



REFLECTIONS

Advent - Christmas

November 27 - January 5th, 2023



Advent - Christmas

NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 25TH, 2022

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

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, such 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.

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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The Twelfth Day of Christmas

JANUARY 5, 2023

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

*So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.
(Luke 3:18)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the Saints of God! John the Baptist is making ready the people of God for the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We have journeyed with the Christ child through this season of Christmas. The angels have sung, the shepherds have shared, Jesus is named and circumcised, the Magi are arriving, and we are getting ready for the Baptism of Jesus.

John is proclaiming the law and Gospel to the people of Israel. The kingdom of God is at hand and John is preparing the people as the last of the prophets. John is that final prophet that ushers in the era of the Kingdom of God in our presence. Christ will come to the waters of the Jordan, the Heavens will be open, the dove will descend and the voice from Heaven will proclaim the arrival of God's Son. John the Baptist prepares the way for the Messiah.

The final day of Christmas connects us to the ministry and work of Christ as our redeemer. John not only proclaims the Law, but he also proclaims the "good news." He proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He proclaims that the Messiah is here to deliver the people of God. The Law will be fulfilled, and the final sacrifice will be given for the forgiveness of sins.

John's words of the Gospel are for us too! We have journeyed through Christmas and are on the eve of Epiphany. The way for our salvation is prepared. We have heard the message of repentance and forgiveness. We are washed in the waters of Baptism. We are brought into His family. We are declared the first-born son and are given the inheritance of life everlasting. The world works on hearts and minds to deceive us that we are not ready or nor worthy of this free gift but through our Baptism we are made ready and prepared for eternal life and the glorious return of our Savior Jesus Christ. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Grant us, O God, the strength and courage, To live the faith our lips declare;
Bless us in our baptismal calling; Christ's royal priesthood help us share. Turn us from every false allegiance, That we may trust in Christ alone; Raise up in us a chosen people, Transformed by love to be Your own.*

(LSB 600-Mark How the Lamb of God's Self-Offering stz 3)

The First Sunday in Advent

NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 23:36-4; Introit Psalm 118:25-28; antiphon: Zechariah 9:9b

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 1:1-28; 1 Peter 1:1-12

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Matthew 24:36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's the beginning of Advent, the preparatory season before Christmas. We know that Christmas is all about the keeping of God's promise to send a Savior to creation. That promise was made to Adam and Eve. That promise was made to the people of the Old Testament. That promise was made to you and to me. But there was one slight problem with God's promise: He never said when that promise would be fulfilled.

People throughout time have tried to predict the coming of Jesus, whether it be His initial coming to creation or His Second Coming. But all of those guesses are wrong. God has the time in mind: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..." (Galatians 4:4) For whatever reason, God chose not to reveal that to His creation. In the end, it doesn't matter when God's promised Savior comes; what matters is that God made the promise!

It is for you that God made the promise of a Savior. Sin was not meant to be a part of creation. And so, for creation, God made and God kept the promise. As for the timing of God's promise, that was known only to God. When God made the promise to Adam and Eve, He never told them when it would be fulfilled. In fact, not even Jesus knew when His coming would occur.

In the end, our Lord's coming was not a surprise. It was an event in which God had foretold His people. As for the timing, why was this not revealed as well? Again, Jesus tells us, "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." God's people, wherever and whenever, are called to be ready to receive Jesus whenever He comes, for when He comes, He comes with that which we need the most: the forgiveness of our sins.

As we begin the season of Advent, may our eyes ever be turned to Jesus, ready to welcome Him, as He fulfills God's promise of salvation. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, amen. (Collect for the First Sunday in Advent)

Monday of the First Week of Advent

NOVEMBER 28, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

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

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."
(Isaiah 2:3)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's that time of the year, the Church Year, that is. It's that time to reflect upon the Advent, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Advent is that strange time of the Church Year where it's a bit somber and joyful and hopeful at the same time.

When you go back to the time of Isaiah, the people were not the greatest. Isaiah begins his book by saying, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged." (Isaiah 1:4) That's not how anyone should want to be referred to, especially the children of God. But that's who they were - a sinful nation. These people desperately needed God, but they had forsaken Him. But this goes beyond them, it goes back to Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve had the privilege of being with God, the way that God had intended. Due to the craftiness of the serpent, sin found its way into the Garden and everything fell apart. When everything fell apart, so did the people. They turned to their own ways, sinful ways. They forgot about God. They forsook God. God became irrelevant. Though the people forgot about God, God did not forget about them.

Eventually, God's people saw their need for God and proclaimed their desire to go to the house of the God of Jacob. Their intent: that he may teach them and they would talk in his paths.

That's where our Lord's Advent comes into play. God comes in human flesh for the forsaken. God comes in human flesh for the sin-corrupt people, His people. God comes in human flesh for you.

One has to ask the question of why God would do this if His people had forsaken Him. He does this because He has created them, has created you. He does this because they have sinned, because you have sinned. He does this so they may be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Where God's people decide to go up to God, God decides to come to them, to keep a promise made long before them. Jesus is coming; He is coming for them and He is coming for you, that you may be His redeemed children. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Eleventh Day of Christmas

JANUARY 4, 2023

Today's Reading: Table of Duties: To Husbands

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

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

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The gift of marriage between a man and a woman is a paradigm of the relationship Christ has with His holy bride. As we begin to close out the season of Christmas we are drawn once again to the manger where our savior is laid. In the manger is the church's groom who has come to redeem her and bring to her everlasting life.

The world around us delivers to us a perverse understanding of marriage. Sin has corrupted the beautiful gift of husband and wife living as God intended. Marriage is no longer held in high esteem rather it is seen as a cumbersome relationship where contracts are entered into before any vows are made to one another. Marriage is for convenience and the gratification of one's desires and not for the mutual love towards a man and woman. In many parts of the world marriage is no longer considered a part of the lives of the people. The gift of marriage that God instituted has become a trinket of glamor and selfish adoration focused primarily on the wedding itself.

Paul directs his hearers at the church of Colossi to uphold marriage as God had intended. It is a relationship between a man and woman that is formed under the order of creation. God gave Eve to Adam as his wife. The two are to become one. The relationship between Adam and Eve is not a relationship of control and demeaning behaviors but one of love and servitude. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5). Husbands are not bitter towards their wives but rather protect them, provide for them, and procreate with them. The husband stands between his wife and the adversary just as Christ does on the cross. As God exacts His judgment upon His Son for all the sins of the world our Holy Groom stood between us and that wrath. He took the wrath of God upon himself that we may be given life. He presents us Holy and blameless without blemish before His Father in Heaven. His robe of righteousness covers His Holy Bride. When we fail, He does not become bitter and cast us off, rather He draws us in and washes the stain of sin through Holy Absolution. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Savior, grant Your blessing, To this husband and this wife, That in peace they live together In Your love throughout their life, Christ, defend them from the tempter, And from all that would destroy Love's foundation You have laid here, And its threshold paved with joy. (LSB 860-Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing stz 1)

The Tenth Day of Christmas

JANUARY 3, 2023

Today's Reading: Galatians 3:23-29

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 63:1-14; Luke 2:21-401

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the saints of God! Paul gives to the church at Galatia a reminder of who they are and whose they are through the waters of Baptism. Their identity had been stripped from them as the Judaizers had infiltrated the church and imposed the law upon the people of God. Their identity was no longer about Christ but about what they had fulfilled in their attempts to live perfectly under the law. They had lost their identity.

Our world works diligently to take away our identity. Various social media platforms use different criteria to identify who we are as individuals. We fill out forms that ask where we were born, where we currently live, what is our ethnicity, what religion we practice, what grade we are in, what we want to do after high school. All these factors make up our identity.

As Paul writes, he reminds his hearers that there is only one identity necessary and that is our Baptism. Our Baptism identifies us as the oldest son in God's family. The oldest son is the one who receives the inheritance. When the people of Galatia heard these words of Paul they were reminded of the customs and traditions that the oldest son was the recipient of the family's estate by nature of the birth order. Even if the eldest son didn't deserve it, he still got it because he was the oldest.

We are certainly not worthy of the inheritance that is promised to us through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In Baptism we are baptized into the name of Christ. We have His name on us and we receive all the blessings and benefits of being the first-born son of God. The world uses a plethora of ways to identify us but in Christ there is only one marker and that is our Baptism. In the Name + of Jesus. Ame.

God's own child, I gladly say it; I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any, That brought me salvation free, Lasting to eternity! (LSB 594-God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It stz 1)

Noah

NOVEMBER 29, 2022

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

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do you know the difference between good and evil? What's the definition of good? What's the definition of evil? Who decided what is good and what is evil? Those are important questions in our world today. The difference between good and evil is defined by who is asking the question. We tend to come up with a definition that fits our wants and needs in a particular moment; what is deemed good today may be deemed evil tomorrow and vice versa.

That's the kind of response you would expect from a world vantage point. But what about from a godly vantage point? What does God say is good? What does God say is evil? How do you reconcile the two?

