



# REFLECTIONS

The First Sunday of Advent -  
Saturday After the Epiphany

**November 30, 2025 - January 10, 2026**



This season's Reflections were written by

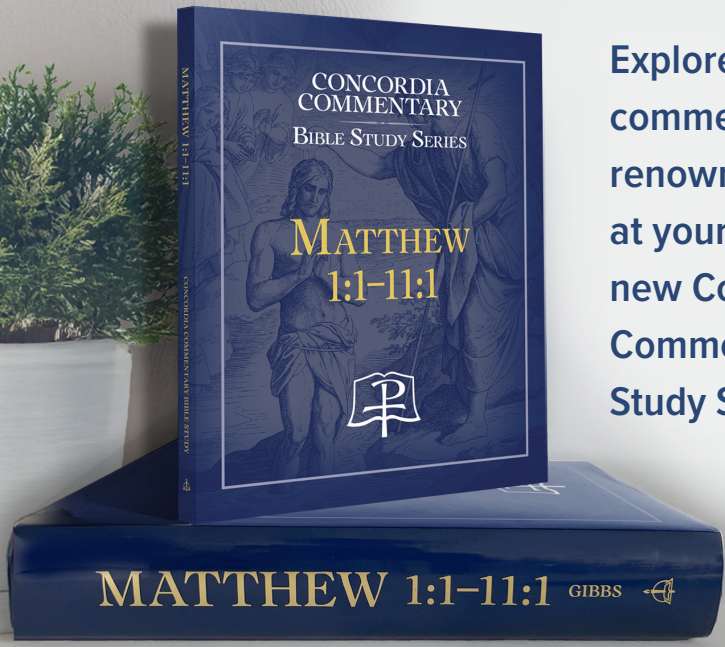
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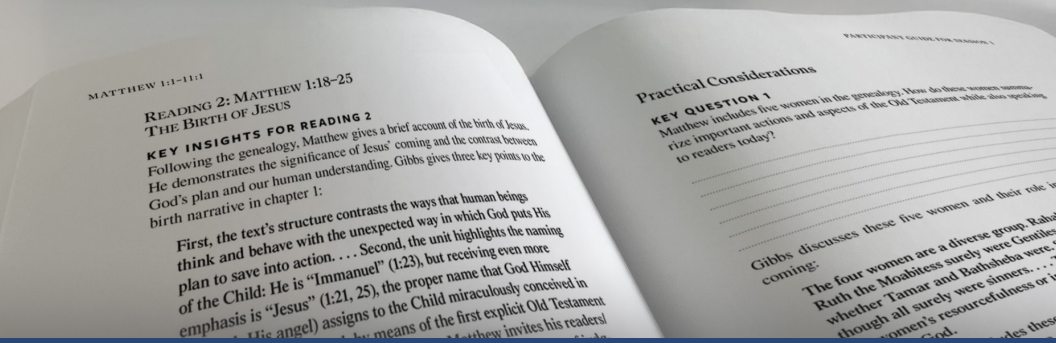
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# **A Short Form for Daily Reflection**

## ADAPTED FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

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Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

**In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit. 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 You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil 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 You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.**

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

# St. Andrew, Apostle

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

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

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

*"One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" (John 1:40-41)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Andrew told his brother that they had found Jesus, the Messiah. It seemed that way. They believed the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would come. Now, they had found Him! Except that Jesus hadn't been lost. Instead of Andrew and Simon finding Jesus, Jesus came and found them. Jesus, the all-knowing Lord, walked past John the Baptist while he was teaching, and John pointed out Jesus, the Lamb of God. When Andrew followed Him, Jesus invited Andrew to "come and see" where Jesus was staying and what Jesus was doing. In other words, Jesus invited Andrew to follow Him.

Sometimes, it's easy for people, including you, to think that they've "found Jesus" or "got Jesus." From our perspective, that's what it seems like. Yet, it's not that we find Jesus, but that Jesus finds us. In the Small Catechism about the Creed's Third Article, we confess, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." We who cannot believe in Jesus as Lord or come to Him don't find. Instead, Jesus and the Holy Spirit find us!

That's great news, because it takes the burden off you. It can be tempting to think that you need to find Jesus or that you need to make sure that you are following Jesus the right way. Don't be confused: you aren't in charge of God's grace. Jesus isn't lost, and Jesus doesn't need finding. You were lost, but Jesus has found you and called you His own new creation, baptized into His name and an heir of eternal life with Him! Jesus now invites you to "come and see" His gracious work for you because of His great love for you!

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.*

# Monday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 1, 2025

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

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

*"And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'" (Matthew 21:9)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Wait, how did a Holy Week reading break into December? Palm Sunday happened the week of Good Friday and Easter, not four weeks before Christmas. Maybe the Bible-reading calendar (the lectionary) goofed up! Don't worry. This is not a mistake. At the beginning of this new Church year, we are supposed to hear about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as King, about Jesus' appearance as Savior, and recognize Jesus' presence not only in Jerusalem but with the whole Church. That day, Jesus entered on a humble donkey to the shouts of the crowds. During this season of Advent, we also look at how Jesus was born and laid in a manger at Christmas, and how Jesus will come again in glory on the Last Day.

What those events all have in common is that Jesus is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. In Jerusalem, the crowds shouted the Hebrew word "Hosanna!" which means "Save us now!" Psalm 118:25 teaches us to pray like this, and it continues to be the prayer of Christ's Church today.

In Advent, in Holy Week, and for every day throughout the year, you need Jesus. You need a Savior. The world threatens you, the Devil attacks you, and your own sinful flesh and mind try to get you to doubt God. You fall into sin; no matter how hard you try, you cannot live perfectly. By yourself, you are a lost cause. You can't do what God has called you to do in His Law. That's why He has come. He has come to save you. The Lord of all, present in the manger. The One who humbly rode a donkey into Jerusalem as an answer to prayer. The One who was subject to death, even death on a cross, for your forgiveness. The One who rose from death to give you the promise of everlasting life with Him. Jesus has come to save you.

Keep praying! Keep singing with the crowds, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Save us now, Lord!" Confess your faith in Jesus, your Savior. He has come to rescue you from sin and every evil. Rejoice, because He is the Savior you need, and He will never leave you nor forsake you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"Hosanna in the highest!" That ancient song we sing; For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav'n our King. Oh, may we ever praise Him With heart and life and voice And in His blissful presence Eternally rejoice!" (LSB 443:3)*

# Tuesday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 2, 2025

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

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

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" (Jeremiah 23:5-6)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

These days, there aren't very many kings in the world. Sure, there's a King of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth, but where else are there kings? Brunei, Saudi Arabia, Monaco, and Morocco are some current monarchies as well, for your trivia background information. Still, "kings" sound foreign to most people today. But the Lord's promise through Jeremiah is more than talking about a monarchical form of government, but the establishment of the "once-for-all-ruler-over-all-things." This is not a promise about another monarch or king in the world, but the ultimate ruler over all things.

The righteous Branch of David is not just another ruler. He is the be-all, end-all ruler. All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him. (Matthew 28:18) He is before all things; in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17) In him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28) There is no one like Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch. The justice and righteousness that He brings are no mere human ideal, but the very justice and righteousness of God.

Jesus has come. The Lord is our righteousness. Jesus, the righteous Branch, has made you righteous by His grace. In a human court, a judge will declare an accused person "not guilty" if there isn't enough evidence to convict them of a crime. Notice, though, that there is a big difference between "not guilty" and "innocent." Someone who didn't commit a crime isn't guilty of that crime, but they aren't innocent. But when Jesus, the ruler and judge of all things, comes, He is our righteousness. Jesus doesn't declare you "not guilty" nor "innocent" but rather "righteous." By the grace of God that covers you, Jesus says that, because of His grace, you are just the way you are supposed to be. He has claimed you as His own. That's the only authority that matters. Live as a subject in God's Kingdom, because "The Lord is Our Righteousness" (that is, Jesus Christ) is your King.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lo, how a rose e'er blooming  
From tender stem hath sprung!  
Of Jesse's lineage coming  
As prophets long have sung,  
It came, a flow'ret bright,  
Amid the cold of winter,  
When half-spent was the night. (LSB 359:1)*

# Wednesday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 3, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Romans 13:(8-10) 11-14**

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

*"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. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11-12)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Perhaps you remember the story of Paul Revere, the Boston silversmith who warned the American revolutionaries that, "The British are coming! The British are coming!" If you don't remember Paul Revere, you might remember that student in your elementary classroom who stood in the doorway when the teacher left the room. As the rest of the class got up to their shenanigans, the lookout would loudly whisper, "Shhh! The teacher's coming back!"

Holy Scripture doesn't need Paul Revere or the classroom lookout because the Holy Spirit inspired St. Paul to write that it's time to wake from sleep. There is no time for sleepiness, laziness, or shenanigans for God's people. The Lord's salvation is near at hand, and Christ is returning soon. Live like Jesus is coming in glory soon! Live as one of the Christians who is forgiven by Jesus and for whom Jesus died.

It's hard to live in a constant state of readiness. Have you ever had a class at school where your teacher warned you that you could have a pop quiz at any time? It was really stressful, wasn't it? Or if you have a job, you know how nerve-racking it can be when your boss watches your normal tasks and then asks to have a private chat.

