receiving life and salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for making known to us true love in the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Amen.*

# Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 11, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Introit for the Third Sunday in Advent  
(Psalm 80:1, 3, 14, 17; antiphon: Isaiah 62:11b; 30:30, 29)

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 28:14-29; 1 John 5:1-21

*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

*(From the Introit for the Third Sunday In Advent)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever restored anything, maybe an old car or a house or even a piece of furniture that has seen better days? If so, you know the hours that it can take. Restoring old furniture can be a lot of work. Scraping off layers upon layers of old paint. Sanding creases, grooves, and scratches. Smoothing out the finish and finally whipping on a new coat of finish. Yes, time and effort are needed in order to make that which is old, dirty, and broken into a revived thing of beauty.

Restoring things takes effort and dedication, and throughout the process, the item in question does nothing to help. Wood and metal just stand there dead and lifeless, waiting on the hands and the keen eye of the one who restores in order to bring them to life again.

The writer of Psalm 80 knew that only God can restore the brokenness of mankind. This is the cry of the psalmist in the Introit for today. The writer wants the Lord God to restore His people. He wants the rough edges sanded down, the old crackled paint to be removed, the scratches and blemishes to be made like new, and finally for a new finish to be put on the people.

Sinners always need to be restored, and it is only God who can do these things. The Lord delights in His chosen people; they are His creation. It is the desire of the Lord to shine forth with a face filled with grace and mercy. He wants His people to be made new. It is only by the work of God that we who are dead, lifeless pieces are brought to life once again. Jesus brings us to life. His atonement has brought us salvation. In Baptism we are covered with Christ's righteousness, and the old, sinful stain is removed so that we are made right with God.

What a great gift we receive all the days of our life! Now, because of Christ, God's face shines upon us. He looks down from heaven and sees Jesus, and we are restored saints, children of God, waiting for the coming of Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the restoration that you give to us each and every day in the waters of Baptism. Help us always to be mindful of the gifts we receive from your bountiful hand and continue to order our lives to your praise and glory. Through Jesus's Name we pray. Amen.*

# The Third Sunday in Advent

## DECEMBER 12, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Matthew 11:2-11

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 29:1-14; Jude 1-25

*Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."* (Matthew 11:2-6)

In the Name of + Jesus. Amen. Why did John send his disciples to Jesus? Some say he did what any great teacher would do, he sent his students to find the truth. He sent them to be catechized by Jesus. Others say that John was struggling himself. He had been in jail for a year. He was almost certain his life would end there in prison. He had questions, questions for Jesus.

A lot of ink has been spilled trying to answer the question of why John sent his disciples. The answer is probably a combination of both. The important thing is not why John did what he did, but what did Jesus do in response?

Jesus directed John's disciples, and John and us to look at the evidence. "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." Jesus did not direct them to look into their hearts, or at their own emotions. He directed them to see Jesus' authority over disease, dysfunction, doubt, and death.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we vacillate, daily, between a sure and certain hope in Jesus' atoning death on the Cross and saying, "Are you the one to come, or shall we look for another?"

Daily we find our hope in what Jesus has done. Our blind eyes read His "Good News" and see His Cross and empty grave. That gives us His peace. Daily our old deaf Adam is drowned when we make the sign of the cross. Through our Baptism our ears are opened by His Spirit to hear His life-giving words of forgiveness for all our sins, including sins of doubt, worry, and fear. Daily our future death would try to rob us of our sure and certain hope. Jesus was in the grave first. It could not hold Him. It cannot hold you. Your hope is not in "why." It is in what Jesus has done for you! In the Name of + Jesus. Amen.

*Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

*(Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent)*

# Monday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 13, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 40:1-11

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 29:15-30:14; Revelation 1:1-20

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. . .*

*(Isaiah 40:1-3)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It was the first week of school at Concordia Nebraska. I was in the commons visiting with the food service manager and I asked, "What's on the menu?" He said, "Mac and cheese, meatloaf and mashed potatoes, grilled cheese and tomato soup. Comfort food. These incoming freshmen need something to make them feel at home when they are not at home."

We all need comfort because we are not at home. We're here, sinners, in a broken, sinful world. Broken relationships leave us bitter and untrusting. Sinful, lustful thoughts drive us to steal the gifts of the Sixth Commandment. The world around us sings a siren song of selfishness and life without suffering. Sin always has consequences, and when the weight of my sin comes crashing down on me, I expect the worst. My guess is you do the same. That is how this broken world works. You get what you deserve without mercy. But that's not how our good and gracious God works. God's Word does what it promises. God's Word is formative. It accomplishes what it says. "Comfort!" Comfort is what it promises. Jesus on the Cross, forgiveness of sins and peace are what it delivers.

God's people didn't do anything to earn or merit God's favor. Quite the opposite. They chased false gods, and they rebelled against His authority. Completely broken, without any hope, and God gives Jerusalem "double for all her sins." Not double wrath or punishment. Not double death or eternity in hell times two. Double gift from a tender and forgiving God. He sent us Jesus who died and rose again. He gives us grace and mercy! Forgiveness and peace! Comfort and joy! Our risen Savior gives us the greatest comfort food ever as His Body and Blood are put into our mouths. Take and eat, take and drink for the forgiveness of ALL your sins.