In our sinful and fallen world, we have defined good and evil with definitions that are acceptable to us. However, what is acceptable to us does not always mean it is acceptable to God. That's where we differ from God. God has a clear definition of what good and evil are and are not.

During the time of Noah, man had become so evil that God was sorry that He had created man. Man clearly called evil good and paid the price for it. God destroyed creation for its sinfulness. However, Genesis records, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." (Genesis 6:8)

What Noah did exactly to find favor in the eyes of God is not said. Despite all the evil that creation had done, God found favor in Noah. Despite all the evil that creation continues to do to this day, God has found favor in another. God finds favor in Jesus. Jesus keeps the Law. Jesus does not sin. There is no evil to be found in Jesus. In turn, God finds favor in you. God finds favor in you because you are clothed with Christ's righteousness. God finds favor in you because you have been forgiven all of your sins for Christ's sake.

What was once declared to be good and very good quickly turned to evil and the effects were devastating. Through Jesus, evil has been turned to good once again, and thanks be to God, that applies to us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and eternal God, according to Your strict judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to Your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. Grant that we may be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, so that with all believers in Your promise, we would be declared worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

St. Andrew, Apostle

NOVEMBER 30, 2022

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

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

"[Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ)." (John 1:41)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. John has an early encounter with two of his disciples and Jesus. John confesses, not only to the disciples but to all, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" With such a great confession of who Jesus is, how could anyone miss it? Sadly, many missed not only John's announcement of Jesus, but also Jesus Himself! However, one of John's disciples heard that pronouncement and sought Jesus - the apostle Andrew. The first apostle of Jesus, he found his brother Peter and declared to him, "We have found the Messiah."

Andrew's declaration to Peter is just as important today as it was then, if not more important. Today, our focus grows ever more increasing on God's promise of a Savior coming to fruition. It's not a matter of wanting a Savior (because we don't due to sin), but needing a Savior. We need Jesus to be who John says He is - the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our sinfulness keeps us from God. Our sinfulness makes us an enemy of God and being an enemy of God only ends with death. God is not content with death and makes the promise of Jesus. As time passes by, more and more of God's promise is revealed until John makes the startling revelation that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Andrew takes that revelation and expands on the fact that He is the Messiah.

The Messiah has come and we await His glorious return on the Last Day where He will take all believers to be with Him in heaven forever. Until that Day comes, we continue to look forward to the day of our Lord's Nativity where He comes to us in the most unlikely of ways - a baby born to unsuspecting parents.

What Andrew proclaims to Peter continues to resonate with us today, that we have found God's promised Savior, Jesus, the Messiah. We have found Him in the manger. We have found Him in His Word and in the bread and the wine and the water. We have found Him on the cross and we find Him as He is risen from the dead. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by Your grace the apostle Andrew obeyed the call of Your Son to be a disciple. Grant us also to follow the same Lord Jesus Christ in heart and life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen, (Collect for St. Andrew)

The Ninth Day of Christmas

JANUARY 2, 2023

Today's Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

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

"So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."(Numbers 6:27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the saints of God! We have just been given the name of Jesus as He was circumcised eight days after His birth and now we again hear about the name of God's people and that His name will be upon them. His name will be their name. In the history of God's people, names are very important. We have names of individuals, names of families, names of tribes and names of nations. In all the names that are given, the only name of the Lord God is the one that will bring salvation. When the people of God have His name on them His blessings accompany that name.

The people of God didn't always want His name upon them. They liked the names of the other gods around them. The names that would appear on the statues and monoliths of the pagan nations. The names of the false gods were appealing to the people as those names were associated with the desires of the flesh. The names of the other gods had earthly freedoms connected to them and with those freedoms came earthly wealth and power.

The world around us wants to give us other names. The world wants us to indulge in the philosophies derived from sin and Satan. The world wants to draw us away from the name given to us in Baptism and immerse us in the names of deceit, selfishness, self-centeredness, greed, and all the vices of the world. In our Baptism, the name of Jesus is placed upon us. We are baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The waters of baptism are poured over us as the name of the one true God is spoken marking us in His name. All the benefits and blessings of His name are given to us free of charge. The name of God the Father is upon us, the name of Jesus the Son of God is upon us, the name of God the Holy Spirit is upon us. In our Baptism we stand firm in the name of God and hold fast to His blessings and promises. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What is the world to me, With all its vaunted pleasure. When You and You alone, Lord Jesus, are my treasure! You only, dearest Lord, My soul's delight shall be; You are my peace, my rest. What is the world to me! (LSB 730-What Is the World to Me stz 1)

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

JANUARY 1, 2023

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. It takes eight days before the baby Jesus is finally given His official name of Jesus. Up until that point in time everyone knew what His name was to be, but it wasn't official until the eighth day when the priest circumcised Him. The priest would perform the duties of the law as the foreskin was removed. It is the event in which Jesus' entire family had been waiting for, in eager expectation. No longer was He referred to as Joseph and Mary's baby boy but rather Jesus. The name that was given to them by the angel nine months ago.

In the Christmas hymn *Away in the Manger*, it states that Jesus did not cry as He lay in the manger. On this day as He is brought before the priest, there is a different set of circumstances compared to when Jesus was lying in a manger. The earthly parents of Jesus give Him to the priest and the priest goes through the rite of circumcision. Now blood is shed from the baby Jesus. A foretaste of what is to come. As a baby in the arms of the priest, He is no longer silent as the knife is laid to the child and skin is removed. The mark is placed upon Him as the law is fulfilled. The mark of circumcision is only the beginning for Jesus as He will fulfill all aspects of the law for the redemption of His people.

The fulfillment will culminate in the shedding of blood. It won't be just a mere removal of the foreskin but rather a vicious and brutal beating delivered by the hands of the Roman guards. It will be nails in the hands and feet and spear thrust into His side. Blood, lots of blood, will be poured out as the Messiah is sacrificed upon the cross.

Today circumcision is no longer the mark that is placed upon us to identify us as God's people. Instead, Christ has given to us the sacrament of Holy Baptism. In our Baptism we are baptized into His circumcision. No more blood is to be shed as Christ has all the blood necessary for our salvation. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, You made Your beloved Son, our Savior, subject to the Law and caused Him to shed His blood on our behalf. Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit that our hearts may be made pure from all sins; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit; one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

DECEMBER 1, 2022

Today's Reading: Table of Duties: To Bishops, Pastors, Preachers

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 7:10-8:8; 1 Peter 3:1-22

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." - Titus 1:9 (Table of Duties: To Bishops, Pastors, Preachers)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do you know why your pastor does what he does? Do you know why he preaches what he preaches? It's because God has called him to an Office to do one thing (actually, more than this, but especially this): preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what he does, week in and week out. And the best part: he does this for you! That's right, he preaches that Gospel message for you, that you may hear of the Good News of Jesus, that He has come into creation, to live among creation, to die for creation, and to rise again for creation.

It might not seem like that's a hard thing to do, to preach the Gospel, but rest assured, it's harder than it seems. The world is very hostile to the Gospel of Jesus. The world doesn't like what your pastor has to say because he might hurt their feelings or say something that they don't agree with. But that's what he said he would do, to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season..." (2 Timothy 4:2).

The reason why this is so important is because it is Jesus who saves. Preaching Jesus is preaching salvation. And so, your pastor buries his nose in the Scriptures in order to proclaim the sweet words of salvation, that your sins have been forgiven for Christ's sake. He does this because God has called him to do so, to bring Jesus to a people who are hurting, who are dealing with the messiness of life, that they may be comforted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ for them and their sins.

There is no greater joy for a pastor than to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that all who hear it would believe and receive the salvation which Christ has won for us. Remember your pastor, pray for your pastor, that he may faithfully preach the Word of God to you and to all. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have commanded us to pray that You would send forth laborers into Your harvest. Of Your infinite mercy give us true teachers and ministers of Your Word who truly fulfill Your command and preach nothing contrary to Your holy Word. Grant that we, being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by Your holy Word, may do those things which are well pleasing to You and profitable for our salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Increase of the Holy Ministry)

Friday of the First Week of Advent

DECEMBER 2, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 13:8-14

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

*"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."
(Romans 13:11)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Apostle Paul gives a great summary of the Second Table of the Law and how one loves their neighbor. This isn't the easiest thing for us to do; in fact, it's impossible for us to do. However, Jesus has come and has kept the Law, all of it, in our place. He has kept the First Table with regards to God and has kept the Second Table with regards to our neighbor. Jesus has shown love, great love, the greatest love to us, His redeemed brothers and sisters.

St. Paul tells us that the hour for us to wake up has come. The reason for that is important - salvation is near. As we embark on this Advent journey, we draw ever closer to God's promise of salvation coming to fruition. We see the great love of God for us in that He sends us Jesus. Because we cannot keep God's Law, salvation by the Law is not possible. In fact, the Law can do nothing but condemn. Man failed to keep God's Law in the Garden and sin was the result. From that moment on, keeping the Law was not possible.