You are covered by the grace of Christ. That doesn't mean that you can let your guard down or live in a spiritually lazy way. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. (Hebrews 12:2) Live out your faith because you are a beloved child of God. Jesus is coming back. Yet, your life of faith isn't something you need to do because you are afraid of God, but because that is who God has made you to be. While it can be hard to remain dedicated to the loving service that God has called you to do, don't grow weary. Don't give up. Don't stop serving and loving your neighbors. After all, God put those people in your life for you to love. He has also called you to love Him with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. As hard as it is, simply do that until the day that Jesus returns in glory.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*As we worship, grant us vision, Till Your love's revealing light In its height and depth and greatness, Dawns upon our quickened sight, Making known the needs and burdens Your compassion bids us bear, Stirring us to tireless striving, Your abundant life to share. (LSB 848:3)*



# Thursday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 4, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of Duties: To Employers and Supervisors**  
**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 10:12-27a, 33-34; 2 Peter 1:1-21**

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Well, this is an awkward bit of the Catechism to discuss in reflections geared toward youth, isn't it? The "bondservants" described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians can also be understood as slaves or indentured servants. That's not how things work around you, though. These words are appropriate not only for people who supervise indentured servants, but also for bosses, teachers, supervisors, and anyone who holds a position of authority.

That's not too many high-school students, but that doesn't mean you're off the hook. Are you a captain on your sports team? Do you babysit? Are you sometimes left in charge of your younger siblings? If you're an older student in your school, how do you treat younger students? Do you take advantage of others? Are you bossy when you babysit or pushy to your teammates? When you serve in those places of honor and respect, do you treat those around you lovingly?

This encouragement has a deeper significance than "be nice to others." While "it's nice to be nice," God created all people. Those with authority and those under authority have the same heavenly Master, and God doesn't play favorites. A threatening, belligerent boss doesn't honor God when he or she mistreats their employees. A rude or quarrelsome teacher doesn't honor God by their actions. A condescending babysitter or trainer at a part-time job doesn't honor people created by God. God has every right to judge you for how you treat others, including those whom you supervise in any capacity.

The way that you treat others is imperfect. Have you threatened, patronized, or been rude to others? Well, since you have a pulse - probably. What hope is there for you? Jesus shed His blood on the cross to cover even those sins, and the fruit of the Spirit fills you with strength to love others in a more excellent way. Your sin is forgiven, and when you have influence and authority over others, use it in service to them, as you are one of God's gifts to the people He created. God loves everyone He has made. God calls you to love and respect the people He made, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because He has given supervisors and bosses and babysitters and team captains to the people He has created.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*The humble heart and lowly God raises up on high; Beneath His feet in terror  
The haughty soul shall lie. The heart sincere and right, That heeds God's  
invitation And makes true preparation— It is the Lord's delight. (LSB 354:3)*

# Friday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 5, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Isaiah 11:1-12:6**

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

*"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Salvation" is a powerful word, but you might not use it every day. We're more familiar with the verb "to save" and with the noun "savior," but to say that God is our salvation is unique. Salvation is what God accomplishes and brings. The Savior brings salvation. Isaiah doesn't just say that God brings salvation, but that God is salvation. In other words, this isn't something God simply accomplishes, but salvation is God's identity (along with many other important things!)

Isaiah lived in a chaotic world. The politics were complicated. Life was dangerous. Things were confusing. Where would God's people find help? Their kings hadn't been great. Other nations were attacking them and trying to take advantage of them. Was there hope that things would get better? Isaiah promised that there would be a branch from the stump of Jesse. There would be a descendant from King David who would do great things for God's people. "Great things" sells that promise short. The One who is coming would not be corrupt, but would do everything right. The peace would be so profound that wolves and lambs would lie down next to each other, and the lambs wouldn't get eaten! There would be no danger, even to the point that toddlers could play over snake dens without getting bitten! God's people who had been carried away would be brought back home. Everything would be restored!

Who would do this? No mere human king. No political or military leader could pull this off. This is the work of God Himself. God is the salvation of His people. God is the hope of the hopeless, the strength of the weak, and the perfection of the imperfect.

That's great news, because life today can be chaotic as well. Politics, health, safety, emotions, families, and so many other things are difficult, challenging, and messed up. Both in the days of Isaiah and today, God is the salvation of His people. God shows up with healing and forgiveness and restoration and righteousness, and He makes all things right, just the way they should be by His very presence. God comes to you as your salvation. In the middle of chaos, trust in the Lord your God because He is your salvation.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Since Christ has full atonement made And brought to us salvation, Each Christian therefore may be glad And build on this foundation. Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, Your death is now my life indeed, For You have paid my ransom. (LSB 555:6)*

# Saturday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 6, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 2 - Psalm 80:1, 3, 14, 17; antiphon: Isaiah 62:11b; 30:30, 29**

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

*"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes.' The Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard, and you shall have gladness of heart. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved! Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see. But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes.' The Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard, and you shall have gladness of heart." (Introit for the Second Week of Advent)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God is present with His people. That promise runs all the way through Holy Scripture. It especially runs through tomorrow's Introit from Psalm 80 and the parts of Isaiah that comfort us today. Loneliness is a powerful feeling. It's hard when you feel abandoned by your friends and misunderstood by your parents. When it seems that God is far away from you, you can also feel a spiritual loneliness that is really discouraging.

In those times of loneliness, Scripture leads us to call on God, "Look at me and don't forget me! Save me! Restore me! Don't go away, but stay here with me!" That's the prayer of Psalm 80. Hear the Word of God. Call out to your dear Heavenly Father as one of His dear children. You are not alone, because God is with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Hope in the Lord and in His plentiful redemption!

When you feel alone and when you wonder if God really does care about you, remember that He has baptized you, placing His own name on you. Remember that He speaks His Word in your ears to remind you that you are forgiven and that you belong to Him. Remember that He has broken His own body and shed his blood for you, and gives you that Gift in Holy Communion. You are not alone, because your Lord, Jesus Christ, draws near to you and is present with you. He will remain with you until the Last Day, when He will take you to Himself. The Lord is always with you, no matter what!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*God Himself is present: Let us now adore Him And with awe appear before Him. God is in His temple; All within keep silence; Humbly kneel in deepest rev'rence. He alone On His throne Is our God and Savior; Praise His name forever! (LSB 907:1)*

# Second Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 7, 2025

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

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

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Where is God? The nations are in distress, the earth roars with violence, people are fainting with fear, the powers are shaken. Where is God? My home breaks, disaster takes away what I have, fear haunts my waking moments, and the social pressure is more than I can bear. Where is God? I struggle with my sin, my temptation abounds, I endure the disgrace of those who have sinned against me, I am ashamed. Where is God? Diseases rampage, wars rage incessantly, my body breaks, those I love die. Where is God?

We ask, because we have heard that God loves us, that God delivers us, that God saves us. If we are going through these things, we assume that He must not really be here, or else we wouldn't go through them at all. Even though our Lord has told us directly that we would. The Lord says, "the wickedness of man [is] great upon the earth, and that every intention of his heart was only evil continuously." However, we still can't figure out why the world has so much evil in it. The Lord said, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it." Yet we are frustrated that nothing we do seems to change anything. Jesus said, "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And for the life of us, we cannot figure out why the world seems to want us dead, and will do anything to accuse us of the worst.

Jesus also said, "Take up your cross and follow me." Where is God? He is found in the suffering, the struggles, the shame, the death. "When you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Jesus is found at the cross. And it's there where our sins are counted His, and He pays for them in full. It's there where our shame is counted as His, and He bears it publicly, humiliated before all for our sake. And when you face the things of this world, which will always be there, you never face them alone. Your redeemer is with you. Jesus is with you. And these things are not the proof of God's absence. Just the opposite. He's telling you to take them as proof of His presence. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

# Monday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 8, 2025

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

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 24:14-25:12; Obadiah 1-21; 1 John 2:15-29**

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." (Malachi 4:5)*

*"On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true." (End of the Explanation of the Third Article)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We look forward to the coming of the Day of the Lord. A day when all evil will end. A day when those arrogant, who are sure they know better than to believe in God, will come face to face with Him. A day of fire for the sinful world. So that sin, death, and the devil have roots to take hold any longer. On that day, we will go out leaping with joy at the resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, our salvation, and eternal life with God. And all that's left which is wicked will be ash under our feet.

We are ready for the Last Day, to be sure. But there is another day that has already happened. A day where evil ended, because it was conquered. A day when the arrogant, who were sure they knew better than God, saw God face to face. A day of fire, as the wrath of God over the world's sin burned brightly. And by this day, by the death of God on this day, sin, death, and the devil have no way for roots to take hold any longer.

On that day, that great and awesome day of the Lord, Jesus Christ died on His cross. We call that day Good. What Jesus won for us on that day causes us to go out leaping with joy. Joy over the forgiveness of all our sins. Joy that He has saved us. Joy that eternal life has been made ours. Joy, because resurrection is coming. All promises made by the God who keeps His every promise. Elijah was indeed sent before that day. Jesus Himself will show us that John the Baptizer is the Elijah who was to come. And that same John the Baptizer has likewise made the way ready for Jesus to come to us.