We are not at home yet. One day soon we will be with the Lord. Sin will be done. Hell will be sealed. Until then, rest in His comfort and promises for you today. In the Name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

*The gifts Christ freely gives He gives to you and me To be His Church, His bride His chosen, saved and free! Saints blest with these rich gifts Are children who proclaim That they were won by Christ And cling to His strong name.*

*("The Gifts Christ Freely Gives" LSB 602, st.1)*

# Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 14, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 30:15-26; Revelation 2:1-29

*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.* (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever read your school's student handbook, or an employee handbook from work? They are not page turners, that's for sure! They are dry, dull, and lead to despair. The handbook has one purpose. It clearly shows the rules. It shows the law. Any infraction of the rules and you are out. The handbook's purpose is three-fold. It seeks to identify who you are. It seeks to define what you are to do. And it lays out consequences when you forget your identity or responsibility.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 4 may sound very much like a student handbook. Our identity is "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Our responsibility is to be "found faithful." And the consequences for our failure, the consequence for our sin, is the judgment of God. If you read Paul's encouragement to the apostles through the lens of the Law only, it will lead to despair. We are not faithful. No student, no employee, no sinner is ever completely faithful. Because of that we should be found guilty, suspended, or fired.

Now look at your identity as God intended it to be seen. Not based on what others say about you. Not on your perceived keeping of the Law. Look at your identity through Jesus. You are a servant and steward. You have been bought back from certain and eternal death by the blood of the sinless Lamb of God shed for you on the Cross. You are an adopted child, into a holy and loving family, through your Baptism. Your identity is not based on you at all. It is not based on your success or your failure. Thank God! Your identity is rooted in the magnanimous love of God for you.

In your Baptism you were brought into the Priesthood of all believers. A steward reflects the will and wishes of the Master. As stewards we are merciful even as our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36). We forgive as we have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12). We love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Through Gospel eyes, which see Jesus on the Cross atoning for all your sin, you do not fear God's judgment. He judged Jesus for you. All your unfaithfulness, all your sin was placed on Jesus and died on His Cross. You are forgiven. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

*Spirit, water, blood entreating, Working faith and its completing In the One whose death-defeating Life has come, with life for all.*

*("Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying" LSB 597, st.6)*

# Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 15, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Parents

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 30:27-31:9; Revelation 3:1-22

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4)

In the Name of ✠ Jesus. Amen. I remember the look well. I had said something to one of our kids that was insensitive and rooted in anger. I knew better, but the argument had exhausted my patience and I answered with a statement I would never have let our kids say. My very next words were, "Please forgive me; that was wrong." The look from our child was one of astonishment! Instead of being told, by me, to ask for forgiveness our child was being asked to forgive me. For the first time our child began to put together the idea that we all, --parents, children, family, and friends,-- receive and give the forgiveness won for us by Christ on the Cross.

The Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," might seem to come from the top down in its application, and to some extent it does. It is the head of the household's responsibility, given by God, to teach this to the old Adam in our children. It is also the head of the household's responsibility to hear and heed what Paul writes: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Dr. Luther is very clear. At the beginning of each of the Six Chief Parts is this directive: "As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household." Your parents should be the primary faith teachers for you. Let's face it: Not all parents do a good job of this. Sometimes our anger gets the best of us. Sometimes when the hard questions are asked, we don't have a good answer, and we get defensive. Sometimes we simply fail in this part of our vocation.

You are forgiven! Remember that. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger," is a clear reminder that we need the forgiveness that freely and lovingly flowed from Jesus' hands and head. The rest of that verse, "but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," is Gospel for parents and children. Even though we sin and fall short of the glory of God, we are not disqualified from teaching our children. We are forgiven completely by Jesus. Even though we are not perfect teachers, the Holy Spirit continues to equip us. Our children learn by what we teach and what we model. We receive forgiveness and we give forgiveness. In the Name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

*Oh, blest that house; it prospers well. In peace and joy the parents dwell, And in their children's lives is shown How richly God can bless His own.*

*("Oh, Blest the House" LSB 862, st. 4)*

# Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 16, 2021

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**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 32:1-20; Revelation 4:1-11

*At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.*  
(Revelation 4:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Can you imagine seeing what John saw? In a divine vision John is brought into the holy throne room of God. The throne in the center is where Jesus sits. He has ascended from His work on earth. He is exalted. His humiliating work of the Cross, His death and the grave are done. He has honored His Father's promise to send us hope. He has crushed Satan's head and completed His divine work (Genesis 3:15). He is completely and totally alive and victorious.

We are redeemed, forgiven, and justified by His blood as a total and complete sacrifice for ALL sin, for your sin. The angels shout, "Holy, Holy, Holy," just like in the vision Isaiah saw (Isaiah 6:3). The glory! The majesty! It is almost too much for words to describe!

John was taken into this heavenly throne room to give absolute hope that God will triumph over sin, death, and the devil. There is hope and it is for you.

What John saw can seem like a distant dream for us. We are here in the world that is fiercely divided. A difference of opinion divides you and your BFF. The culture pushes against everything you hear in church. If you disagree with your teachers or professors or are bold enough to say, "That is not true," you become a target. Fear not, dear saint. There is hope! Real, physical hope, for you, here on earth!

When you gather for the Divine Service, our victorious Lord brings hope to you. You hear the result of His Calvary victory for you when your pastor pronounces the forgiveness of all your sins. You are fully free and forgiven. You hear God's Word preached to you, and it points you to the Cross where Jesus beat every enemy, for you! We sing what John heard the angels sing when we sing the Sanctus: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of power and might." When the pastor lifts the Body and Blood of Jesus up, in, with, and under the bread and wine, and says, "The peace of the Lord be with you always," we have hope! Jesus is lifted up from death's dominion. Jesus is lifted up into heaven and is sitting on His throne waiting to return. And then, hope comes to you. Take and eat; this is the Body of Christ. Take and drink; this is the Blood of Christ for you, for your forgiveness, for eternal and everlasting hope! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee, Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see, Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee, Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.*  
(*"Holy, Holy, Holy" LSB 507, st. 4*)



# Daniel the Prophet and the Three Young Men

DECEMBER 17, 2021

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**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 33:1-24; Revelation 5:1-14

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*  
(Daniel 3:16-18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When you were confirmed, you were asked, "Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?" And you answered. "I do, by the grace of God." You are in good company. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not use the same words but made the same confession.