Because we could not keep the Law, God sends Jesus as the only one who can keep the Law. He keeps the Law perfectly in order to make full satisfaction for our sin. So that you do not have to face God's all-consuming wrath for sin, Jesus comes into creation and makes the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. He comes into creation and becomes one with creation, one of creation, in order to redeem creation.

It's hard to imagine that an ordinary looking baby born to average parents could be the fulfillment of God's promise. What's even harder to imagine is that this baby will grow to be a man who has a date with the cross. Jesus comes to fulfill the Law in its entirety. What we could not do, Jesus does. As Paul says, "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

That is what Jesus does, He fulfills the Law. He shows the greatest act of love by standing in our place. Even more, He dies in our place. He dies and you live. There is no greater act of love than that someone lay down his life for his friends, of which you and I are counted (John 15:13). Salvation is near, near to you as the promise comes to you in the manger. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"The everlasting Son Incarnate deigns to be, Himself a servant's form puts on To set His servants free." (The Advent of Our King, LSB 331:2)

Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus

DECEMBER 31, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 12:35-40

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

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luke 12:40)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Tonight, many will be celebrating the ringing in of the New Year. Tomorrow families will gather around the dinner table again as the celebration of a New Year begins. Unfortunately for many in our midst the true significance of these two days will be overlooked. The Circumcision of our Savior Jesus Christ.

As Luke leads his reader to the faithful witness of Jesus Christ and delivers the certainty of the events he witnessed, he delivers the words of Christ regarding being ready for the return of the Son of Man. Christ did not come to just die and resurrect but the rest of the narrative is His glorious return. The world around us does not want to be a part of that message. Main line Christianity focuses only on our death and life in Heaven but forgets the rest of the story, "The return of Christ."

Christ reminds His hearers to be ready for His return. He likens it to the thief in the night. We do not know when he is coming, only that he is coming. We do not know the day or the hour when He will return but we do know for certain that He is going to return. He merely says, "Be ready." We have been made ready for the return of Christ in our Baptism. We have been marked in the waters of reconciliation and carry the name of Christ both upon our hearts and upon our heads. We have been given faith that holds fast to the promises of Christ that His works are sufficient for our salvation. We are made ready!

On the eve of Jesus' Circumcision, He was made ready for the next day. He would be presented before the Priest and part of His body would be removed. The night before He was prepared for that significant day in His life. The day that He received the mark of Circumcision. In the same manner we are made ready for the Day of Christ's return. We wait as if each day were the eve of His return. We are anxious for His return. We do not know the exact day or hour, but we do know that He is coming again, and we are ready. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Eternal God, we commit to Your mercy and forgiveness the year now ending and commend to Your blessing and love the times yet to come. In the new year, abide among us with Your holy Spirit that we may always trust in the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (ToDP 1075)

The Sixth Day of Christmas

DECEMBER 30, 2022

Today's Reading: Hebrews 1:1-12

(Psalm 84:1-2a, 4, 10b, 11b; antiphon: v.9-10a)

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

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the Saints of God! The glory of God is in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. He is the perfection of God in the flesh. The baby in the manger is the creator of all things and in Him all things came into existence. Our God has come to us in the flesh to redeem flesh by flesh. The author of Hebrews delivers to us the message of satisfaction. Jesus is the satisfaction for the sins of the world. He is the Holy, unblemished, first-born sacrifice for all the sins of the world.

Christ Jesus will make purification for our sins. Sin which we have inherited from Adam brought death and condemnation into the world. No longer is the world deemed "good" as God declared it in the first two chapters of Genesis. In sin, death was brought into the world. The desires of Adam and Even were to be like God. They bought into the lie of Satan and ate the forbidden fruit. The consequences of their selfishness were that mankind would be condemned to eternal damnation. Nothing that we could ever do would make it right. We could not and can not make satisfaction for our sin. We are no longer pure. We are no longer Holy as God created us. We needed to be restored from outside of ourselves.

It was at just the right time that Jesus came into this world to make satisfaction for our sins. Jesus' fulfillment of all the requirements of the law brought our purification. He lived the perfect life that we can not live. He died the perfect sacrificial death that was the purification of our sins. He conquered the grave so that we may have life eternal. He restores the dead creation to life by His life. Now we wait. Just as the first Christmas came in long expectation we wait for the return of Christ. Christmas is more than just about looking back but it is also about looking forward to the return of Christ on the last day when He will raise our lowly immortal bodies to immortality. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The infant Priest was holy born For us unholy and forlorn; From fleshly temple forth came He, Anointed from eternity. (LSB 624-The Infant Priest was Holy Born stz 1)

Saturday of the First Week of Advent

DECEMBER 3, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit: Psalm 105:4-8; antiphon: Isaiah 40:3b

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

"Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered... He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations." (Psalm 105)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I promise. Have you ever said those words before? Did you mean them or did you say them because that was what was expected of you? Our words, our promises, often fall flat. We don't mean them, we break them, we put all sorts of stipulations on them. Thankfully, God's words and promises are not carelessly spoken. When God makes a promise, God follows through with His promise.

Of all the promises that God has made, they all stem from a singular promise, that of Jesus: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). That promise set the tone for God and His creation. Could God have left creation in its state of sin? Yes, He could, but He wouldn't, He couldn't. God had created man so that man would live with Him forever. Satan had made that an impossibility. God would do something to make sure that that would not happen. There, God made a promise, a promise made not only to Satan, but a promise made to man as well. That promise was for salvation.

God's promise made is a promise fulfilled. Psalm 105, gives thanks for God's faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham, a covenant which said that Abraham would be the father of many nations. How does that covenant relate to God's promise of salvation? In both instances, God makes and God keeps a promise.

God's promise is a promise made to you and for you; but not just for you but for all of creation. This promise is one that will bring the blessings which God desires for all people - blessings which bring life for all who believe, the forgiveness of sins and life for all believers in Christ.

This promise is for a thousand generations. To put that into perspective, there are 76 generations between Adam and Jesus. What does that mean for us? It means that God's promises, His blessings, His Word extends beyond the generations to all of creation, in every time and every place. His promises are not reserved for a select few but are intended for all. In turn, that means that His salvation is intended for all as well. His promise of salvation is for you, now and forevermore. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 4, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

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

"For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" (Matthew 3:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. On the Second Sunday in Advent, we meet an Old Testament carryover in John the Baptist. John's purpose is to prepare the way of the Lord as Isaiah records. John, the cousin of Jesus, has a very early encounter with Jesus in the womb where he leapt for joy in the presence of Jesus. Fast forward some 30 years and John sets the stage for Jesus.

John's singular purpose is to prepare the people for Jesus' arrival; John is to be the opening act for Jesus' headline performance. To do that, John takes all focus off of himself and places it on the One who is to come. When people confront John about being the Messiah, he makes it abundantly clear that He is not the Messiah, that he is unworthy to fill that role. Instead, his singular job is to point to Jesus as the Messiah, not to be the Messiah.

This was not going to be an easy task for John. The people had a preconceived notion of the Messiah. Put some of the pieces together and John was Messiah, except he wasn't the Messiah. He begins baptizing people for the forgiveness of their sins; the Pharisees and Sadducees come, not looking for what John has to offer but to challenge his purpose.

John does what is expected of him, he prepares the way of the Lord. As John begins his ministry, Jesus is poised to begin His ministry. His ministry is markedly different from that of John. While both will baptize, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John will preach repentance for all while Jesus will separate the repentant from the unrepentant and will bring them to Himself, that they may be with Him forever.

Jesus comes so that He may do the Father's will, and that will is for you to be saved. John prepares for Jesus to make Himself aware to creation, that He may save it by His death and resurrection. John makes us ready to receive Him, not just at His Nativity but to receive Him on the cross and ultimately when He comes again to take us with Him for all eternity. 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.

The Fifth Day of Christmas

DECEMBER 29, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10

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

Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. (Isaiah 52:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the saints of God our Father! The hymns' of Christmas are still coming from the lips of His saints. We sing without ceasing the praise of our eternal Father and the birth of our savior Jesus Christ. Our God and creator have brought comfort upon His people through Christ our Savior. We break forth into singing!

The singing is not coming from the high places or where the Lord resides according to the prophet Isaiah. The singing is coming from the waste place of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem has been besieged and its walls have been laid low in captivity. The city is in ruins and yet it proclaims its rebuilding. The coming of the King is at hand.