From God's perspective, these two are the same day. And we can see them that way as well. We look forward to the coming Day of the Lord. We look back at the already arrived Day of the Lord. And on both days, we rejoice that Jesus Christ has paid for our sin, conquered our death, defeated that devil, and saved us forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Behold the Lamb of God That bears the world's transgression, Whose sacrifice removes The devil's dread oppression. Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away our sin, Who for peace and joy Will full atonement win. (LSB 346:3)*

# Tuesday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 9, 2025

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

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

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I've sometimes heard people say they like Jesus pretty well, but that Old Testament God sure sounds mean. As tempting as it is to point out that Jesus isn't always smiles and sunshine (Hello, cleansing of the temple!), it's better to find out why. If not, we won't understand why He tells His people to conquer a land and get rid of the people who were in it before. Not understanding that when God's people fall into the same idolatry as those before, the Lord has many harsh things to say and do to them, too.

Why is God angry? Because they hurt those whom God loves. They weren't just going about their own business, and then one day got smited by the Lord out of the blue. The Canaanites were offering their own daughters as prostitutes for their idols. They slaughtered their own sons for a mute statue's favor. Wouldn't you get angry if the people around you demanded the most vile things imaginable from your own family members in order to get an inanimate object to love them? Or worse, so they could prove to themselves how good they were?

Sin isn't just the breaking of arbitrary rules. Sin hurts those whom God loves. Sin hurts your neighbors, your relationships, your self, your own body, your own soul. Wouldn't you expect the Lord to get angry over such things? And yet, what do we do when that sin is ours? What do we do when God has every right to be angry with us?

We give those sins to Him. The Lord's anger isn't like ours. It's not like anything else in this world. God's anger is focused into action. Focused on righting the wrong, healing the wounds, making whole what is broken, taking our sin away. And that doesn't mean that our sin gets ignored, as if it weren't real. It is carried by Christ. Christ, our ram caught in the thicket, who dies instead of us on God's altar. Christ, our brother, who goes ahead of us into death in order that we might live, fed by His Body and Blood. Christ, who parts the sea of sin and death that we may cross over by the Baptism He gives us into a new kingdom. Christ the suffering servant, who bears the sins of the world, including all yours and mine. All the anger over sin has been poured out upon Jesus at the cross for your sake. And He did it for you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Once He came in blessing, All our sins redressing; Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy; Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us (LSB 333:1)*

# Wednesday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 10, 2025

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**Today's Reading: 1 John 4:1-21**

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

*"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."  
(1 John 4:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

False prophets don't come with warning labels. They do not advertise that they are wolves dressed as sheep. They may not even intend to do harm, but that doesn't stop the harm they cause. There are a lot of things in this world called 'Christian.' And yet, they do damage to Christians and threaten to take away their hope found in Christ. If we are not careful, we may even find ourselves as one of the wolves.

This is why it is so important to be in God's Word regularly. Scripture is where God talks to us. He teaches us what is right, what is His. It's God's Word that tells us of our sin and fallen nature. It's God's Word that tells us how God made a plan to save us from the beginning through Jesus.

God's Word shows us the world that we really see. Things are difficult here. Things hurt here. There are crosses here, especially when we confess Christ. Anything that tells us these things will not bother you if you have enough faith, does not come from God. Our hope comes from something far better. Our hope is found in Jesus.

There is sin in the world. We have sin ourselves. But Jesus bears it in our place. Dies for it on His cross. You know what God thinks of you by looking at what He did on Good Friday for you. He takes your sin away. He forgives you. He saves you. He makes you part of His family. He feeds you. He washes you. He is present even now with you. Now might not be without pain, but with Christ, there is more hope than all the world's comfort apart from Him. Included in this hope is resurrection for you. Eternal life for you. A world without sin for you, those you love in the faith, all believers, and God Almighty Himself. These are all promised in that Word.

False prophets, even unwitting ones, put those things in doubt, take those things away. But Christ has given you His Word to test these things by. Be in His Word often. For He is with you always.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"Comfort, comfort ye My people, Speak ye peace," thus saith our God;  
"Comfort those who sit in darkness, Mourning 'neath their sorrow's  
load. Speak ye to Jerusalem Of the peace that waits for them; Tell her  
that her sins I cover And her warfare now is over." (LSB 347:1)*

# Thursday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 11, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of Duties: To Youth**

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 28:14-29; 1 John 5:1-21; 2 John 1-13; 3 John 1-15**

*"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" (1 Peter 5:5-6)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

You will hear the word 'vocation' a lot in Lutheran circles. It means the place in which God put you, and the responsibilities that come with that. You will have many different vocations throughout your life. Right now, you are young. And with that comes the responsibility to defer to those with more experience, for experience comes with time. That's a difficult thing to do. Because you have ideas. You know how you want things to go. And you have a world that worships the young, pushing you from behind.

Our Lord calls for humility, but humbling oneself just makes everything take longer. But what is better, the Lord raising you up or you raising yourself up? Which one is even possible when we are dead in our own sins?

Yet the Lord doesn't call you to do any less than He has done Himself. Jesus is God, and yet when He was in the vocation of youth, He listened to the teachers in the temple—asking good questions, yes, but hearing their answers. Likewise, He was obedient to His earthly parents and humbled Himself to obey what they said.

In another vocation, Jesus humbled Himself to be tried before the Sanhedrin. They did not do the right thing, but by Jesus' humility, we were saved. Jesus humbled Himself before Pilate, a pagan who feared more for his own skin than for doing what was right. Pilate also failed, but by Jesus' humility, all our sins are forgiven. Jesus was placed under the authority of death. Not that death had a claim on Him, but by His humility, Jesus died on a cross and saved us from death forever.

God places people above us in authority for a reason. Those people might not always get it right, but our Lord does this for our good. When we fall short of what God expects, we humbly return to His grace and mercy, which He gives to us through Christ.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Oh blest that house; It prospers well, In peace and joy the parents dwell.  
And in their children's lives is shown How richly God can bless His own  
(LSB 862:4)*



# Friday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 12, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Jude 1-25**

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

*"I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3b)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The letter from St. Jude, also known as Thaddeus, to the Church is short. But in it, the apostle sees that false teachers are twisting God's Word, and people are following after them. He reminds the Church that this is not the first time this has happened. In fact, it has been happening throughout the history of God's people.

From Cain, who killed his brother, to Balaam, who had to be repeatedly warned not to go beyond God's Word, no matter what earthly gain he got from it, to Korah, who rebelled against God and Moses (and whom we will see more of in tomorrow's devotion). We have always needed to be on the lookout for those who say things we want to hear. For the desires of our hearts are only evil continuously (Genesis 6:5).

As we saw a couple of days ago, false prophets don't come with warning labels. However, the Lord has let us know that they will be here. And that means we can watch for them. We test everything we hear against the Word of God. Even what you read here, even what you hear from your own pastor. And if there's something that doesn't seem to fit, ask. The misunderstanding may be with you, and he can help. Or the misunderstanding is with him, and you have been a help. For we're all to have mercy on those who doubt, according to St. Jude.

Hold tightly to God's Word. For in it we're given Christ. His work of the cross is delivered to us, faith is created in us by the Holy Spirit relaying this Word. God's Word comes to our ears as we hear it read, and as we hear sermons rooted in what God reveals in that Word. God's Word comes to us as Absolution, Christ forgiving our sins directly. God's Word is connected to water in Baptism, where we are buried with Christ in death in order that we can rise with Him in the resurrection. Where we are washed and made clean from all our sin. God's Word says of bread, "This is My body, given for you." The Word says of wine, "This is my blood, shed for your forgiveness." And we receive that word in our mouths.

The book of Jude has many other interesting details in it as well. Yet the central theme is to hold tight to that Word, no matter what the world wants you to hear. Because God gives His Gifts by His Word. And that Word is given to you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes, The Savior promised long; Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne And ev'ry voice a song (LSB 349:1)*

# Saturday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 13, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 3 - Psalm 85:1-2, 6, 8; antiphon: Phil. 4:4-5**  
**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:15-30:14; Revelation 1:1-20**

*"You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin." (Psalm 85:2)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Introit for tomorrow comes from Psalm 85, but there's a part of many psalms that we don't bother with very often. If you open up your Bible to Psalm 85, you will see at or maybe even before verse 1 these words: "To The Choirmaster. A Psalm Of The Sons Of Korah." Who is Korah, and who are his sons? For that answer, we start at Numbers 16.

Korah rebelled against Moses during the 40 years in the wilderness. He thought He should lead God's people, and talked a number of them into staging a coup against Moses and Aaron. He refused to meet with Moses, lest Moses kill him and call it judgment from God. Well, the rebellion ended with the ground opening up before the people and swallowing Korah and his closest followers before closing over the top of them. A plague then hit the rest. There was no mistaking God's action. Moses didn't do a thing.

But not everyone in Korah's family died. His sons lived (Numbers 26:11). We have their genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6. One of Korah's descendants was a man named Samuel, son of Elkanah, who was the prophet who anointed David to be king. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren went on to be musicians at the temple. The Holy Spirit inspired them to write eleven of the 150 Psalms.