Daniel and these three young men lived in rapidly changing times. They lived in the disappointments and temptations of exile. Golden idols with the threat of death if they did not bow down demanded a faithful confession. Ordinances that demand you pray to King Darius were in direct conflict with faithfully serving the one true God whom Daniel and we serve.

Our world is rapidly changing as well. "Woke" and "cancel culture" push hard to have you bow down to their will. Pressure to achieve and perform push us to conform to the will of a broken sinful world, sacrificing faithfulness to our faithful God.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faithful. They worshiped God. Their confession did not waver. Even when they looked into the lion's den or stood at the mouth of the fiery furnace, they did not worship false gods. They did not give in to fear. Their confession was, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us."

Our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has served us first, is able to deliver us. Every enemy, defeated. Every sin atoned for by "the Son of man," and His kingdom shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13). The fear that tries to paralyze and silence our faithful confession cannot withstand the baptismal identity which God has given you. You are a child of God, faithful and forgiven. Your confession is the same as Daniel and the three young men. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen

*I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me; Within His wounds I find a stay  
When Satan's pow'r assails me; And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread.  
No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.*  
(*"I Walk in Danger All the Way"* LSB 716, st.5)

# Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 18, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Introit for the Fourth Sunday in Advent  
(Psalm 19:1, 4-6; antiphon: Isaiah 45:8a)

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 34:1-2, 8-35:10; Revelation 6:1-17

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his  
handiwork. (From the Introit for the Fourth Sunday in Advent)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I live in an area that is not affected by light pollution. One of the great joys I have is looking up at the night sky. On a cold January evening, when the days are short, it is easy to see the Milky Way. Science estimates that between 100 and 400 billion stars hang in our little corner of the night sky. They also want to date the birth of the Milky Way back millions or even billions of years.

The psalmist writes "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." So, which is it? Millions and billions of years or "and God said" on the fourth day? If you have ever thrown a pot, or built a birdhouse, or created anything, you know the created does not rule the creator. The clay does not say to the potter, "I prefer two handles, not one." The creator creates and the created receives. The hands of the potter form and shape and fire, and the pot receives its shape and purpose.

Since the fall of man, we the created have been giving orders to the Creator. Not six 24-hour days but millions and billions of years! When the created mimics the role of creator, the created will always be empty and unfulfilled. That is why created mankind, who refuses to live under the reign of the Creator God, continually pushes for change. They seek purpose, security, and independence from the eternal enemy of death.

Looking up at the Milky Way, or at the majesty of a mountain waterfall clearly shows us that there is a creator. Looking at the way God dealt with Adam and Eve after they sought to be like Him shows us His mercy. He did not give them what they deserved. He gave them a promise. He gave them, and us, a Savior. Looking at the Cross of Jesus we see our benevolent and gracious Creator offering His only begotten Son as the total and complete payment for our sin.

The Creator creates. He speaks creation into existence. He speaks words of forgiveness and peace to you through the blood of the perfect sacrifice, His Son. We, the created, receive. We live in His peace and promise. We have joy and purpose as we declare His glory and care for His First Article Gifts. In the Name ✠ Jesus. Amen.

*Voices raised to You we offer; Tune them, God, for songs of praise. Hearts and hands we bring in tribute For Your gifts through all our days. Alleluia! Alleluia! Triune God, to You we sing! ("Voices Raised to You We Offer" LSB 795, st.1)*

# The Fourth Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 19, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** John 1:19-28

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 40:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17

*And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."  
(John 1: 19-20)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I love Advent. I love preaching about John the Baptizer preparing the way of the Lord and preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John knew who he was. He knew his purpose was to point to the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He did not try to ride on Christ's coat tails. He did not try to carve out a higher place for himself. John was confident about two things. He said, "I am not the Christ" and he knew he was not worthy to untie the strap of Jesus' sandals.

A very wise pastor once told me there are really only two things one needs to know to be a faithful pastor. The first is that there is one God who forgave your sins through His Son Jesus on the Cross. The second, and most important is, that you are not Him! When we keep that in mind things are easier.

Pride often gets us into trouble. Taking pride in your work or your family is a good thing. But pride takes a dangerous turn when we elevate or trust in ourselves. Check out the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18.

Jesus said of John, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John" (Luke 7:28). That is high praise! And yet John did not let that accolade go to his head. John preached repentance, and he preached the Law, so people would see Jesus as their only hope and Savior.

John, being the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New, knew who Jesus was. Savior, Redeemer, the perfect and complete sacrifice for your pride and arrogance. He also knew his own sin. He was not worthy to untie Jesus' Converse.

John's boldness in preaching and pointing was not to elevate himself. It was to open blind eyes to the reality of sin and death. His preaching pointed to a long hoped-for promise of a Messiah. His preaching brought comfort, comfort to all like us who know our sin and cling confidently to our Savior, His Cross, and our forgiveness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
Amen.*

*(Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent)*

# Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 20, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Deuteronomy 18:15-19

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 40:18-41:10; Revelation 8:1-13

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.* (Deuteronomy 18:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If there was anyone who spoke the Law of God to His people, it was Moses. At God's command, Moses was the Lawgiver. God wrote it with His fiery finger on Mt. Sinai and Moses carried it down to God's people. There were other faithful prophets like Aaron and Nathan, so why was Moses better? Why did God say, "I will raise up a prophet like you?"