The birth of Christ is a restoration of Israel. Israel reduced to one. The child in the manger is the fulfillment of the promises of God that Israel is restored. No longer do we wait for the salvation of the Lord because the salvation of the Lord is manifest in Jesus Christ. Restoration is in the manger.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we look back while looking forward. We know that as Christ came into this world on Christmas, He will return to restore this world to its original glory. The world may seem like the waste places described by Isaiah with all the chaos that surrounds us. The world wants to pursue the desires of the heart and selfish living. Sin kills and destroys the perfect creation of God. Satan tempts and jeers at us relentlessly in all facets of our lives. Amid all the waste places around us, God delivers us through His one and only Son Jesus Christ. He brings to us comfort in the promises of His restoration in the forgiveness of sins. We will be taken from the waste places of this present world and delivered to the New Jerusalem, a restored creation, at the resurrection. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All idols then shall perish, And Satan's lying cease, And Christ shall raise His scepter, Decreeing endless peace. Proclaim the Savior's birth; "To God on high be glory And peace to all the earth." (LSB 383-A Great and Mighty Wonder stz. 4)

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

DECEMBER 28, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-18

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

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. (Matthew 2:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to all the saints of God as we celebrate the birth of our savior Jesus Christ! As we celebrate Christmas and the birth of Christ there seems to be a lot of death lurking in the background. Hymns are being sung, families are still gathering, and the tide of Christmas is still on the increase. On Holy Innocents we mark the darkest day of Christmas. The day that we remember the rage and anger of King Herod and the death of the innocent males under the age of two in Bethlehem.

The Magi have arrived, gifts have been delivered and the true King is worshiped. Herod, on the other hand, is furious. The Magi arrived to worship the king and it is not him! Herod wanted the glory and honor of being the only true king. In Herod's mind there is only one king, and it is himself. The child the Magi speak of must be destroyed.

Yet it was not the right time for Christ to die. The Son of God has come into this world to die but not as an infant but as a grown man. The fulfillment of the entire law needs to take place. A circumcision, a baptism, all the requirements of the law completed and then the final sacrifice and shedding of blood. The deliverance of God's people in His Son Jesus Christ will come at just the right time.

On Holy Innocents we remember the babies of Bethlehem who were killed because of Herod's pride, arrogance, and selfishness. We see ourselves in Herod as we tolerate the plethora of cultural behaviors that normalize the killing of innocent children before they are born under the guise of choice and freedom when it is really a choice of convenience and selfishness. It is in Christ that we find our hope in the forgiveness of sins and life through His life and death. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, the martyred innocents of Bethlehem showed forth Your praise not by speaking but by dying. Put to death in us all that is in conflict with Your will that our lives may bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (TODP 1065).

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 5, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

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

"He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth..." (Isaiah 11:3b-4a).

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. As we prepare for the Nativity of Jesus, as we prepare for the celebration of our Lord coming into creation, we also look ahead to our Lord's Second Coming. What does that mean for us? What will happen? Isaiah gives us a glimpse as to what that will look like for us.

As God looks at creation, what does He see? He sees a people who have sinned, not just once, but over and over again. In fact, we are people who are sinners to our very core. It is because of that sin that God can and should destroy us, and yet He doesn't do that. By what His eyes see and His ears hear, there should be every reason for God to exact His wrath upon us. Because of Jesus, He judges the poor with righteousness. We are the poor, the poor in spirit, the poor due to sin.

God does not choose to exercise His wrath upon us because Jesus intercedes for us. Jesus comes into creation to plead on our behalf. His life, His death, His resurrection do what is expected of us because we cannot do it. He keeps God's Law in our place. He makes us His holy people by His shed blood which washes over us.

When Jesus judges us, He judges us with righteousness and faithfulness, except it's not our righteousness and faithfulness; it is Jesus' righteousness and faithfulness. Jesus is righteous because He is without sin. Jesus is faithful to God's Law in its entirety. By what Jesus does for us, He makes us righteous before God.

Instead of God exercising His wrath upon us, He exercises it upon Jesus, the sinless one. Jesus takes our place in this great exchange, where we put on His holiness and righteousness and He puts on our sin. We are judged innocent before God, while Jesus is judged guilty. He takes on everything that would keep us from God and it is purged from us. By Christ's actions, we are declared righteous.

Jesus does this because it is the Father's will, that all would be saved. God was not content with sin and so He sends Jesus. As Jesus comes into the world, He seems insignificant by others, looked at as a heretic. Despite what people thought of Jesus, He came to save even them. He comes to give His life as a ransom for all people. Even more, Jesus comes to give His life for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Nicholas of Myra, Pastor

DECEMBER 6, 2022

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

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Jolly Old Saint Nicholas, Lean your ear this way!” What we know as a fun and light Christmas song has some truth behind it. Saint Nicholas was an early Christian bishop in the city of Myra. Nicholas is considered by some traditions the patron saint of numerous types of people, including children. This gave way to a reputation of secretly giving and leaving gifts for children. His actions led to the modern day model of Santa Claus.

Some believe that Christmas is all about Santa Claus and giving, or more importantly, receiving gifts. While leaving gifts for children is great, there are greater gifts. The thought that Christmas is all about gifts is indeed true, but no greater gift has ever been given than that of Jesus. He comes to bring the greatest gift that one could ever want or need, that of forgiveness and eternal life.

The gifts that Jesus comes to bring are not gifts which come just once a year as Saint Nicholas gave. No, these gifts are given to us daily as we receive our daily bread. These gifts are given to us in our Baptism where we have been made God’s child. These gifts come in our Lord’s Supper as we feast upon His body and blood in the bread and wine. These are gifts which God desires for you and graciously gives to you.

It’s hard to believe that God has wrapped up all He desires to give in a simple gift of a baby born to unsuspecting parents. While the angel had told them what Jesus was destined to do, they would not be able to fully understand it until our Lord began His ministry, and even then, they could not grasp the full weight of His ministry on our behalf.

These gifts which God gives, He gives to us freely. He gives them to us for our benefit. He gives them to us that we may be His beloved children. Very soon, God’s gift of Jesus will be laid in the manger, but we do not have to wait until Christmas to receive that gift, for it is yours now in Christ. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You bestowed upon Your servant Nicholas of Myra the perpetual gift of charity. Grant Your Church the grace to deal in generosity and love with children and with all who are poor and distressed and to plead the cause of those who have no helper, especially those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief. We ask this for the sake of Him who gave His life for us, Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Nicholas of Myra)

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

DECEMBER 27, 2022

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. “Just give me the truth!” It is a common thought that resonates to many people today. We all want to know the truth. We all want to hear the truth. We do not want to be lied to or have the truth embellished, just give us the truth. As John writes his Gospel, he has one thing in mind, “To bear witness to the truth.” He wants to be a reliable witness about the events that have taken place before his very eyes. He wants the world to know that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in the works of Christ as sufficient for our salvation, salvation is delivered. John is a reliable witness.

Our world around us seeks to deconstruct the truth. We live in an era where words like misinformation and disinformation are common in our daily vocabulary. We can’t make it through one round of surfing channels or scrolling through our social media feeds without being reminded that certain information contains inaccuracies or only partial truths. Notifications on various feeds will indicate that information is missing or that appropriate verification has not taken place. Doubt and uncertainty surround us.

John the Apostle wanted nothing more than to deliver the truth and remove all doubt about Jesus Christ. It is just two days after Christmas, and we recognize St. John, Apostle and Evangelist. His primary purpose was to deliver the message that God the creator of all things is revealed to us in the flesh in Jesus Christ. He begins his Gospel with creation and closes it with a testimony to the accuracy of what is written. John’s Gospel takes the reader around the cross and delivers the message that our God has come down to us in the flesh. He died and rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. The truth of the historical narrative of Jesus gives to us the assurance of the promise that He is returning in all His Glory to raise the dead. 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. Amen (TODP-pg 1061).

St. Stephen, Martyr

DECEMBER 26, 2022

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

And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:60)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A blessed and joy filled Christmas to everyone! The 26th of December gives us a little reprieve during all the Christmas celebrations. The day after Christmas brings us to the first martyr in the Scriptures, Stephen. He is called out for speaking the truth about Jesus Christ and the local church leaders do not like the message he is proclaiming. He is delivering a faithful law and Gospel sermon and the hearers want nothing to do with the message of Jesus Christ. The result? Let's bring him before the authorities and drum up some bogus charges so that this man will just be quiet about all this nonsense regarding Jesus Christ!

Stephen does not back down. He keeps pressing forward with the message of salvation through Christ. The local leaders have heard enough! Kill him! Even during his stoning, he begs God to not hold this sin against them. In his life and death, he lives in the forgiveness of sins through Christ alone. Each rock pummeling him is yet another opportunity for him to ask God to exact His judgment upon them, but he doesn't. Instead of vengeance and wrath he seeks God's forgiveness for them.

In our lives today, we are confronted with the chaos of sin. The same sin that consumed the church leaders of Stephen's time consumes us too. We want to silence the Gospel. We want to appeal to our own flesh. We want the credit for our achievements, and we certainly desire to participate in our own salvation. God's law confronts us and exposes our sinfulness. His holy law reveals our unholiness and shows us the need for a savior. The day after Christmas death confronts us in the remembrance of St. Stephen. We are given that example in Stephen that even in the most difficult times of lives the forgiveness of sins prevails. We no longer must carry the burden of our own sin. Our savior Jesus Christ has come into this world to redeem the world. He has come into this world to die for all our sins. 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. Amen (Treasury of Daily Prayer, pg 1057)

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 7, 2022

Today's Reading: Table of Duties: To Hearers

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

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." - Hebrews 13:17
Table of Duties: What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors

You know the Third Commandment, right? You keep it every time you enter the sanctuary, right? Sadly, we do not. We do not always hold God's Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it, do we? That is what Luther says we should do. We should want to hear God's Word of salvation for us. That is what your pastor is there for, to proclaim to you God's salvation won for you by Jesus Christ.