They used to rebel against God. And the Lord turned them to be speakers of His Word. He did the same with a Pharisee named Saul, who we now know as St. Paul. And He continues to call us out of our sin, and speak His Word to us, and through us to our neighbors. He does this because God forgives sin. He covers iniquity. And He did that through Jesus. That is why Advent prepares the way for Jesus to come to us. As a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. As a Savior wrapped in burial cloths and laid in a tomb. The death of Jesus pays for all sins, whether Korah's, or Paul's, or ours. His blood covers them all. And we stand forgiven in Him.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Hark, the herald's voice is crying In the desert far and near, Calling sinners to repentance, Since the kingdom now is here. O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way; Let the valley rise to meet Him And the hills bow down to greet Him. (LSB 347:3)*

# Third Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 14, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Matthew 11:2-10, 11**

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

*"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

John the Baptizer has been faithful since before he was born. John leapt in his mother Elizabeth's womb in greeting when Jesus visited inside Mary before He was born. He proclaimed a baptism of repentance while dressed in camel's hair and eating locusts. He stood against Herod marrying his brother's wife, which is why he was in prison. But such faithfulness doesn't make doubt impossible, especially when things don't work out the way you hoped they would.

We, too, might be faithful in much of what God gives to us. We have confessed Christ when it cost us. We have shared the Gospel with those who needed it, even if they didn't want it. We have called upon Him in times of great need. But what happens when things don't turn out the way we planned? That prayer didn't receive the answer we wanted? That friend betrayed us? A loved one dies? In those moments, we want Christ to answer us: Are you the right one? Or is it someone else?

Jesus answers John, John's disciples, and us in the same way, by actually doing the things that He promised. And every promise finds its yes in Jesus' death and resurrection. Because Jesus died for you. Those things that didn't go according to our plan? Remember that God's plan included a cross for Christ to die on. Prayer didn't get the answer we wanted? Jesus prayed for the cup to pass from Him, though not if it was against the Father's will. And the Father's will was for us to be saved from our sin. That friend who betrayed us? By Jesus' betrayal, the price for sin was paid forever on our behalf. A loved one dies? By the death of Jesus, death itself is destroyed.

It may have seemed like things were not working throughout Jesus' passion and death. But as Easter morning dawned, sin was forgiven, paid in blood. Death was conquered, as Jesus rose as the firstborn from the dead. The devil had no more claim on anyone, as Christ kicked down the gates of Hell itself in victory.

Yes, those moments of doubt come. But all God's promises are answered with "yes" at His cross. Look there, and see what our Lord thinks of you. You are worth God giving up His own life to save. And what can matter more than that?

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

# Monday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 15, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:1-8, 9-11**

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

*"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.'" (Isaiah 40:3-4)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When John the Baptizer was asked who he was, he pointed to this verse from Isaiah. So, how did he change the landscape? By preaching repentance.

Turns out people aren't generally keen on confessing their sins. The world is not a very forgiving place. We ourselves have been trained from the earliest ages to find reasons why our wrongs were actually rights. A child who is confronted with knocking over a lamp might blame a stuffed animal. That doesn't work, but our reasoning gets more sophisticated as we grow. It was a sibling's fault. It was a parent's fault for putting the lamp so close to the edge. It was an emergency, so haste was more important than the lamp. Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter. So long as someone believes it, we show ourselves to be right.

We live in a world that demands self-righteousness. If you cannot justify yourself, you will be blamed. However, when people without faith sin in such a way that they cannot justify themselves, it breaks them. Guilt overwhelms them. All that self-justification was actually protection. And without it, people lose their minds, which is why confession and absolution in the Church is so weird to people. Why would anyone willingly put themselves through such guilt and shame? However, the repentance of a Christian has two parts. First is sorrow over our sin. That is the same as anyone else. It's the second part that is different. The second part is hope. A sure and certain hope that all our sin is forgiven. The guilt is made Christ's. The shame hangs on His shoulders. His blood pays for it. And His life is given for our salvation.

Without Christ, we would make mountains to hide our sin behind. We would bury in whatever valley we could. But the way of the Lord leaves nowhere for our sin to hide. All our hiding places are made an open field, so the sin can all be seen. And so that Jesus can take it all away. That is why we are so willing to turn in repentance. That is why we willingly confess our sins. Because we know the one who takes them and makes them His. And they're ours no longer.

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 347:4)*

# Tuesday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 16, 2025

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

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

*"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Corinthians 4:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It is important to know what a pastor isn't and what a pastor is. Since he's in front of the congregation all the time, we sometimes think he's the most important person there. He's not. We sometimes think that because he knows so much of God's Word, he must be holier than everyone else. He isn't. We sometimes think that he must have a secret line to God that the rest of us don't get. He doesn't. Pastors are people just like everyone else. We have the same sins, the same struggles, the same losses.

What makes a pastor different is the vocation into which God has placed him. He speaks on Jesus' behalf. When the Lord forgives sins, the pastor speaks Christ's forgiveness. When the Lord feeds His people, the pastor brings out what God has prepared. You see, Christ did not come as a master but as a servant. Likewise, those He sends to speak on His behalf do not come as masters but as servants—to serve as our Lord serves.

That's why our worship is called the Divine Service—not because we serve the divine but because Christ serves you. He teaches you His Law, what He expects you to do. He teaches His Gospel, what He has done for you, especially at the cross. He washes your sins away. He clothes you with His righteousness. He sets you at His table, serving you His own body and blood to eat and drink. He gives you the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So also the pastors whom God calls do these things at His command. Teaching, preaching, washing, serving. These things which God gives are important enough for Him to set a steward over them for your sake. A steward is someone who takes care of his master's things, does his master's business. And that is what a pastor does. God put him here for you. Not as someone far off beyond your reach, but someone, like Christ, who comes to where you are, to serve you where you need.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*The everlasting Son Incarnate deigns to be, Himself a servant form puts on  
on To set His servants free. (LSB 331:2)*

# Wednesday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 17, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Revelation 5:1-14**

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

*"...I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain..." (Revelation 5:6)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Revelation is not a timeline of the last days, but an image of Christ and His Church at all times. Sure, the pictures described inside make the imagination run wild. But all of Scripture tells us about Jesus and what He has done for us. This chapter is no different.

There is only one worthy to open or close the book of life. Hailed as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, we instead see someone very different. A slain Lamb. Slain, yet standing. The English is a bit awkward here, since the Lamb doesn't merely appear slain, yet isn't actually slain. No, the Lamb is slain, and yet stands alive. This is Jesus. The one who can reveal the sealed is the same one who is the lionlike Lamb and is the same one who died and yet lives. And he has revealed to you that He has written your name in His book of life.

After all, He has placed His own name upon you. The name I AM when He speaks of Himself. The name Yahweh, which is Hebrew for HE IS, when we say it. His name, which He gives to you, also gives what it says. You are, through Him. You exist, you live, through Him. And to put that name upon you, the lionlike Lamb, the one who stands though slain, the one through whom all things exist, died. And He died for you. Only God can lay down His life and pick it back up again. And that's exactly what He did.

Almighty God traded His life in exchange for yours. He suffered in your place for your sins. He was nailed to a cross so that you would be saved. His blood is what blots out all the sins written in crimson, and your name is written in His book. You are buried with Him by baptism into death in order that when He rose, you now have His resurrection promised to you. This is why all the powers of heaven praise Him. Because He has gone out and found you, rescued you, saved you. That's what every verse in Scripture is about, including these.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Yea, her sins our God will pardon, Blotting out each dark misdeed; All that well deserved his anger He will no more see nor heed. She hath suffered many a day, Now her griefs have passed away; God will change her pining sadness Into ever-springing gladness. (LSB 347:2)*

# Thursday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 18, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of Duties: To Widows**

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 34:1-2, 8-35:10; Micah 1:1-7:20; Revelation 6:1-17**

*"She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives." (1 Timothy 5:5-6)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Table of Duties tells us how we should live in the vocations that the Lord has placed us in. Even though not very many reading these Higher Things devotions are widows at the moment, that doesn't mean we skip these. Because in your congregations, you will almost always find widows. Some are helping wherever they can. Some are unsure of what to do next. All have faced one of the greatest losses a person can face.

In this world, we are encouraged to be alone. That a video chat is as good as being there in person. That you can do all your work virtually. That your physical presence isn't necessary. But it doesn't work that way in the Church. To put your trust in the Lord is to never be alone. Yes, God is always with you, and that is never to be underestimated. However, you are not a Christian in isolation. The Lord put you into a congregation so that you would have people around you. Brothers and sisters in the faith. All part of one family, the Church.

Yes, widows need someone to be there. However, they are very good at being there for you when you need them, too. They've been through more than you can imagine, and they understand where you're at better than you do. And they can do so, because in their darkest hours, our Lord is there for them. They face the loss of death every day. But they can face it together with the One who has overcome death Himself. Jesus brings them into His Church so they will not be alone in this. Jesus brings you into His Church for the same reason.

If we live to ourselves alone, we will find this world a very lonely and empty place. But that's not who our Lord made us to be. When we hear those words of Absolution from our Lord, we do so with our brothers and sisters in the faith. When we receive Christ's Body and Blood, we do so shoulder to shoulder with our Church family. So that whenever you feel alone, not only do you have the Lord to turn to, you have His Church to turn to as well.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*No saint on earth lives life to self alone Nor dies alone, for we with Christ are one. So if we live, for Christ alone we live, And if we die, to Christ our dying give. In living and in dying this confess: We are the Lord's, safe in God's faithfulness. (LSB 747:1)*

# Friday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 19, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Revelation 7:1-17**

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

*"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14b)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

As we said on Wednesday, Revelation is not a timeline of the last days, but an image of Christ and His Church at all times. And also, there is once again a difference between what is heard and what is seen. 144,000 is 12 (the number of the church, both Old and New Testament) squared, times 1,000 (the number of completeness). We know it isn't meant to be a literal number of those saved, because we see how many are saved: more than we can count.