Moses interceded for his people. They were afraid of God's harsh Law and did not want to deal with God directly, so Moses stood between them and God.

Moses delivered God's people. Moses stood before Israel's captor, Pharaoh, and spoke for God. "Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Exodus 4:23). God used Moses to put the Passover in place, where blood and a lamb would defend His people from death. God used Moses to lead those same people to the Promised land. This prophet will be hard to beat.

We are in the fourth week of Advent. Very soon we will celebrate when the sinless Son of God took on frail flesh and blood and was born into our world. In the manger in Bethlehem the greater Moses will be swaddled.

This greatest Prophet will also intercede for you. Because of your sin, God's wrath should destroy you, but there, between you and the wrath of God, is Jesus, the greater Moses, intervening on your behalf. This greatest Prophet hangs on the Cross for you. The Law that damns sinners is fulfilled completely by the greatest Prophet and then graciously gifted to you. The greater Moses, Christ the Lamb of God, delivered you from your death sentence.

Jesus is the greatest Prophet and the greatest Priest. He offered Himself as the greatest sacrifice. His blood shed, once for all, forgives you every sin of commission and omission. Jesus our great High Priest does not point us ahead to a future Savior. He fulfilled the Passover just like he fulfilled the Law of God, for you, dear saint. His blood shed. His body given to you, and you are forgiven.

Jesus is our great Prophet, greater than Moses. Jesus is our great High Priest, offering Himself as your total and complete sacrifice. In just a few days we remember again that Jesus is our great High King, born to serve, love, and forgive you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*His wondrous works and ways He made by Moses known, But sent the world His truth and grace By His beloved Son. ("O Bless the Lord, My Soul" LSB 814, st.6)*

# St. Thomas, Apostle

DECEMBER 21, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** John 20:24-29

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 42:1-25; Revelation 9:1-12

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:27-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It is a week after Jesus has risen from the dead and beaten our old evil foe of sin, death, and the devil. The disciples have locked themselves in again for fear of the Jews. Thomas is with them this time. On the first resurrection morning he was someplace else. Jesus' first words to them, both on that first resurrection morning and now a week later were the same: "Peace be with you." Jesus' words to them were more than a polite greeting. Peace was a fact, a sure and certain reality. From the moment Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and gave up His life as our sinless sacrifice, we all have peace with God. Even Thomas.

Thomas' situation was far more serious than "doubting." He was unbelieving, rejecting Jesus and the gifts He brings. So Jesus does what He does so well. He calls unbelieving sinners to Himself. Okay, Thomas, here is what you need. Touch my hands; touch my side. And then Jesus said this: "Do not disbelieve but believe." With a word Jesus spoke faith into Thomas.

Saving faith is not a product of physical evidence. It is not a product of human reason or the will of man. In what Dr. Luther wrote about the Third Article of the creed we confess: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him."

Jesus calls unbelieving sinners to Himself. His means are simple. He speaks, we believe. Paul reminds us, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Saving faith is believing what Jesus says. He said we are forgiven, and we are because He took our sin and gave us His righteousness. He said all who die in the faith He has given will rise again, because He was the firstborn of the dead. He said to Thomas, "Believe," and Thomas did.

Believing in Jesus, as Thomas did, always produces fruit. Jesus called Thomas from death to life and Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God." Jesus says, "Believe and be baptized," and we are connected to Jesus' death on the Cross. Jesus says, "Call on Me," and we pray, and He answers, giving comfort and peace. Jesus says, "Take and eat and drink," and we are forgiven. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*We may not touch His hands and side, Nor follow where He trod; But in His promise we rejoice And cry "My Lord and God!"*

*("We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight" LSB 720, st.2)*

# Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 22, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Children  
**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 43:1-24; Revelation 9:13-10:11

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesians 6:1-3)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever thought about why your parents want you to obey them? Yes, on a very small level it's because they are tired of hounding you and reminding you again and again to do the things they ask. But there is a much, much, bigger reason. Your parents want you to obey them because there is a promise from God waiting there for you.

God has given you so many gifts. He has made you His own child in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has forgiven you at the cost of His own dear Son Jesus, who died on the Cross for all the times you have rolled your eyes or talked back to Mom or Dad. He has promised to guide you by His Law, so you see your salvation in Jesus alone.

God has given you parents who are a good and precious gift to you. Your parents have a very important role to fill. God has put them in your life to stand in His place. They are not to be God but to teach you and love you like God does.

Your parents are standing in for God to help you do your first vocation, your first job; that of their son or daughter. Just as you "fear, love and trust in God above all things," you are also to love and listen, honor, and obey your parents.

They are there to show you the love of God by bringing you to the Divine Service, where God gives us His good and precious Gifts and where we hear His promises preached.

When that early Sunday morning wake-up call comes, it is because your parents want the best for you, because they want God's Gifts given to you. They want you to see how God provides life for you, health for you, daily bread for you. They bring you to youth group and confirmation class in order to ground you in an unchanging promise that will carry you through when your world is rocked because of your sin and the brokenness of others.

Even though you might not agree with your parents, they are a gift from God to you, to teach and shape you. They want you to receive God's eternal gifts. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"You are to honor and obey Your father, mother, ev'ry day, Serve them each way that comes to hand; You'll then live long in the land." Have mercy, Lord!*  
*("These Are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581, st. 5)*

# Thursday of the Fourth Week of Advent

## DECEMBER 23, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Philippians 4:4-7

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 43:25-44:20; Revelation 11:1-19

*The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:5b-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You may have already realized that I did not start where you thought I might. I skipped vs. 4, and I suggest you read it after we are done. The true hope Paul has, that allows him to be so content in every situation, (Philippians 4:11), is in this Gospel good news promise: "The Lord is at hand!" It means that what He promises is here, right now, for you.