Stop and listen to the words that he speaks: "...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ..." The words that he is about to speak are not his words but God's words. In fact, everything that your pastor speaks comes from God. They tell you what God has already said and declared about you. Your pastor has your best interests at heart, that is, you hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, and be saved.

How should we listen to our pastors? We obey them because they are our God-sent pastors who are charged with proclaiming both Law and Gospel to us, absolving us from our sins, feeding us Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. They do this because God has called them to the Office of Holy Ministry to bring and declare God's gifts to His people. This task is not taken lightly by them, for they must give an account to God of their actions.

We do not want to be a burden on our pastors. We want to make their vocation as easy as possible, even though pastoral ministry is often anything but easy. Just as preaching the Gospel is a good and noble task, so is hearing that Gospel as it is preached to us and placed into our mouths. Bring a smile to your pastor's face by telling him you'll be there Sunday and every Sunday after that, receiving the gifts which God delivers through your called and ordained servant of the Word. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O holy and most merciful God, You have taught us the way of Your commandments. We implore You to pour out Your grace into our hearts. Cause it to bear fruit in us that, being ever mindful of Your mercies and Your laws, we may always be directed to Your will and daily increase in love toward You and one another. Enable us to resist all evil and to live a godly life. Help us to follow the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to walk in His steps until we shall possess the kingdom that has been prepared for us in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect for Obedience to the Word)

Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 8, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 15:4-13

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

"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. The Apostle Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament, directed mainly to churches. One such letter was to the Church at Rome. This church was in a rather unique situation. Rome was a great city of commerce. This brought with it a large amount of foot traffic. While this could be an advantage to the Church, this also proved to be a disadvantage as well, for this brought with it an influx of pagan non-believers.

With this pagan influence, it was very easy for the Romans to forget who they were, blood-bought and redeemed children of God. They needed a gentle reminder of who they were, much like we need the same reminder today. And so Paul reminds them to return to their roots, that is, return to God's Word and what it means for them. There in God's Word, they would be reminded of the promise God made to them and what it meant for their daily life, for there they would find their hope.

What was written in former days was God's promise of salvation, not just for His people in the Old Testament, not just for the Church at Rome, but for all people everywhere. God's instruction was for them to remain faithful to Him, just as He promised He would remain faithful to them.

Ultimately, what was written in former days was the promise of the Messiah. This is what God intended for His people, then and now. He intended to be with them forever. Due to sin, that was no longer a possibility. That is why He made the promise of a Savior, so that the relationship between God and man would be restored to what it should be.

It is through that Word of God, the promise He made so long ago and recorded in Holy Scripture, that we find our hope. Our hope isn't found in ourselves or in the things of this world but in Jesus. At times, the Romans forgot where their hope was to be found. We too can forget that as well. That is why this season of Advent is so important for us, to help us prepare to receive Jesus as our salvation, for it is in Jesus do we have our hope, both now and forevermore. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Word)

The Nativity of Our Lord

DECEMBER 25, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 2:1-20

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

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. At just the right time, Jesus was born. At just the right time, God sent His son to be born of a woman. At just the right time God sent His son to be born under the law. Our savior Jesus Christ came into this world at just the right time. God chose the time and the place where His son would be born. On Christmas Day we rejoice and celebrate the gift of salvation that came into this world. The day that the Word made His dwelling amongst us.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, we engage in numerous activities that help reinforce the magnificent gift of salvation through Jesus. We go to church and sing the familiar hymns of Christmas. We receive His body and blood for the strengthening of faith and the forgiveness of sins. We hear the message of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. We sit around the family dinner table and reminisce of years gone by and reflect on loved ones who are no longer with us. We open gifts and extend gratitude towards family and friends who have taken time to remember us in their Christmas giving. All these activities give us the remembrance that our savior Jesus Christ came into this world for the salvation of the world; certainly, some activities more than others.

When it comes to Jesus, He is the gift. Christ brings to us exactly what we need. In the manger is the Son of God that has come to redeem the world. In the manger is forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. In the manger is the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king for the people of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Christmas Eve

DECEMBER 24, 2022

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."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Advent is over. The preparation for the coming of our Messiah is complete. In the Divine Service we shift our hymnody from Advent to Christmas. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us! The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the baby lying in a manger.

Our creator gives us exactly what we need. We need a savior. As King Ahaz dialogues with Isaiah, he thinks he needs an army to stave off the encroaching army from the north. Isaiah reminds King Ahaz that the Lord God of this universe will guard the kingdom from the enemy. Ahaz wants nothing to do with the Lord. (Is 7:12) Ahaz wants to lead the people on his own terms with the help of men not God. He desires the credit of being the one who overthrew the enemy. His pride has consumed him, and he no longer trusts in God.

Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin giving birth to a son reminds King Ahaz that it is God's plan not his that matters. Today it is God's plan that brings to us salvation through the forgiveness of sins in Christ. The Old Adam in us wants Christmas to be about us and what we want. "What's in it for me?" is what the sinful self asks. The world constantly reminds us of what we need for peace and comfort. His Holy Word reminds us that the birth of our savior Jesus Christ is the only gift we need. In Christ the word became flesh. The fulfillment of the prophets is at hand. Salvation has come into this world. The kingdom of God is before us. We take comfort daily knowing that our sins have been paid for with the one gift of God's only son Jesus, Immanuel-God with us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; 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 Christmas Eve-LSB)

Friday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 9, 2022

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

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What's in a name? It identifies you. It tells you where you came from and to whom you belong. My last name harkens back to my Italian heritage. But my last name doesn't define who I am, though I do have a name that does just that: child of God.

Above all other names, all other titles I might have, none is greater than being called a child of God. With that title, it declares that I belong to God, that I have God's name placed upon me. In Holy Baptism, God places His name upon you, forever marking you as one who belongs to Him. It means that I am God's. Because I am God's, I can't help but sing, "God's own child, I gladly say it, I am baptized in Christ!" (LSB 594:1)

It is not only one thing to be called a child of God but we should also live our lives as children of God. It means live like you are baptized, because you are baptized. It means live as one who is forgiven for Christ's sake because you are forgiven. It means to live as one for whom Christ has died. But know this: not only are you a child of God but so are others. It means that they are also one for whom Christ has died. This is as John writes: "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:11).

Great love has been shown to you by God through Jesus. Jesus comes and lays down His life so that you may have eternal life. Just as Christ has laid down His life for us, so we should be willing to lay down our life for our neighbor: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16) It is as Luther says, that we "help and support him in every physical need" (5th Commandment).

While God could condemn us and rightly should, He shows His great mercy in Jesus. Though we are not deserving, God sees fit to forgive us our sins out of love, that we may be united to God once again. This is done for us by Jesus as He lays down His life so that we may take up eternal life. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We sing of mercy and judgment unto You, O Lord, our Savior and Judge; help us with the one, warn us with the other. Grant us Your humble servants, O Lord, that a stubborn heart may depart from us, and that wicked things before our eyes may not allure us, but that walking in the simplicity of innocence, You may lead us on in Your pity and love, and absolve us as a truthful Judge; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen

Lord God, heavenly Father, out of great love for Your creation, You have sent Jesus into creation to restore and unite man to You once again. Help us to show love to our neighbor, that we may help and support them in every need. In Jesus' name, amen.

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

DECEMBER 10, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit: Psalm 71:14-18; antiphon: Philippians 4:4

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

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more." (Introit for Advent 3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Back in my seminary days, there was a sainted professor who, upon entering the classroom, would ask, "Are we rejoicing in the Lord, brothers?" We see in the antiphon words of St. Paul to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4) He then would tell us that if we were not rejoicing in the Lord, then we didn't need to be there, for there is never a time where we should not be rejoicing in the Lord.

Because of God what God has done for us in Jesus, we should constantly be rejoicing. By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has won for us everlasting life. We should want to shout that from the rooftops, that Christ has forgiven me and given me eternal life, just as it says in the Introit: "My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day, for their number is past my knowledge" (Psalm 71:15). This is something that Jesus has done, not only for me, but all of creation.