Who are these countless number? They are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. Now, imagine the worst trouble you can think of. Does it fit the word tribulation in your mind? Is it worse than a perfect world where humanity was made by God to not die, being infected by sin, which destroys ourselves, harms one another, and causes all people to die? This fallen world is the great tribulation that Christ calls us out of.

And He does so by washing us. That Baptism He gives you delivers the death of Jesus to you. It brings where He shed His blood to where you are now. And by that blood, your dirty, filthy, rotten sin is taken away. By His death on the cross, your sins are paid in full. And you are made clean, purified.

Your Baptism is the seal that the Lord has put upon you. He has written His name across you, to let the world know that you are His. That's why He gives so much to save you. That's why He dies so that you would live. You are that important to Him. So important that He wants you to be in eternity with Him. He has grafted you into His people. He places you before His throne. He shelters you with His presence. He feeds you and gives you drink from Himself, so that you will hunger and thirst for righteousness no more. He has delivered it to you. And Jesus Christ, on the Last Day, in eternity, will indeed wipe away every tear from your eye.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Behold a host, arrayed in white, Like thousand snow-clad mountains bright! With palms they stand; Who is this band Before the throne of light? These are the saints of glorious fame, Who from the great affliction came And in the flood Of Jesus' blood Are cleansed from guilt and shame. They now serve God both day and night; They sing their songs in endless light. Their anthems ring As they all sing With angels shining bright. (LSB 676:1)*



# Saturday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 20, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 4 - Psalm 19:1, 4-6; antiphon: Isaiah 45:8a**  
**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:18-41:10; Revelation 8:1-13**

*"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The heavens declare. The sky proclaims. The glory of God is spoken. The handiwork of God is revealed. Creation itself shows us who God is. Not fully; we have the Scriptures to tell us in detail who God is and of His great sacrifice on the cross on our behalf. However, Almighty God, as creator and sustainer of life, is not unknowable apart from His Word.

God's creation reveals Him as Creator. The complex systems that are in place for sustaining our basic needs are all designed. And we can know whether or not we have sinned, because we do have a conscience within us. These are all the natural order of things. So all are without excuse when they stand before the Lord on the Last Day.

That God is revealed in the natural order of things should drive us all the more to the place where He speaks about Himself. Yes, we can see God through His creation, but we know what He thinks of us by listening to His Word itself. We can see just how much our sin hurts ourselves and those around us when we listen to Him. And we can see just how much He cares for us by becoming a human being just like us. Standing in our place to take what we have earned by our sins.

The heavens declare God's glory. But as amazing as the heavens are, it is the glory of Christ on His cross that gives us hope. God sacrificed Himself to save His creation, to save you and me. To make His advent here two thousand or so years ago. Be born, taking on our humanity to stand in our place and receive what we had earned. Then giving us His place, His righteousness, His life. And by that Gift, He gives us all others as well, including the beauty we see in His creation.

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 355:1)*

# St. Thomas, Apostle

DECEMBER 21, 2025

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

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

*"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thomas refused to believe his brothers' testimony of the risen Christ. He wanted concrete proof, a living body he could feel, a real visual for the eyes. This makes sense. Jesus had prophesied His resurrection, and Thomas wanted evidence. Why would he give up everything for a lie? He's doubting, thus the moniker "doubting Thomas"; still, no disciple abandons everything for a cause he knows is untrue. Jesus' words "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" are a gentle rebuke for Thomas and us who make demands on God when the Word is sufficient. Christ is merciful to give Thomas what He seeks and prompts that great confession, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas sees, believes, and goes on to exercise Jesus' charge to forgive and retain sins (John 20:22-23) in a firm faith only God can give.

It's not hard to find people denying God while claiming a lack of proof. But how many stories are in the Bible recording miraculous events only for the people to continue in unbelief? The Israelites crossed the Red Sea in miraculous fashion, only to grumble about food. Jesus healed on the Sabbath before enemies seeking His death. Miracles, we find, don't always result in faith and a proper understanding of Jesus. The devil who masquerades as an angel of light would love to have us turn to something other than the Word, telling us we need proof and evidence before faith. But the Scriptures are clear to teach us the power of the Holy Word and its sufficiency, therefore to create faith that believes and thus one is blessed without the eyes, without reason's confirmation of God via the senses.

The disciples' witness of the living Christ is foundational to the testimony today going forth, echoing what Thomas and the others saw—the risen Christ Whose scars mean forgiveness and life. The Church still echoes this testimony and responds to Jesus in the words "My Lord and my God!" The Holy Spirit, Who works still in His Word, is good to create such faith before our risen Savior, Who speaks, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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, our Lord and our God, 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.*

# Monday of the Fourth Week in Advent

DECEMBER 22, 2025

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

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

*"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:23)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Pharisees sent priests and Levites to scope out the preacher, the first of many encounters between God and His enemies recorded in the Gospels. Their questions aren't for idle curiosity and genuine desire for the truth. The higher-ups want to know what they're dealing with and who the new preacher in town is, drawing the people away from themselves to Bethany across the Jordan.

We know from Matthew and Luke that John knew this wasn't a harmless delegation when he called them a "brood of vipers." Still, he doesn't shy or shirk from his duty. Boldly, John confesses that he isn't the Christ, but rather a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is "the voice" calling people to readiness before the coming One Whose sandals he's not worthy to untie.

The blessed Christmas season highlights the birth of Jesus, and as we reflect upon His coming by the virgin Mary in a stable, John's words are for us to hear: "Make straight the way of the Lord." We crumple and break the ways of God in our sin. We know the Law, what God commands us to do, but daily our pesky, wretched Old Adam gets the upper hand. Try as we might, the Law still convicts, and our reliance before God can only be the One about Whom John boldly testifies and confesses. John calls us to straighten things out, get on the right path, and stop twisting and turning. In other words, John calls us to repentance. Christ is coming, the theme of Advent, and our lives anticipating His return for Judgment. Christ is coming on the Last Day and comes even now in Word and Sacrament. Repentance and faith define the life of the baptized believer, availing Himself of Christ and His gifts whenever possible.

Finally, we should note John's courage to confess in the face of enemies. It happens when the Christian knows persecution from those asking questions with evil intentions is coming. The Truth, however, prevails, and it's another fruit of faith to be bold in the face of danger, knowing the One Who comes is the One Who has saved us from sin, risen from the dead, and gives to His Church that hope and freedom the devil and God's enemies cannot overcome.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Once He came in blessing, All our sins redressing; Came in likeness lowly, son of God most holy; Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us (LSB, 333:1)*

# Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Advent

DECEMBER 23, 2025

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

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

*"...I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God charges every prophet, disciple, apostle, and pastor to speak His Word; thus, the wide sense of Deuteronomy 18:18. God gives His Word to His men bearing the task of speaking the full counsel of the divine Word. God desires His office bearers to speak what He says without addition and subtraction to the mighty Word, a point any faithful pastor knows well. But is there an individual in mind here, or is God speaking about the Office for men tasked with the ministry in various points in human history?

There are scholars arguing that God is only speaking about the prophets in general, without anyone in mind. Often, these arguments spin out of unbelief in the inspired text. People doubt the Bible to be God's inerrant Word and concoct arguments from the premise that the Scriptures are void of any divine inspiration. The Bible without its divine character becomes just another book, a collection of myths by mortals under the familiar confines of a fallen world and sinful flesh. Our confession, however, is that the Bible can be trusted, and that it is the holy, infallible Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Who always testifies to God's redemption won for us by Christ. Luther looked at this passage (Deuteronomy 18:18) and saw not only its divine character as the Word of God, but in light of Jesus, Who says about the Scriptures, "It is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39), he saw Deuteronomy testifying to Christ. The "prophet" in chapter 18 is Christ from the blood of the Jews Who perfectly and completely taught the Word of God and fulfilled it in His suffering and death.

Moses, a great leader and prophet in his own right, would not be the last. God would raise a large company of prophets, ultimately leading to Christ, the Prophet from the Jews, giving us the Holy Word of God, testifying to Himself as the Savior of the nations. The warning is clear: "whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Deuteronomy 18:19). Our task is to listen, a listening that always entails repentance and faith in the Prophet Who still speaks in His Word, teaches, leads, and guides us gathering in His Name and reading His Word on the pages of our Bibles testifying to God's salvation in that Prophet, that Savior sent from God, our crucified and risen Savior Who is Jesus.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord Jesus, turn us daily to your Word and grant us repentance and faith always that leads to life everlasting obtained for us by Your blood that washes away all sin and makes us your Church. Amen.*

# Christmas Eve

## DECEMBER 24, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Matthew 1:18-25**

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 44:21-45:13, 20-25; Daniel 10:1-12:13; Isaiah 48:1-22; Revelation 12:1-17**

*"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Isaiah 44:21-45:13 makes the point that God is in control of conducting affairs and uses people according to His good and gracious will. His Word won't return void but always accomplishes His purpose. So, despite how chaotic and unpredictable the world seems at times, the world still exists under the God Who knows when the sparrow falls and the number of hairs on the head; the God turning the hearts of Kings and working through them as instruments for His divine command. Cyrus was one more King in a line of those ruling powerful empires whose lifespans were always framed by God's divine boundaries. He was a subduer of nations whose hand God held to loosen the belts of kings and open gates to territories powerless before God. The point is clear: God works through people to fulfill His holy will.