Today is the "day before," the day before the day when God put flesh on a long-standing promise. Emmanuel will come! God will take on flesh and blood and dwell among us. The Prince of Peace will bring what His Name describes. "The Lord is at hand" to calm our anxious hearts. About 18% of the United States is on medication for anxiety. Many more limp along without treatment. We worry, fret, and fear. The cares of the day, the season, our health, and family concerns keep us up at night. How is your anxiety level just two days before Christmas?

Anxiety is not new. Since sin came into the world sinners have been anxious. Jesus addresses anxiety directly in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6). Likewise, Paul directs our anxious lives to hope and peace: "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything." Did you notice how Paul did not direct you to the self-help section of the bookstore in order to decrease your stress? He simply and calmly says, "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything." Jesus brings peace.

For three years Jesus preached and healed and brought peace. He calmed an anxious wedding host who ran out of wine. He slowed anxious Martha from her frenzied serving. And with the completion of His work on the Cross, He forgave you and reconciled you to God.

Your past is forgiven. It died with Jesus on the Cross. The Lord is at hand. You are forgiven. The cares of today are not unknown to our omniscient (all-knowing) God. That is why He makes promises to you. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Now go read vs. 4. That is the result of living in the peace and forgiveness of Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Wait, then, in quiet confidence, Your anxious thoughts at rest. God knows your needs before you ask And works for what is best.*  
(*"Be Still, My Soul, before the Lord" LSB 771, st.3*)



# Christmas Eve

## DECEMBER 24, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 7:10-14

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 44:21-45:13, 20-25; Revelation 12:1-17

*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)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In his book on Christian doctrine, St. Augustine writes that there are two kinds of signs: natural and conventional. Natural signs are those that have a relation of cause and effect, such as smoke signifying fire or a paw print in the mud pointing to a particular kind of animal. On the other hand, conventional signs do not have any intrinsic relation to the things they signify. They point to ideas or feelings or theology. In fact, this page is filled with conventional signs. Words mean things because the shapes of the letters of the English alphabet signify certain things when they're arranged in a certain order.

But signs are not always clear. Sometimes signs are ambiguous: They could mean one thing; they could mean another thing. They could mean several things at once or nothing at all. Signs need to be interpreted properly. If you've ever been misinterpreted, you know how frustrating it is when you mean one thing and someone thinks you mean another.

God also gives signs. He gives natural signs, like a beautiful sunrise to signify His majesty and glory. He also gives conventional signs, like the Holy Scriptures. But His signs are often misinterpreted. So sometimes He gives a sign that is neither conventional nor natural. "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).

The Lord Himself provides the sign and the Lord Himself provides the interpretation. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matthew 1:22-23). The meaning of this sign isn't just an idea or a feeling or even theology. It's God Himself. The unconventional and unnatural sign of the virgin conception and birth signifies that God Himself is now with us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*We praise You, Jesus, at Your birth; Clothed in flesh You came to earth. The virgin bears a sinless boy And all the angels sing for joy. Alleluia!*  
*("We Praise You, Jesus, at Your Birth" LSB 382, st.1)*

# The Nativity of Our Lord

## DECEMBER 25, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Luke 2:1-20

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 49:1-18; Matthew 1:1-17

*"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*

*(Luke 2:14 NKJV)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. A peculiar choir gathers in the field outside Bethlehem. Angels gather before an audience of shepherds and sing a new song, for the Lord has done a marvelous thing. Their hymn of three parts praises the birth of Jesus and what it means for God and for us.

"Glory to God in the highest." Glory is revelation. The glory of God in the Old Testament was the visible manifestation of His presence in cloud and fire. But as the first chorus of the angels' hymn reverberates through the countryside, God makes Himself known in a new way. No longer wrapped in fire and clouds, the shepherds can find Christ the Lord wrapped in swaddling cloths. The flesh of a newborn baby is glory for God. The One who reigns in the highest has made Himself known by descending among the lowest.

"And on earth peace." Jesus was born in a time of relative peace in the world. But peace on earth is often maintained by force and threat of violence; the world is always on the edge of war. The peace that comes with the birth of Jesus isn't worldly peace, however. Since Adam's sin, humanity has been at enmity with God. The only solution for this war was for God's Son to cross enemy lines, to Himself become a man, and to suffer the violence that a ruler thought necessary to keep the peace. But by suffering violence, Jesus brings peace on earth. "Peace be with you," is the message of the resurrection (John 20:19).

"Goodwill toward men!" How does one please God? A mountain of good works won't begin to please Him; even our best works are like a pile of dirty rags. All our works are stained by bad intentions and inherited sin. But Jesus, the Son of the Virgin, earns His Father's pleasure by His obedience. "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," declares the Father's voice from heaven (Luke 4:22b). The same voice that declares God's goodwill at Jesus' Baptism also declares you to be His beloved son or daughter, and that He is pleased with you for the sake of Christ.

"Gloria in excelsis Deo." Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King. Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

*("Angels We Have Heard on High" LSB 368, st. 3)*

# St. Stephen, Martyr

## DECEMBER 26, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Acts 6:8-7:2, 51-60

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 49:22-26; 50:4-51:8, 12-16; Matthew 1:18-25

*But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God,  
and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You can't get one day into the season of Christmas without rocks flying. Yesterday was a day of joy, of glory for God, peace on earth, goodwill toward men. Today men grind their teeth in a rage at the message of Jesus. It's perhaps the second starkest contrast in the Church's entire year of grace. Jesus is born and then Stephen is martyred.