We should always be in a state of rejoicing for what God has done for us, but our sinfulness doesn't always want to rejoice. I didn't get the promotion I was seeking. I didn't pass the chemistry test. My loved one just died; how could God do that to me! There are many things that happen in our lives that are not worth rejoicing, but there are even more things that are worth rejoicing. Even if I didn't get the promotion, I still have forgiveness by Jesus' death on the cross. Even if I didn't pass my chemistry test, I still have God's name on me, marking me as His beloved child. Even though my loved one has died, they are now resting in the loving arms of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is much for us to rejoice in in this life, but nothing more important than the life we have received in Christ Jesus, for Jesus is the cause of our rejoicing, both in this life and the life everlasting. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Rejoice, O pilgrim throng! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing; Your festival banner wave on high, The cross of Christ your king. Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing! (Rejoice, O Pilgrim Throng, LSB 813:1)

Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent

DECEMBER 23, 2022

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

I, I am he, the one blotting out your rebellions for mine own sake, and your sins I will not remember.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Blotting out rebellions? What? It's almost Christmas Eve. That little Advent calendar almost has Jesus nestled in the manger. Blotting out rebellions? We know how the game works this close to Christmas, why don't we just keep it simple? If you're naughty, you get nothing. If you're nice, well then today, tomorrow and the next day look pretty good for you. But Isaiah the Prophet writes that naughty and nice aren't going to figure at all into "I AM's" becoming Emmanuel. Isaiah says; Jesus comes regardless. In fact Isaiah says this Jesus is coming for the rebellious ones, the sick ones, the dead ones, and He's not just come to blot out rebellions but literally to wipe out/ annihilate sins.

Like an old fashioned floppy computer disk that's had a magnet run over it (ask your parents or google it), Jesus comes to annihilate sin and even the memory of YOUR sin. Then Isaiah says why Jesus is going to do it "for Mine own sake." Jesus is true to His promise but also we see that this text infers that Jesus does it for us. He comes for rebels (and He's not talking about whether you've dyed your hair, or some other crazy cool thing). Jesus comes for those who have spoken and acted against Him. He's come for the sick ones that can't heal themselves, the ones who've spoken out against Him, called Him names, tweeted, snap chatted and tik tocked all sorts of slanderous, nasty things about Him. He's even come for you as you hold yourself in higher regard than your neighbors, classmates and so on. He's come to annihilate, wipe out your sins of chastisement, gossip and self-righteousness and He's come as a lowly, meek and humble child.

It's not about naughty or nice. Jesus the Savior came not to remember your sins, but to annihilate them. It is His coming to us that reminds us that it is Christ alone who Has, IS and will sustain us. He will willingly take that which causes our death, make it His own, put it to death (annihilate it) by His death all in order to save us; to provide the most blessed exchange, our sin for His Redemption and forgiveness; our rebelliousness exchanged for His perfect obedience; our death exchanged for His life given freely to us.

You and I have a future, not because we've been nice, not even because we've only been a little naughty. Ours is a future pinned on the certainty that not even our sins could defeat our Lord and God. No amount of guilt, shame, or remorse is a match for Our Savior, as Isaiah says "He does for His own sake." Jesus your God, came as your Servant to willingly bear the burden. He's borne the burden to remove even the slightest spot of rebellion and transgression away by becoming a man like us, to forgive (blot out) sins by His innocent suffering and death, by His blood shed that covers us in His righteousness, innocence and blessedness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Advent

DECEMBER 22, 2022

Today's Reading: Table of Duties: To Subjects

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 43:1-24; Revelation 9:13-10:11

"Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work". (Tit. 3:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the explanation of the 4th Commandment we've learned what it means to honor. To honor is to hold in high esteem, to show dignity that God has rightly given to them as those who are given by God to look after us, take care of us. The Small Catechism explains what honor looks like by also telling us what we are not to do. Do not despise or anger our parents or other authorities.

This section of the Table of Duties teaches us that citizens are to honor the civil government and to show dignity to those given to rule over us; this is important but it is not the whole story. God also places us into positions to participate in the activities, governance, and care of our society. We are to care as Christ cared, to honor as our Lord honored the authorities. How was that? He suffered under Pontus Pilate; Jesus willingly subjected himself to Pilate and the office that Pilate had been given by God. To say that Christ suffered under Pontus Pilate is simply to say that Jesus suffered unto God the Father who placed Pilate in his governorship.

As the children of God then we are governed by the Word of God. Not only are we encouraged to participate in civil discourse, conversations with our classmates, teachers and public officials. We may also be afforded the opportunity to run for public office at the school or public level, opportunities for service in the military or to volunteer in the community are other options too. This duty: of citizens reminds us first and foremost, that acts of charity and mercy for the temporal support of their neighbors in need is founded in Christ Jesus who first subjected Himself to the temporal authorities for our sake. Thankfully this article isn't just about paying taxes and obeying the laws of the land, although that is included. We are given to pray for our rulers, participate in the general welfare of the nation, and "to be ready to do whatever is good." In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful Father, grant us faith to pray for the civil authorities and to trust that You will accomplish Your good and gracious will through them. Teach us to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness and to be ready to do whatever is good in service to others in our community and nation, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Third Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 11, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:2-15

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

Go and tell John what you hear and see... (Matthew 11:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. John the Baptizer was done for, imprisoned for rightly calling out Herod Antipas for His marriage to Herodias. John the Baptizer had a good run... I guess that's one way to look at it.

Yet Jesus, true God and fully man, knew both the tormenting agony John the Baptizer was going through and what would soon become of John. Jesus, God with us, sent comfort to John in Prison, not in the form of a file baked into a cake or a kind card. Jesus, the Word in-flesh, sent Himself... Go and tell John of me... tell Him what you hear and see. But this seems like such small consolation, doesn't it?

Jesus sends comfort in the midst of imprisonment, peace in the midst of impending death and a gentle reminder that all that John himself had spoken and done in the Name of Jesus was not in vain... Tell Him what you hear and see... meaning; Tell Him that the One John jumped in the womb of his mother over, sends peace that passes through prison walls. Tell John that the repentance he preached on the banks of the Jordan River and to Herod Antipas was not in vain... tell Him that though He will lose his head and die at the request of Herodias; tell Him that nothing in all creation will be able to separate Him from the love, mercy, peace and forgiveness that Christ Jesus freely gives; tell Him that the sins of the whole world, washed onto Jesus in the Jordan River are going with Jesus to be put to death on the cross, tell John that though He dies, yet He will live as His Jesus will live as the first born from the dead.

Those blinded by fear will be soothed, comforted and protected by Christ the light Who overcomes all darkness. The lame, the deaf, lepers, the blind and even the beheaded, will live again, forever. Lepers, yes, sinners are cleansed, those who are deaf will hear the word that gives life and the poor. Yes, even poor imprisoned John, even in the face of death, has the good news Jesus put into them. Blessed are you John, blessed are you dear saints of God who have the Good news preached to 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. (Collect for Advent 3)

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 12, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:1-14; Jude 1-25

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:10 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Isaiah the prophet writes of the desert; a wasteland, dry and barren with burning sand. But a vivid and accurate picture of the desert isn't the only thing Isaiah writes about; He writes about the people who are weak, with feeble knees, anxious hearts, and blind eyes; Isaiah writes of bodies that are lame and tongues that are mute. Isaiah gets it, knows what life is like, not just in the real desert of his homeland, but writes of the world we live in and the desert that IT really is. More than that; Isaiah writes that here in this wilderness of sin we are prisoners.

Many of us don't know much about having to scavenge for food or about having to walk for miles to find water but we Christians, in our day, certainly do know something about the arid, hot and angry winds that still blow in this land that we sojourn through. Friends who back bite, and gossip, hatred online, bullies and the strain that goes with confessing Christ Crucified. The weakness, feeble knees, anxious hearts, blind eyes, bodies that are lame and tongues that are mute are not just a thing of the past. They're real today; really real for you and for me.

Our text from Isaiah 35:10 is a definitive conclusion; a promise for you and me of gladness and joy. Before that conclusion though Isaiah reminds us that there is comfort, strengthening and compassion even in the midst of the wilderness wandering. He... that is, Jesus comes to you just as He did for Isaiah and all those who know the sting of the wilderness. He comes to abide with you, comfort you and still your anxious hearts. Jesus comes to save you from sin, death and the Devil, but also to save you from despair, anxiousness and fear today; to save you from hunger and thirst and to save you from, and comfort you in, your wilderness wandering. What about this saving that Jesus does? Isaiah says Jesus pays a ransom, that is, Jesus buys you back (the fancy theological word is redeem) at a great price, both because of Who Jesus is and because of how much He loves to love you; your life ransomed (bought back) by Jesus blood. Jesus comes smack dab into the middle of this desert wilderness of ours to give you joy, for today. But even better than that; Isaiah says this joy Jesus gives is everlasting, never ending, forever and ever joy that will replace sorrow and sighing. The whole desert will rejoice with joy and singing; like water breaking forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert, the burning sands become a pool; it's all around us, as close as the Divine Service, the waters of baptism, the body and blood that He still gives and the word He puts right into your ears. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

St. Thomas, Apostle

DECEMBER 21, 2022

Today's Reading: John 20:24-29
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 42:1-25; Revelation 9:1-12

"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (John 20:25)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The title of the reflection says it all: St. Thomas, Apostle. That's how we should remember Thomas. But we've loved to give him another nickname haven't we? But Thomas isn't a doubter at all, at least not anymore than anyone else. When Jesus announced to his disciples that He was going to Judea, some of his disciples tried to stop him (John 11:8). Thomas was not dissuaded; instead He boldly proclaimed: "Let us also go, that we may die with him"

Thomas is an Apostle; one sent out by Jesus Himself to teach and to preach, to heal wounds, perform miracles and proclaim the mysteries of the Gospel. That's precisely what Thomas did on that first Easter Sunday and eight days later.