Against this backdrop we can read a passage like Matthew 1:18-25 and see again the LORD working through people, only this time it's not a powerful earthly King but the virgin Mary. God doesn't rely on the strength of the flesh and needs no temporal Kings to bring forth the One True King ruling on His throne, even in the womb. It's a reversal from what we see in the Old Testament—the God Who uses Kings now uses the lowly virgin in the delicate womb to carry the Christ Who will establish His own Kingdom by blood.

Matthew 1:21 is the divine Word of God foretelling salvation in the Christ Who will save His people from their sins. The birth of Jesus fulfills another prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 that says "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." Joseph is righteous not only in how he treats Mary when suspecting her of adultery, but in that he believes the Word from the angel of the Lord. He does according to God's command and calls the child "Jesus."

The world still turns under God's watch, which is a comforting truth alongside the Gospel teaching us that in this world of kings coming and going, nations rising and falling, chaos, pain, suffering, and death, God is good to keep His Word once again in sending His Son to fulfill His promise of saving sinners. The child in Mary's womb would do it, showing again God faithfulness in keeping His Word to redeem the world which happens only by Jesus' cross and blood.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Here a maid was found with child, Yet remained a virgin mild. In her womb this truth was shown: God was there upon His throne (LSB 332:3)*

# The Feast of the Nativity

DECEMBER 25, 2025

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**Today's Reading: John 1:1-14 (15-18)**

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

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."  
(John 1:14)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The words "in the beginning" take us back to Genesis. We know the story: a perfect, pristine creation by God in six days comes crashing down under the curse of sin by one man's trespass that "led to condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18). The darkness of sin and man's condemnation under the law is only overcome by divine Light.

The inspired writer John proclaims this Light, this redemption found in the Word made flesh Who dwelt among us. John's description of Jesus is still worthy of faithful contemplation, for he speaks of Jesus' divinity as the everlasting Word in the beginning through Whom all things were made. Whereas the other Gospels begin emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, John begins with His divinity. Christ wasn't another prophet or rabbi, but the everlasting Word Incarnate, God having come to dwell among us not in a Temple or Tent, but in the flesh and blood person of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. We behold our Advocate with the Father in the Son Who testifies "I and the Father are One" (John 10:30) and "before Abraham was, I Am" (John 8:58). In the face of so many heresies decrying Jesus as God, this confession of Christ as Lord must go forth in that courageous conviction only God brings forth in His blessed children. There's no other way to the Father than through the Son, Who is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6) and calls sinners to repentance and faith in He Who still outshines a dark world.

The children of God believe and confess this Word by faith, and John also clarifies for us that this is God's work. Children of God aren't made so by the will of the flesh but God. It's His divine work to bring life from death. The dark, cold, stoney heart becomes one brimming with life at the good deposit entrusted to the baptized believer—faith in the Word made flesh. It's this faith that seeks comfort and solace in the promises of God when it seems the darkness has won and thus any victory belongs to the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31). Feelings should fall to the wayside of Jesus' promises. No, the darkness doesn't win. The Word Incarnate has made sure of it. The darkness doesn't overcome the Light Who shines now and for all eternity.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Into flesh is made the Word, alleluia! He, our refuge and our Lord, alleluia! On this day God gave us Christ, His Son, to save us; Christ, His Son, to save us (LSB 381)*

# St. Stephen, Martyr

DECEMBER 26, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Matthew 23:34-39**

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

*"Truly, I say to you all these things will come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:36)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This text speaks about Jerusalem's rejection of Christ. Prophets and wise men will come from God only to suffer death, a pattern history reveals in the examples of Abel and Zechariah the son of Barachiah, the latter being "murdered between the sanctuary and the altar." Nevertheless, vindication will come. God's justice will prevail when "righteous blood" falls upon those rejecting the grace of God. In God's court, the murderers and persecuting unbelievers have no Advocate. The verdict is death for those despising the only Mediator between heaven and earth.

The target audience in Jesus' teaching here plays a part in this prophecy when before Pilate they cry "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 24:25), a striking statement brimming with theological importance. Indeed, Jesus' blood will atone for the entire world, even the ungodly. His justification for man fulfilled at the cross is universal, not partial and selective. Still, Jesus' enemies boldly claim responsibility for His death. Killing the Messiah in raw defiance is blasphemy before the Lord of justice and mercy. "This generation" is Jesus' designation of the wicked, the unbelievers, the enemies of God opposing prophet, disciple, and pastor because of their hatred of God. All things will come to pass according to the divine Word and "this generation" is no exception to God's judgment.

This is a sad narrative of Jesus' lament for His children. After everything He did for His people, the result was rejection. Jesus' words "you were not willing" place the onus square on the sinner, not God. Unbelief resides in the flesh of man to look at God's promise to gather us as the hen gathers her brood under her wings and say "no." Such rejection and the persecution of God's people will continue until the Last Day. Baptized believers live with no delusion of grandeur that life will be easy for the Church. This text teaches us what's in store for the Church of God as she makes her pilgrimage in this life fraught with difficulty and trial. Still, The Lord is merciful to gather us under His wing, to grant His people protection and peace; to confirm for us His promise of salvation at His glorious return when every knee shall bow and confess before the Lord of glory Who keeps his Word. Just as judgment comes to pass, so does Jesus' promise to save.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord, grant your Church steadfast faith to endure persecution and find comfort and hope in Your steadfast love that endures for all generations. Amen.*

# St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

DECEMBER 27, 2025

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**Today's Reading: John 21:20-25**

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

*"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" (John 21:22)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It's easy to make comparisons to others. The flesh wants to be on top, number one, the best at everything. You see it in children who cry and throw tantrums when they lose at something or feel slighted by another child. Adults are no different, only they throw tantrums in different ways.

The disciples were not immune to the Old Adam, and the Gospels record their quest for greatness and penchant for comparisons amongst themselves. In Matthew (20:20-28) and Mark (10:35-45) we hear the story of James and John seeking a place by Jesus. Of course, the other ten disciples are "indignant at the two brothers." Also, in Matthew (18:1-6) and Mark (9:33-36) are the accounts of the disciples debating the question, "who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" It's not just in sports, then, the question "Who is the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time)?" It happens in the Church, even amongst Jesus' very own disciples.

Despite Jesus' teaching, old habits die hard, and the Old Adam never ceases to rear his ugly head. Even in the last section of John's gospel, Peter is worrying about others, not himself. He's interested in John's future: "Lord, what about this man?" But it's none of Peter's business. John's outcome will reside in the hidden will of God, as does the fate of everyone. For Peter, the instructions are clear: "follow me" says the Lord.

We're no different from the disciples in that we make comparisons that can easily give rise to wretched jealousy and anger over the neighbor. But in God's Church, this has no place. Such sins require that daily repentance before Christ seeking forgiveness for all those times we exalted ourselves and forgot about our sin. All those times we compared ourselves with others in the Church, thought we were better, or despised those we judged to be ahead in pious works and the eyes of others—we're called to repentance of such sins and to faith in God. We're given a baptized life where those good works flow from faith excluding hubris and comparisons, jealousy and discontentment with ourselves before God.

Our eyes need to be on Jesus, and we need to listen to His voice, "follow Me." The neighbor is in God's hands, whose days are numbered like ours. The measure of days God knows and thus we're content knowing our lives are in the hands of a loving Creator Who has redeemed us by the blood of His Son calling us to bear our crosses and follow Him.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, forgive us of our pride and by Thy Word bring us daily to repentance and faith trusting in You to bring us through the vale of tears into that life everlasting You have prepared for us by Your cross and blood. Amen.*



# The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

DECEMBER 28, 2025

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

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

*"Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted for they are no more.'" (Matthew 2:17-18)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Christmas is war. That may sound jarring in our ears, but we cannot forget that truth. Yes, the incarnation of our Lord has raised up the sons of Adam out of the sinful curse of thorns and thistles, dust and ashes. Yes, the birth of our Lord proclaims that we now live in Anno Domini (A.D.), salvation is ours, and eternal glory with God is ours by Christ as a free gift. But Rachel, who was buried in Bethlehem, becomes the embodiment of every Mother in Bethlehem whose son was murdered by Herod. And she weeps, mourns, and wails because Christmas is war, and war has spilled upon the innocent. The birth of the Savior is the first blow against the gates of Hell. It is terror unto demons and those who have allowed themselves to be twisted in wickedness, like King Herod. Herod understood that his wicked act was not merely of the earthly sort. He heard the Magi, he sought the scribes, he listened to the prophecy; Herod sought to fight against God. And this was a fight He'd never win. Today we remember these innocents, who died in the place of Christ, but we do not only remember in bitter tears, but with quiet hope because eventually Christ would die for them. We remember the promise that "precious/costly in the sight of the LORD, are the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15) What was lost and stolen from them has already been restored by His innocent death and glorious resurrection. And He will restore fully at His final Advent. And on that day, we will stand in the fullness of God's glory along with these blessed children, along with Rachel, and we will be comforted; our sorrow transformed by the radiant splendor of our God and King. Until then, Christmas remains a war, but a war that has been won by Christ. So do not grow weary; let the demons tremble, let the wicked repent and return to their gracious King Jesus, and let the redeemed stand tall in the splendor of the Gospel.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*All praise for infant martyrs, Whom Your mysterious love Called early from their warfare To share Your home above. O Rachel, cease your weeping; They rest from earthly cares! Lord, grant us crowns as brilliant And faith as sure as theirs. (LSB 517:9)*