The Greek word "martyr" means "witness." A martyr is anyone who bears witness about anything and the content of their testimony is their "martyria." Eventually the term martyr took on a more specific meaning to denote anyone who bore witness to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus unto their own death. Their blood was the witness that they bore. Martyrdom was common in the early years of the Christian Church.

Stephen's martyria is one of the longest in Scripture. You should read the verses in between Acts 7:2 and 7:51. Stephen rehearses the history of Israel, then demonstrates that it all was a prelude to Jesus. Yet God's work is met with resistance every step of the way. Stiff-necked people always resist the Holy Spirit.

Stephen preached the Law and it enraged his opponents. But what got him killed is the essence of his martyria. "And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:56). It's interesting to note that every week in the creed we confess that Jesus sits at God's right hand, but Stephen specifically says that Jesus is standing.

This should remind us of the starkest contrast in the Church's entire year of grace. One Friday Jesus hangs on a tree until He is dead. And then on the Third Day after that, He stands again. That's what resurrection means--the dead man stands up again. And so Stephen's martyria is not a witness unto death, but a witness unto life--the life that we have in Christ. Stephen will stand again. And so will you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, in the midst of our sufferings for the sake of Christ grant us grace to follow the example of the first martyr, Stephen, that we also may look to the One who suffered and was crucified on our behalf and pray for those who do us wrong; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for St. Stephen, Martyr)*

# St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

DECEMBER 27, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** John 21:19-24

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 51:17-52:12; Matthew 2:1-12

*This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. (John 21:24)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. John wrote many things, including several letters and the book of Revelation. But many scholars of the Bible place John's Gospel at the very end of the apostolic era, and consider it perhaps the last book of the New Testament to be written. In the final years of his life, John sets down the life of Jesus one final time. His Gospel is different from those of colleagues Matthew, Mark, and Luke. As an evangelist, John is depicted as an eagle because his Gospel soars with rich theology.

The story of Jesus could have been written in many different ways. In fact, John himself testifies, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). But why did John write these things? And how do we know that his testimony is true?

John wrote the things that he wrote for a reason. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). John writes for faith and life--faith that Jesus is the Christ and God's Son, and the life that comes in His Name.

And we know that his testimony is true because it's not just his testimony. "He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth--that you also may believe" (John 19:35). He writes this just after he reports the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side when He died. The water and the blood testify with the Spirit (1 John 5:7-8). The testimony of John is the testimony of God. For you. For faith. For life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Merciful Lord, cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed in the doctrine of Your blessed apostle and evangelist John, may come to the light of everlasting life; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

*(Collect for St. John, Apostle and Evangelist)*

# The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

DECEMBER 28, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Matthew 2:13-18

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 52:13-54:10; Matthew 2:13-23

*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."  
(Matthew 2:13-15)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Emperor Caesar Augustus reportedly once said that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son. That's because Herod executed several of his own sons to prevent them from taking power away from him. So it's really no surprise that when he got wind of a baby born to be king, he turned to violence once more.

The Holy Family could have gone anywhere outside of Herod's reach for safety, but the angel directed them to Egypt. Perhaps Joseph was familiar with Egypt and even knew some people there who would let him lay low with his wife and newly born Son. But God certainly knew Egypt. That's where He sent His son Jacob for safety during a famine. And there, Jacob became a great nation. But a time came when Egypt's safe haven became an oppressive prison. So God called the sons of Jacob out of Egypt by His servant Moses.

The story of salvation echoes throughout history. God called His sons out of Egypt in the Exodus and He calls His Son Jesus out of Egypt. Both calls are surrounded by death, however. The flight from Egypt and the flight to Egypt are both initiated by the deaths of sons in the final plague and the martyrdom of the innocents. Even though Joseph found safety in Egypt for the Child, His death really was inevitable. The martyrdom of the Holy Innocents bears witness to the death of Jesus.

But just as God raised His Son from Egypt, He also raised Him from the dead. And because Christ is risen, the Holy Innocents will also rise. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Ah, what availed King Herod's wrath? He could not stop the Savior's path.  
Alone, while others murdered lay, In safety Christ is borne away.*

*("Sweet Flowerets of the Martyr Band" LSB 969, st.3)*

# The Fifth Day of Christmas

DECEMBER 29, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Workers

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 55:1-13; Luke 1:1-25

*Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.* (Ephesians 6:5-8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Work. Everyone's got to do it. Not everyone likes it. Some people detest it. And then there are some who do incredible amounts of work in order to avoid work.

But work is not itself bad. God works. "And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done" (Genesis 2:2). God likewise made man for work. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). But Adam inverted this scheme. He worked where he should have rested and harvested fruit when he should have been hearing God's Word.

Sin breaks work. Instead of working for the good of creation, we want to work to please God. Instead of resting to receive God's gifts, we relax our efforts when our neighbors truly have needs. Sin turns work upon its head.

But to this broken world of work, God speaks His Word. "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters...as you would Christ...rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man." Works done for others are works done for Christ! Whether you are a servant bound to a boss or a free person bound to your neighbor's needs, your works benefit the world around you. God sanctifies work once again with His Word.

And this allows us to relax before God. "Whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord," not in the way of rewards or karma, but that God also sends workers for your good. Through the work of others, God also blesses you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*With the Lord begin your task; Jesus will direct it. For His aid and counsel ask; Jesus will perfect it. Ev'ry morn with Jesus rise, And when day is ended, In His name then close your eyes; Be to Him commended.*

*("With the Lord Begin Your Task" LSB 869, st.1)*

# The Sixth Day of Christmas

## DECEMBER 30, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Luke 2:33-40

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 58:1-59:3, 14-21; Luke 1:26-38

*And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.* (Luke 2:40)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Can God make a rock so heavy that He can't lift it? If God can do anything, He can certainly make a rock that is exceedingly heavy. But if God can do anything He could lift it. We're stuck. Either God can't make the rock or He can't lift it--and then God can no longer do anything.