I know, it sounds like Thomas is balking at the idea that someone could be raised from the dead. It's more profound than that. He disbelieved the Resurrection, but let's face facts, all of us balk at the Resurrection too. So Thomas demands to see the One with holes in hands and side, meaning that if this resurrection thing is true, then I only wish to see Jesus; the One who said He'd be crucified. And if you guys aren't going to show me that One, well then, I'll never believe. Show me Christ Crucified. That IS a good confession!!! Indeed, it's the greatest and only Confession; that Christ Crucified is the One who came to earth as the Son of David, the Son of God, bore our sinful flesh to death and died with nails in His hands and feet and a pierced side, for Thomas and for you.

St. Thomas Apostle; the sent out guy. That's the good and right way to see Thomas and to commemorate the day that marks his death in the year 72 AD. Thomas, the Apostle, the one who refused to believe in anything but the Crucified Christ. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, You strengthened Your Apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in the resurrection of Your Son. Grant us such faith in Jesus Christ the Crucified One that we may never be found wanting in Your sight; through the same Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

DECEMBER 20, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 1:1-7

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

Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. (Romans 1:3b)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God became a man, meaning that all that was common to fallen men was what Jesus understood, knew, lived and bore with. Jesus cried, felt pain, knew ridicule and being made fun of. He knew sorrow and sadness, watched people He loved go through pain, scarcity and worry. Jesus Christ, fully God (that's 100%); fully man (that's 100%) bore all the sin, weight, guilt, sorrow and so on, and all this without sin.

To say this doesn't make sense is perhaps the understatement of the year. 100% plus 100%; that's 200%. Isn't it wonderful then that to our world, to our feeble and simple minds Jesus simply came, not to make everything in this world of law make sense. He came because in the fallen world very little, if anything, has made sense; people get sick and die, tragedies and misunderstandings plague each and every day. Since the Fall, although we like to think that we're logical, reasonable and that most things make sense. in reality very little actually makes sense at all. He came to a people, to us, in the depths of the ocean who've only known darkness, depths, weight and has come to believe that that's the only normal way.

To a world of darkness came The Light, and the world hated the light. He came bringing peace and the world hated it, because they'd grown used to strife, to darkness, pain, misery and the like. He came into a world that we said made sense, a world that we said He'd have to assimilate to. Jesus takes sin, darkness, death, destruction and depravity and hangs it with Him and dies; God Man. THE GOD MAN dies and with Him our guilt, shame and heaviness. Jesus was long spoken about by God in the Garden "I will put enmity between thee (the serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15.) That seed is Jesus. Hear St. John: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a seed fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).

The seed of David? Jesus is THE MAN, the seed that Crushes the serpent's head? That's Jesus too! The seed that dies and bears much fruit? You guessed it—Jesus; The God/ Man come for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen

The everlasting Son, Incarnate deigns to be, Himself a servants form puts on to set His servants free. (LSB 331 "The Advent of our King" St. 2)

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 13, 2022

Today's Reading: James 5:7-11

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

... behold, the Judge is standing at the door. (James 5:9b ESV)

In the name of Jesus, amen. Yikes!!! This text sounds a little too scary for Advent; but here we are 12 days from Christmas; maybe we "aughta" temper the strong judgey language... Nah.... Instead, let's dig in a little deeper as to who the judge is and at which door He stands. What else is Advent than the 1st coming of our Lord, the breaking in, the deluge and life giving flood of Jesus blood that covers the sins of all the world? The Judge is standing at the door, 12 days now away from breaking down the door, the curtain, the wall and chasm that had separated us from God.

Here's where you're saying "Wait just a minute, you're telling me a precious little baby is the Judge!? This precious little child is standing at the door looking to bust it all to pieces and break into the prison of this fallen world, to breathe our poisoned air and dwell with us in our sin, death and filth? C'mon....

That's precisely what St. James writes: He writes about farmers waiting for the precious fruits of the earth, he writes about waiting for early and late rains, and behold, here in the dark doldrums of winter, the stark bitter coldness, the ever darker days of December we prepare again to celebrate the birth of the Judge, the birth of the Just One, the Justifier. The wait is over, the fields are ripe, into the darkness and dwindling light comes the light of the world, Jesus the Judge. But notice dear saints of God how He comes to you; lowly, a baby, not pounding down the door but instead breaking into a Silent Night; barely a whisper, a murmur or even one in Bethlehem who will notice that the Judge is on earth, past the door, dwelling with us as OUR SAVIOR, come to judge us not by what we have done or failed to do; but to judge us according to what He has done FOR US!

This is His first Advent; the Savior comes meek and mild, lowly, our Judge, our Savior comes as a child. Surely we can see how He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love? But this Judge Jesus is steadfast in His meekness; this Savior comes willingly to bear your sin, to suffer and die, to bleed His own blood to save you. Yes, the Judge is at the door, but this Judge has come to willingly be judged for you. The Innocent One became your sin, died as the guilty one in your place, and has bestowed to you by simple water and word His own righteousness, innocence and blessedness; yes He's at the door to tell you today, tomorrow and forever; you've been judged already; judged innocent, forgiven for the sake of Christ Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Savior, rend the heavens wide; come down, come down with mighty stride; unlock the gates, the doors break down; unbar the way to heaven's crown. (LSB 355 O Savior, Rend the Heavens wide. St. 1)

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 14, 2022

Today's Reading: Table of Duties: Civil Government

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

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil (Romans 13:1-4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. One of the great comforts of Jesus becoming Incarnate man is that Jesus knows about life here in this fallen world. You're not the only ones who have lived under the rule of earthly kings and princes; Your Lord Jesus did too. Our Table of Duties from the Small Catechism teaches what our life looks like in this fallen world. We, the baptized, are instructed about Civil Governance not just so we can live, breathe and have our being when they do their job well. We're to be subject to governing authorities even and especially when the people who bear the sword of the Law of God aren't Christian, even when they act in ways that are contrary to the very word of God.

God cares so much about order, safety and care for all people that He appoints servants to bear the sword of wrath, the sword of justice and civil punishment for varying violations of the 10 commands; it's good to have order, it's good that the wicked are punished for crimes and we are given the promise that God ordains this sword for order, for good and not in vain.

Out of Chaos, darkness and nothingness God said "Let there be light..." and there was; evening and morning the first day. There God appointed Adam as steward, caretaker of the creation, Adam named animals, called them by the names that have stuck since then. But the reading gets sorta strange when we see that God the Father appoints ministers, that is, avengers to execute wrath on those who practice evil. This passage in the table of duties isn't talking about your pastor, or even a vigilante Christian who seeks to impose morals and virtues across the land. No, the table of duties reminds us that God has appointed authorities, by His good and gracious will, to maintain order here in the land we sojourn through. Ministers, persons given authority by God to punish criminals, law breakers and the like. This ought to be. But what do we owe to those men and women God has appointed for our good; yes, even when they act out of line... gulp!

Why do we owe them honor? Simply put, Our Gracious God has placed them over us to execute their charges for our good. Yes, there will be tyrants and despots and we pray the Lord will be merciful to them when they abdicate their calling. We should pray for our President, Congress, Governors and Mayors, Police and School Boards that their ears would be opened to hear the gracious care of our Lord. We pray that they be given strength and integrity to govern us in a way that is good and right in the sight of God; we owe them honor not because THEY are good, but because our Lord and God is good and He has graciously given them to us as a defense, for our safety and good. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

DECEMBER 19, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 7:10-17

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

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. (Isaiah 7:10-12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Throughout the Holy Scriptures, with few exceptions, there are two voices. The consistent, compassionate, merciful, correcting, loving voice of Almighty God who's always reminding His people of His great love, grace, mercy and peace. But there are also the voices of God's creatures who seem to always be fighting and arguing against God, not necessarily in violent or offensive ways, at least as we'd determine violence and offense. But like ole Ahaz "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the Test"; St. Peter's another, whether it's saying to Jesus "Far be it from you Lord, this shall never come to You" (in response to Jesus saying HE MUST go to the cross) or later in Acts chapter 10:13-16 when Peter sees the vision of all the wonderful animals descending to earth. God says "Get up Peter, kill and eat." And Peter says no Lord, I've never eaten anything impure or unclean, to which God says, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Peter recalls that this happened three times. That, brothers and Sisters ought to show you just a little about the long-suffering of God for us.

We'd think then that long-suffering and patience might only be extended to nice people, like Peter. But what about the nasty people like King Ahaz the 12th King of Judah, you know, a king whose governance was considered to be disastrous to the political and religious state of Israel, never mind his offering of His own son to the false god Molech (2 Kings 16:18)?