# Monday of the First Week After Christmas

DECEMBER 29, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Luke 2:(22-32) 33-40**

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

*"...for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples..." (Luke 2:30-31)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It is now the fifth day of Christmas, and what is it that you see? Do your eyes gaze on a tree that was once brimming with anticipation, gifts, and loved ones? But now does it feel like an empty shell? Do you look at your house, dormitory, or apartment and see emptiness where there was once the hustle and bustle of family gatherings? Or perhaps you look at a countertop that is stacked with papers, a reminder of everything you failed to do before the rush of Christmas Eve/Day? Our dear brother, Simeon, by the Holy Spirit was promised "consolation." His eyes, like many others, looked at a temple that was bereft of the glory of God; the LORD's weighty and splendid presence no longer there. But all of it changed that day when the blessed Mother arrived at the temple with the Holy Child, Jesus. "That's the One," the Spirit of God affirmed in Simeon. And it is here that Simeon sings a crucial song about his eyes, "My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples." What is it that Simeon's eyes see? A temple with no glory? No. A life that is too old or far gone? No. What is it that Simeon sees? He sees the reason that he can be set free in peace. He sees the very light that will lift the nations out of darkness and idolatry. He sees the glory of Israel. He sees SALVATION! What is it that Simeon beholds in faith? Jesus. And that is all he needs. It's no wonder that after we have beheld and tasted of Christ, through His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, we Lutherans sing with Simeon his song! For with eyes of faith, the light of Christ has cast away our sin with forgiveness, our death with Life. The glory of Jesus has crowned us, so that we may be changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). So then, it is now the fifth day of Christmas, and what is it that you see? Promises upon promises fulfilled in Christ, that is what you see.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Christ Jesus brought this gift to me, My faithful Savior, Whom You have made my eyes to see By Your favor. Now I know He is my life, My friend when I am dying. (LSB 938:2)*

# Tuesday of the First Week After Christmas

DECEMBER 30, 2025

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**Today's Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5 or 2 Samuel 7:1-16**

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

*"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him..."*  
(Isaiah 11:1-2a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our lives and even this world (our newsfeeds, our headlines, our daily burdens) can so often feel like a dead stump. Hopeless. Lifeless. Good for nothing. Maybe your heart feels like that today; cut down & good for nothing. But God is not done with stumps. Hear the Word of the Lord: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." (Isaiah 11:1) From a line that looked like it had fallen prey to the lumberjack, the House and lineage of David, God promised a tender shoot. Not one more stump that reminds us of our sinful failure and faithlessness, but a shoot that would take root and grow into a glorious vine. Christ Jesus has taken what was dead, and by His miraculous conception in the blessed virgin and His glorious birth from her womb, the House of David is alive forevermore! And this Jesus declares, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit..." You are now a branch in the vine of David, and His mercy and forgiveness flow even into the places that you may have thought were dead and beyond repair. Baptized into Him, and fed with His Body and Blood flowing within you, let Him nourish you. He is the vine and the root that will never wither. He is the King who will never turn a blind eye to your need, whose Kingdom shall have no end.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*This flow'r, whose fragrance tender With sweetness fills the air, Dis-  
pels with glorious splendor The darkness everywhere. True man, yet  
very God. From sin and death He saves us And lightens every load. O  
Savior, child of Mary, Who felt our human woe; O Savior, King of glory,  
Who dost our weakness know: Bring us at length we pray To the bright  
courts of heaven, And to the endless day. (LSB 359:3-4)*

# Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus

DECEMBER 31, 2025

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

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

*"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes... You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luke 12:37, 40)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Awake and ready! These are the words our Lord Jesus uses to describe the mission of His disciples, you and I included. In other words, Christ Jesus has served us with His everlasting love and mercy given on the cross, and He has summoned us to Christian vigilance. How different it is in the world on this day they call "New Year's Eve." The past is drowned in licentiousness and over-indulgence in libations, the future is ushered in with revelry, and the next day brings the same old-same old. The same sinner led astray by the same sins and the same empty promises. Christian vigilance is different, though; it is a sanctified sobriety! When we hear the word "sober," it's easy to think it means somber, overly serious, or no fun. But go back to those words of our Lord, "Awake and ready." To be awake means your eyes are open; open to the truth of the Gospel, open to the truth of what is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, and open to the joy of eternity with Christ. You are not lulled with the sleep of sin or the numbing pleasures of a passing era because your eyes are on the splendid promise of Christ Jesus. To be ready means that your eyes are not only opened, but you are dressed in your baptismal identity as servants of righteousness. Your belt tightened, your lamp of faith lit, and your hands ready to serve Him in the places He has given you responsibility. Jesus is not calling us to earn our salvation in watchfulness, but to live as those who by grace, belong to Jesus the master, and to live as those who know the joy that is coming. For when the Master returns, it is He who will dress Himself in action and serve us. This passage is not just a warning; it is a joyful promise of what is to come. He will serve us with resurrected bodies. He will serve us by gathering us unto His presence forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"Wake, awake, for night is flying," The watchmen on the heights are crying; "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" Midnight hears the welcome voices And at the thrilling cry rejoices; "Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise?" The Bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take! Alleluia! With bridal care Yourselves prepare To meet the Bridegroom, who is near." (LSB 516:1)*

# Circumcision and Name of Jesus

JANUARY 1, 2026

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

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

*"And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."  
(Luke 2:21)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There is something remarkable and yet so subtle in the Christmas story: the Holy Child of Bethlehem is not called Jesus until the eighth day when He is circumcised. Before verse 21, He is referred to as the baby, the child, Christ, and Lord, all glorious titles, but the personal, saving name of Jesus is bestowed upon Him in the covenant of circumcision. This is not merely a name His parents have placed upon Him from their own whims. It is the Name given by the Father in Heaven. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus means "YHWH saves." This is God's covenant Name for His Son. And Jesus lived by it to completion. He is what His Name declares: YHWH saves. From His circumcision to His crucifixion, from that first cut of blood to the New Creation of His resurrection, Jesus fulfills the meaning of His Name for you and me. And now, you who are baptized, you are in His Name. You have been baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). You are clothed in Christ. His Name is on you even as you now dwell in His Name. When the Lord sees you, He does not remember your sin or your shame, but sees the beloved child now dwelling safely in the shelter of the Name of Jesus, "YHWH Saves!" So call upon His Name. Live under His Name. And rejoice that, as Acts 4:12 says, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The Name was given, the flesh was cut, the covenant fulfilled. Your name was given, the Water and the Word applied, and now the salvation declared in the Holy Name of Jesus is yours.

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.*

# Friday of the First Week After Christmas

JANUARY 2, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Galatians 4:1-7**

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

*"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The word Paul uses for time here is "chronos," meaning clock time. The ticking of seconds. The seconds turned to minutes. The minutes adding to hours. The passing of days and the unfolding of history. And all of it, Paul says, was being directed by God toward one great moment: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son." God stepped into the very timeline He created and directed it to its "fullness." Born of a woman. Born under the Law. Why? So that slaves would become sons! So that orphans might be adopted. We were slaves to sin, chained to whatever empty promises caught our fancy: A life gratified by performance and defined by failure or pride. A life satiated by pleasure and defined by the excess or the lack. All of it occupying our "chronos" time until we slept in the dust of death and inherited the eternal hopelessness of Hell. But Christ Jesus, the true Son, entered that time to bring upon us the eternal status of beloved children of God. So when you look in the mirror, what do you see? A disappointment? A success story? Neither lie defines you nor gets the last word. The truth is far deeper: You are a baptized child of God the Father and a sibling of Christ Jesus; destined for the eternal inheritance, the resurrection of our bodies unto eternal glory and righteousness. That is who you are. Slaves to sin and the law cling to whatever the world says gives them value—titles, looks, surgical adjustments, opinions, success. But not you. You are no longer a slave. You are a son. And if a son, then an heir. Loved, redeemed, secure in the freedom to look at God and say, "This is my Father, and I am His beloved."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, in the fullness of time, You sent forth Your Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem us and make us Your children. Grant that we who have received adoption through Baptism may live in the fullness that comes from Your eternal grace, may walk in the freedom of Your love and worship You as the only True God with Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the Holy Spirit; the Three in One and the One in the Three. Amen.*

# Saturday of the First Week After Christmas

JANUARY 3, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Introit for Second Sunday After Christmas - Psalm 8:1, 4-6; antiphon: Psalm 8:2**