But questions like this are from the devil. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). It is not our place to tell God what He can or can't do. It's not our place to put God into a paradox from which He cannot escape.

God does the paradox His way.

Luke 2:40 reports one of the most paradoxical events the world has ever seen: "And the child grew and became strong." This Child, who was also God, grew and became strong. This Child, the Lord of heaven and earth, who can move planets with His voice, grew and became strong. Presumably at some point before He became strong, He encountered a rock that He could not lift.

"Kenosis" is the term that describes how Jesus set aside His divine power in the Incarnation. It comes from the Greek word that means "to empty," as it says in Philippians 2:6-7: "Though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

The irony is that by making Himself unable to lift the rock, the Son of God shows that He can indeed do anything--including suffering and dying for humanity's sins. The Child Jesus grew and became strong, but His strength is measured in weakness. Likewise, the Child was filled with wisdom, but His wisdom is measured in foolishness. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

God could do anything (including making a rock so heavy that Jesus couldn't lift it when He was a boy). But God chooses to do the Cross. The Cross is strength in weakness and wisdom in folly. But He does it. He does it for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Abide with richest blessings Among us, bounteous Lord; Let us in grace and wisdom Grow daily through Your Word. ("Abide, O Dearest Jesus" LSB 919, st.4)*



# Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus

DECEMBER 31, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Luke 12:35-40

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 60:1-22; Luke 1:39-56

*Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.* (Luke 12:37)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Happy New Year! The 365th day of 2021 will soon be ending. 2022 is just around the corner. While 2021 had its joys, many people will be glad to put it in the history books. Here's to a new and brighter future!

Do you plan to stay up and wait for the clock to hit midnight? When I was a kid, it was a thrill to be able to stay up late and be a part of the festivities. In my teenage years and in college, midnight was often when evening plans began. Now that I've put quite a few New Years in the rearview mirror, I'm lucky If I can stay awake to watch the ball drop on the east coast before I fall asleep.

Waiting for the New Year to arrive should also remind you that as Christians, we also wait for Christ to arrive. While we know that the New Year comes at midnight, the coming of Christ is different. "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:40).

Something strange happens when the Son of Man comes, though. In any other situation, the household waits up for the master so that they can serve his needs. But Jesus turns the tables upside down. "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

The master serves the servants! This is how things work in the upside-down, topsy-turvy kingdom of heaven. It's worth the wait. But then again, you don't really have to wait. The Master gives you a little preview of His return every Lord's Day as you recline at His altar and He serves you His Body and Blood.

Watch. Wait. And prepare for the Master's return by going to His altar. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Jesus, guard and guide Thy members, Fill them with Thy boundless grace, Hear their prayers in ev'ry place. Fan to flame faith's glowing embers; Grant all Christians, far and near, Holy peace, a glad new year! Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining, For the Sun of Grace is shining! ("O Rejoice, Ye Christians, Loudly" LSB 897 st.4)*

# Circumcision and Name of Jesus

JANUARY 1, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Luke 2:21

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 1:57-80

*And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

*(Luke 2:21)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why do we begin each of these Reflections in the Name of Jesus? In one of the first sermons in the New Testament Church, Peter declares, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Names can designate and differentiate, names can describe and denote, but only the Name of Jesus saves.

Jesus' parents didn't pick out His Name for Him. "He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21b). When the angel delivers the Name, he also delivers the Name's meaning. "Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'" (Matthew 1:20-21).

The Name of Jesus literally means, "The Lord saves." While this Name was reserved for the Son of Mary and Joseph before He was even conceived in the womb, it's not officially given to Him until a week and a day after His birth. Names and circumcision go together ever since God changed Abram's name to Abraham and gave him circumcision as a sign of the covenant He made with him.

But there's also something more significant about the Name of Jesus and His circumcision: The eighth day of His life outside the womb was the first day that He shed His blood. His circumcision is a prelude to the Cross. The salvation that Jesus brings is salvation from sins, "and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22b).

The Name of Jesus is given to us in Baptism. Baptism moves us into His Name, and being in His Name we receive all the benefits of that Name. The Lord saves His people from their sins by shedding His blood. So, "whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Jesus! Name of priceless worth To the fallen of the earth For the promise that it gave, "Jesus shall His people save."*

*("Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love" LSB 900, st. 3)*

# The Second Sunday after Christmas

JANUARY 2, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Matthew 2:13-23

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 62:1-12; Luke 2:1-20

*And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*

*(Matthew 2:23)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked Philip (John 1:46). Philip had just told him that he had found the fulfillment of Moses and all the prophets in Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Nazareth was quite a surprise. It wasn't a very prominent city. No great deeds were done there. It wasn't Jerusalem, the city of kings and the temple. It lacked the history of Bethlehem. In fact, Nazareth was never even mentioned in the Old Testament.

So what prophecy is Matthew referring to? He doesn't give a specific prophet or a specific reference. Biblical scholars have proposed several answers to this riddle, but one stands out. In Isaiah 11:1 the prophet writes, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." The Hebrew word for "branch" is *netzer*. The image is of a dead tree with new life growing from an unexpected root. Sounds a lot like Nazareth.

The foundations of Israel had become bankrupt. The political and spiritual institutions that God had given His people were not just ineffective, they were actively turning people away from God. John, who baptized, who was the last prophet of the Old Testament, preached, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).