But there's Yahweh, speaking to, loving and teaching Ahaz, the earthly King of the people of God. Yahweh says "Ask for a sign" and then goes on to say the equivalent of "it can be as hair-brained as you could imagine." But Ahaz who loved the law, not wanting or desiring to blaspheme the Name of God (1st Commandment) says, like Peter, no, I won't do it.

What consternation we'd expect from Yahweh? But there is none to be found. Sure there will be all sorts of terrible things that come to Judah and Israel because of the unbelief of the people, which Yahweh will send. But through it all Yahweh will send the one who will, like Jonah, be three days in the belly of the earth after being crucified for the sins of Judah, Ahaz, Peter, you and me.

There's a lot of voices in the Holy Scriptures; a lot of arguing, a lot of nu-uh's and no-ways from the people of God. But our Lord and God who's been speaking from the beginning, speaks to Ahaz, to Peter and to us that we might be comforted and consoled by the only message that's ever mattered: "Christ Jesus, crucified for the forgiveness of your sins." (1 Corinthians 1:23). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 18, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 1:18-2

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

She will bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Mt. 1:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Names mean a whole lot. Your mother and father chose yours for a reason. Maybe it was a relative's name, maybe your name was found on an internet search for neat, contemporary names; regardless of how you were given your name, your name is how you're known, remembered and the means by which you're addressed.

God became a Man and was given a name too; Gabriel the Archangel as he comforts worrying Joseph says that the name of the Child in Mary's womb, the Child that is to come into the world was conceived by the Spirit and was going to do some extraordinary stuff. What though?

He'd have a name, and He'd save His people from their sin. The name Jesus, is derived from the name Joshua. Joshua in the Old Testament is pronounced Yeshua and Yeshua who was and is and will be Jesus (remember how we talked about this on Friday?) Yeshua is Jesus, Jesus was in the OT, you probably remember Him there by another Name (Yahweh: the pre-incarnate Christ). So Yeshua was the Promise that God gave to His people through the prophets and all History. Yeshua/Jesus is the one long promised Who was bringing salvation. Salvation by His blood, His death and His atonement for our sin.

To help this make a little more sense, understand that the word salvation, in Hebrew, literally means "Yeshua". Psalm 14:7 for example: "Oh, that the salvation (Yeshua) of Israel would come out of Zion! Or Psalm 51:12 "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation (Yeshua) and sustain me with a willing spirit. Gabriel says the same to Joseph and us: Jesus comes to save us; from sin, from death and the power of the Devil. But don't forget one of the other Names this Yeshua has: Emmanuel. This Savior Who is true man like us, is God with us.

There's a whole lot in a Name and now you know a little more about Jesus. But lastly know this, Yeshua, Jesus, Emmanuel has come to give you a name, a family, a life, peace, joy and forgiveness. The day when the old Adam was drowned in your Baptism you were given another Name. The very name of your Lord and Savior, Christ-ian. He names you! He claims you and says that all this is rightly His has been bestowed to you. In the Name of Jesus + Amen.

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 15, 2022

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

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

Advent is about wrath and mercy, repentance and faith so St. John reveals in the book of Revelation... sort of puts things into perspective as we make preparation for the nativity of our Lord.

Advent prepares us, makes us ready; not in the sense of getting our bags packed or checking off the shopping lists for friends and family. In Advent, God reproves and saves, disciplines and loves us. Advent reveals both the Alien work of God and His Proper work.

So what's the alien work of God? Alien doesn't have anything to do with little green men. Hear in Revelation 3, "I reprove and discipline". In some translations of the Bible the word chastise is used. Reprove, discipline and chastise... Yikes! But chastisement isn't God making fun of us, far from it; Our Triune God loves us in that, He points out where we have faltered, failed and fallen short; He allows and even sends natural punishments to reprove (turn us/ He repents us). This is the alien work of God, the reprovng, the chastisement that causes us to cry out in our sin and desperation for Emmanuel, the Savior of sinners from sin and death. He's Emmanuel in a very alien (strange or peculiar) way to reprove us, to turn us, to repent us. That's right. God turns us, opens our eyes, unbinds our shackled tongues, opens our stopped up deaf ears in order that we would see the great need of His proper work for us.

His proper work? Becoming sin for us, bleeding and dying to save us, fulfilling all the law for us, facing down the fulness of the Father's wrath for us. We'd see none of this, see no need at all of His love, mercy made known in His bloody death unless we were first reprovng and chastised to see that of ourselves we are lost and condemned. Having seen that we are lost and condemned, Christ comes to bleed and die in order to make us alive in Him.

What this Lord and God of ours does He does for those He loves. He loves you. Sometimes it seems a bit strange, a little alien, but rest assured that even the pointing out of your sins, your shortcomings and the many and varying places that you've come up short over the last week or year are for reproof; to put the old Adam in each and every one of us to death. Reproof hurts, chastisement and discipline are unpleasant; It's alien, a foreign concept, but fully part of how God loves you, wholly part of His work for you; to turn you to see Who Jesus is and how He properly comes to you. Your Jesus is Emmanuel (God with us), God as a Man, and a baby man at that! Meek, lowly and humble to save, to buy us back and to mark us as ones purchased and won from sin, death and the devil. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 16, 2022

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

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”
(Revelation 4:8 ESV)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. So which is it? Was, Is or Is to come? It's the 16th of December 2022, a Friday, one more day of School before the weekend, perhaps you have a date tonight, tomorrow? Perhaps there are preparations you're making for the upcoming Christmas break. We're a NOW kind of people, Tik Tok and YouTube keep us up to speed about what's happening NOW and that's about all that really matters; you're teenagers, youth; in the prime of your lives. Just what is St. John up to citing the old timey Prophet Isaiah with words about what was, is and is to come?

This citation St. John uses from the book of Revelation covers two parts of the was, is and is to come Phrase. Isaiah the prophet spoke and wrote in a time that he'd have called contemporary If Tik Tok had existed He'd have written the same thing. Isaiah wrote about what was to be, Immanuel, the King, the Savior, the one born of a virgin would be born and die. Isaiah wasn't a future teller, he was just a guy that the Almighty chose to write down what was going to happen. St. John then, somewhere in around the year 90 AD, wrote that the one Isaiah wrote about was now enthroned in heaven, glorified and reigning as the Lord of the heavens and the earth, reigning as the one who said definitively before He died "It is finished." St. John sees a day that not even we have seen yet. So that covers the Was and Will be part, so what about the Is part?

That's today, Friday the 16th of December. The Holy One that Isaiah was told would come; has come; It's finished; salvation is accomplished, delivered to you and me by water and the Word. The Holy One who John saw enthroned is surrounded by the saints, the elders and so on; not angels, but real people. John saw Jesus but He also saw you, you who'll head out for school and work today, who'll head into this weekend guarded and protected by the Holy One who goes before you, who fights for you, who'll feed you with His own word and body and blood in the Divine Service soon, very soon. He who was with His people, He who's sitting enthroned already in the heavens is the Holy One who's with you today, tomorrow and forever. Jesus who was, Is here now, and will be forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Make ye straight what long was crooked; make the rougher places plain. Let your hearts be true and humble, as befits His Holy reign. For the glory of the Lord now o'er earth is shed abroad, and all flesh shall see the token that His word is never broken. (LSB 347: Comfort, Comfort Ye My People: St. 4)

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

DECEMBER 17, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit: Psalm 130:5-8; antiphon: Isaiah 64:1

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

Shower O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout. I, Yahweh, am creating it. (Isaiah 45:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There was a day, a long time ago, when your pastor and I, the writer of this reflection, learned Hebrew. Your pastor and I also learned Church history. Both are very important for preaching, teaching and writing devotions; but what about you? All this talk about the heavens raining and righteousness coming down? Salvation and righteousness bearing fruit and so on and so forth? What does it mean?

Jerome, one of the church fathers, wrote a long time ago that the Introit for the 4th Sunday of Advent (Isaiah 45:8) was better translated as: "let the earth open up and bring forth a Savior." Jerome wrote that this Introit was "a prayer to the Holy Spirit to come down like dew upon the Virgin Mary so that she would conceive and bear the Savior of the Nations"; the Righteous One; Jesus Christ our Lord.

What's even better though is that all this righteousness, which needs to be showered down on us because we were conceived and born in sin, because we are unrighteous, comes to us as the rains come to water the ground. Just as we can't cause the clouds to form up, just as we can't tell the rain where to fall, the salvation that this Jesus wins, the righteousness He imparts bears fruit. God gives growth, God gives comfort, God sends the abundant rains of His own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be poured out abundantly here in His creation, for His people, for you and me. The final part, let the earth cause them to sprout; what a joy this is, because this God of ours takes heed, takes care to come to us, His people, not because we're righteous or lovely, but to MAKE us righteous and lovely. That's what this Father of yours did; that's what this Christ Child did for us. He came to us, in this dry and barren land, took on our flesh and our sin to put it to death with Him that new, abundant and overflowing streams of life giving water would flow over you in baptism "I, Yahweh, am creating it" He's done it FOR YOU. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to Thee O Israel. (LSB 357 O Come, O Come Emmanuel St. 1)