But off to the side, away from the center, a new Branch rises from the stump. Jesus was likely labeled "Jesus of Nazareth" as a term of dismissal or even derision. But it's a Name that perfectly describes His benefits. The Branch from Nazareth is planted on a dead tree on the outskirts of Jerusalem. But from this Branch grows the fruit of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Can anything good come from Nazareth? Everything good comes from Nazareth. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, You have poured into our hearts the true Light of Your incarnate Word. Grant that this Light may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Second Sunday after Christmas)*

# The Tenth Day of Christmas

## JANUARY 3, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** Genesis 46:1-7

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 63:1-14; Luke 2:21-40

*I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.  
(Genesis 46:4)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God is everywhere. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord (Jeremiah 23:24). He was in Canaan. He was in Beersheeba. He was already in Egypt. Yet He says to Jacob, "I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again."

God fills heaven and earth, but He promises to be with Jacob and his family and his descendants in a special way. He will lead them on their journey into Egypt and back out again. The latter promise isn't fulfilled until about four centuries later, though. It is indeed God who leads His people out of Egypt in a visible, tangible, and powerful way, clothed in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. The Lord Himself leads His people Israel from Egypt's slavery back to Canaan's promise.

As the Lord leads Israel down to Egypt, His presence is not as spectacular. Yet it is no less tangible. Jacob's journey is connected to sacrifice. "So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night" (Genesis 46:1-2a). The sacrifices were the ministry of the Old Testament. Each animal offered on each altar demonstrated that God Himself was with His people in a unique way. God Himself went down with Jacob and his family in the Office of the Holy Ministry.

God is indeed everywhere, Martin Luther once observed. But He is not everywhere for you. God fills heaven and earth. But that's not yet good news. Perhaps God is present to judge, punish, and avenge. His presence in the pillars of fire and cloud was most certainly not good news for the Egyptians who found themselves drowned in the sea.

The sacrifices of Jacob show how God is present for you. He is present to sacrifice Himself. He offers Himself on the altar of the Cross as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. And He does it for you.

Life is a journey from birth to grave. Jesus Himself makes that journey. But death is not the end of that journey. "I will also bring you up again," He promises. In death and in life, Christ is with you and for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*While I am a pilgrim here, Let Thy love my spirit cheer; As my guide, my guard,  
my friend, Lead me to my journey's end.  
(“Come, My Soul, with Every Care” LSB 779, st. 5)*

# The Eleventh Day of Christmas

JANUARY 4, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** 1 Peter 4:12-19

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 64:15-65:2; Luke 2:41-52

*If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*  
(1 Peter 4:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's not always fun being a Christian. Sometimes it's embarrassing. Sometimes people make fun of you. Sometimes they insult you. They may even raise their hands in violence against you.

In the first centuries of the Church, Christians were routinely punished with death. In the ancient world, execution was not by lethal injection, but by sword, by saw, by lion, by cross, and by pyre. Christians today rarely face such inventive executions, thanks be to God. But we behave as if even the slightest insult against our faith is a sign that God has abandoned us. We strike back with bitter words and insults of our own, the spirit of the world resting upon us.

For as long as the Name of Christ has been around, people have insulted those who bear that Name. But in Jesus' inaugural sermon on the side of the mountain, He inverts the insult. Far from being a curse, Jesus declares insults for His Name to be a blessing. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

We can bear insults and even injury for the sake of Christ because He bore insults and injury for our sake. No matter how vicious or inventive the insult, it all ends up as blessing because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. He is Baptism's gift, who guarantees that all suffering turns to joy, death turns to resurrection, and insult turns to blessing.

But it's still not easy to bear insults. It's not easy to suffer. So we pray. For ourselves. For others. For those who must bear insult and so much more for the sake of the Name of Christ. But we take heart that Jesus acknowledges every insult and every injury as His own. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Comfort, O God, with Your Holy Spirit all who are in trouble, want, sickness, anguish of labor, peril of death, or any other adversity. Grant courage and steadfastness especially to those who suffer for Your name's sake that they may receive and accept their afflictions in the confidence that You will acknowledge them as Your own. Amen.*

# The Twelfth Day of Christmas

JANUARY 5, 2021

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**Today's Reading:** *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties,

To Employers and Supervisors

**Daily Lectionary:** Isaiah 65:8-25; Luke 3:1-20

*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.* (Ephesians 6:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely," wrote Lord Acton at the end of the 19th century. Lords know about power. In fact, the definition of lord is "one who wields power, authority, or influence." It can also be a verb that means to wield power in a domineering way. Lord Acton recognized the problem that comes with lordship--you tend to lord it over people. It's a common human trait. Power tends to go to your head. Once you get a little taste of it, you want more and more.

Jesus once said to His disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them" (Matthew 20:25). The way of the world is to exercise lordship in a domineering way. "It shall not be so among you," Jesus continues. "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28).

In the upside-down, topsy-turvy kingdom of God, lordship means becoming a servant, a slave, and to give your life for the sake of another. The nature of God's kingdom, then, impacts the way that Christians act as masters or lords. Masters and lords must not threaten—that's wielding power. Instead, they should serve. Masters and lords are not authorized to take from those they manage; they are placed in a position of authority to give.

Even the most powerful masters and lords on this earth must admit that they are at best middle management in light of the lordship of Jesus. He is the Lord of lords and every lord on earth derives his name and office from Christ. Servant, slave, and master alike all benefit from our Master in heaven, who shows no partiality, but gives His life for the benefit of all. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Dear Father in heaven, You are the Lord of lords and Master of all, and You show no partiality. Thank You for removing the threat of punishment by the grace given us in Your Son. We confess that we love to lord our power over others, and for that we need Your forgiveness. Give us hearts willing to serve, even as we have received from Your Divine Service. For the sake of Jesus. Amen.*

## Notes

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*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from  
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.*

*Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.*

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