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

*"Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger." (Psalm 8:2)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Christmas provides us with a unique lens to contemplate Psalm 8:2. Almighty God stills the enemy and the avenger. To still in the Hebrew is "lehashbit." It is where we get the word "sabbath." It means to cease or to put rest. In the context of God's enemies, it means He stops them dead in their tracks. Those wicked forces at work by the demonic or our own sin (think Herod) are stopped dead in their tracks from derailing the Lord's plan of redemption. But how does He do this? Through the mouth of babies and infants! Not with the blunt force of angelic or earthly armies, not with an iron fist, but through the weakest and most vulnerable, babies and infants. God defeats the violent and arrogant lies of Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh with what the wisdom of the world would call "weak" or "foolish." Think of this: While Jesus is the Son of God, rightly ordering the existence of the universe, He was a vulnerable baby dependent upon the arms and milk of His blessed mother! And this "weakness" begins the downfall of death and the devil. And the strength of weakness continues; beaten, bloody, and mocked on the cross, the gates of Heaven open to us, and the strength of Hell is slammed shut. And what does the Apostle Paul say, "God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong...so that no human being might boast before God." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29) Christ within you, and you within Christ through Word and Sacrament, your faith clings to Him alone! And that faith which hangs on the Gospel causes the accuser and the powers of darkness to quake. Not because you are strong, but because you are as weak and helpless as a baby, and your strength is in the God-man born, crucified, raised, and ascended for you, our Lord Jesus! So at Christmastime, learn from St. Mary, "magnify the LORD and rejoice in God Your Savior." Join with the blessed St. Paul and boast all the more gladly in your own weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon you (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*You still the wicked's very boast, Establish strength to the utmost, By babes and mouths of infants small, Our enemies in silence fall. (Metered version of Psalm 8:2 to the tune of Vom Himmel Hoch found in LSB 358. Stanza written by Rev. Matthew Synnott)*

# Second Sunday After Christmas

JANUARY 4, 2026

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

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 63:15-65:7; Luke 2:41-52**

*"And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" (Matthew 2:14-15)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There is a deep thread of exodus that flows through Holy Scripture. And so often, that exodus crosses a body of water. God calls his people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan. Jacob wrestles with an angel at the Jabbok. Even Noah and his family in the ark is a kind of exodus: at God's command, they flee sinful earth, cross over the waters, and step ashore in a new land, unburdened with the sin of the past. And John the Baptist conducts much of his ministry at and in the Jordan.

Over and over again, this image repeats itself in God's Word. God's people end up in Egypt so that God can preserve them from a famine, but that isn't their ultimate home. Even the Promised Land they return to under Joshua's leadership isn't their ultimate home. There are more exoduses to come.

The ultimate exodus for God's people is the one from death to eternal life in the New Creation. And that exodus can't happen unless the way, the path to that life, is blazed and made known. So Jesus goes into Egypt, into the historic land of bondage and slavery, to establish that way.

He is put into the shoes of every child of God and begins a journey out of that land of sin and death, bondage and slavery. He is called out of that place by God onto the way prepared by John the Baptist to show us the way to eternal life and righteousness.

And in this journey, Jesus is made into Israel, reduced to one. He is the entirety of the Christian Church contained in one man. He becomes man to lead sinful humanity into perfection and righteousness.

God the Father calls Jesus out of Egypt as a child so that He may later call him out of death and into life again on Easter Sunday. Jesus goes into death for you to pull you out of death and into life by His Word, your Baptism, and His Supper.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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



# Monday of the Second Week After Christmas

JANUARY 5, 2026

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

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

*"I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." (Genesis 46:3-4)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Several years ago, I received a Divine Call away from my home state. It was an existential crisis for me to move away, even though I knew it was at the Lord's direction and that He would guide me along the way. Now, I've returned "home" from that "exile" and everything is perfect, right? Of course not!

Jacob also doesn't want to leave the Promised Land he had been given by God, even though it was God's plan for him to do so. He wants to stay where he is because that was how he understood God's promise to Abraham, his grandfather. But the Lord's plans for us often follow unexpected detours.

Like Jacob, we want to bypass struggle and get straight to glory. We are sure we know better than God how our lives should play out, so we doubt God's plans and direction. Except our all-powerful God isn't tied to one place. Sure, Canaan is the land He promised to Jacob, but this time in Egypt is only one small step on the road of God's people being established for eternity.

God told Abraham this would happen (in Genesis 15); it was the plan all along for Jacob's family to live in Egypt for generations and to grow there into the nation that Moses and Joshua would lead back "home." The Lord God did not desert His people, even when it seemed so. He had a future planned for them from the start, and He guided them to it.

In a similar way, the years away from family for me were difficult. Even so, the Lord's work was being done; His great nation was being made in His way and on His schedule. Even now, I'm not really "home." I won't be until the Last Day when the true Promised Land is revealed in the New Creation.

That's the underlying truth of Jacob's move, and of your life. No matter how this world may change for Christians, God's mercy remains unchanged. His guiding hand will lead you home to the inexplicable glory of His presence that you see veiled now in preached Word and Sacramental Gifts, but then face to face.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect for Steadfast Faith)*

# The Epiphany of Our Lord

JANUARY 6, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Matthew 2:1-12**

**Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 66:1-20; Luke 3:21-38**

*"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." (Matthew 2:10-11)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Strange men visiting from a foreign country, stately men bowing down to a toddler, and very odd gifts being given—the Feast of Epiphany can certainly seem a bit weird, can't it? Observed only thirteen days after Christmas, it may seem a bit of an odd celebration, with this focus on foreign visitors and the aftermath.

But isn't this the whole point of the Son of God becoming Man? To come in the flesh for the salvation of the world? To temporarily veil the Glory of God in Jesus so that He may fulfill all of God's Law for us?

That's what the gifts from the foreign visitors mean, too. They point to Jesus's work for us and for our salvation. Gold, a gift fitting for a king, the one who rules in power and might from His throne. But this one isn't only a king. He also serves as priest (and ultimately the perfect sacrifice), so it is also proper that he be given frankincense, the aroma of which reminds people of the rising of their prayers to God's throne, and the smoke reminding them that God receives their sacrifice. And don't forget the myrrh. This is the most difficult one, for it is the spice and balm of death, used to obscure the smell of decay. Already as a child, Jesus is reminded of what is to come: his suffering and death for all.

In all of this, Jesus is revealed to the world as the one sent from God to be the Savior of mankind. The Wise Men certainly didn't make this kind of journey for every royal child born; there is something exceptional here. Just as creation would later mark Jesus' death with darkness and an earthquake, his birth was also marked and noted by creation; a star that blossomed in the sky and led them to seek out the child on a journey that lasted for many months and crossed entire empires.

All of this is done to reveal the light that no darkness can overcome. The brilliance of Christ's purifying light shines in our dark world to draw all to his saving Word and work. Christ has been revealed to the nations and to you so that you may trust that this One is your Savior and Lord.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Once far off but now invited, We approach Your sacred throne, In Your covenant united, Reconciled, redeemed, made one. Now revealed to eastern sages, See the Star of Mercy shine, Myst'ry hid in former ages, Myst'ry great of love divine. (LSB 409:2)*

# Wednesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 7, 2026

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

**Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 1:1-14, 22-28; Habakkuk 1:1-3:19; Romans 1:1-17**

*"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12-13)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it? Then answer: 'I do, by the grace of God.'" This is the most difficult question of all to ask (and even answer!) in the Rite of Confirmation. I have known pastors in years gone by who left it out of the rite because it was so uncomfortable, and also because "This is America, persecution will never happen here!"

It may well be that wide-scale suffering of Christians will never happen here. Then again, Satan is a wily foe, and you never know what he has planned next. But look at what St. Peter urges of the Christian: "Do not be surprised" when it comes. After all, your Lord Christ was the Son of God in the flesh, the Savior, and look how he was treated by those who opposed Him. Rejected, scorned, despised, and that was even before the Romans got hold of Him!

What makes you think that you should be spared the same fate as the One who lived your life and died your death? That's why St. Peter says you should not be surprised. This sinful world hates the truth, and as one of the baptized, you are also of the truth, so you should expect some pushback from sin, death, and the Devil.

But don't miss the last sentence, because it isn't all bad news. Rejoice that the world treats you so, because their derision towards you is a sign that you are Christ's. And if you are Christ's, He has promised to come again in glory for you on the Last Day to gather you with all the faithful into the New Creation and the wedding feast of the Lamb that has no end. So, don't despair when the world treats you poorly. Know that your eternity is secure in Jesus. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord Jesus Christ, before whom all in heaven and earth shall bow, grant courage that Your children may confess Your saving name in the face of any opposition from a world hostile to the Gospel. Help them to remember Your faithful people who sacrificed much and even faced death rather than dishonor You when called upon to deny the faith. By Your Spirit, strengthen them to be faithful and to confess You boldly, knowing that You will confess Your own before the Father in heaven, with whom You and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Persecuted Christians)*

# Thursday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 8, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of Duties: To Everyone**

**Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 2:1-3:11; Romans 1:18-32**

*"The commandments...are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Romans 13:9)*

*I urge...that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. (1 Timothy 2:1)" (Small Catechism, Table of Duties, To Everyone)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Do you want to fulfill God's Law perfectly? It isn't difficult. Jesus said to one of the Pharisees who questioned him about the Law that loving God with every fiber of your being and loving your neighbor as yourself is how you keep God's Law. Easy-peasy, right? Just love God and your neighbors perfectly, and you have it all sorted out! Except it isn't that easy, is it? St. Paul tells Timothy that we should pray for everyone. Since all of Holy Scripture applies to all of us, those prayers for everyone are part of loving God perfectly, because He has given us those neighbors for whom we should pray. Even the neighbors we don't necessarily like or even want to pray for. Oops.

No matter how much you try, you will never be able to be perfect or keep God's Law perfectly; it is impossible because of sin. You just can't do it. But that doesn't mean you give up on it, either. For the command has been given to us to love and pray for our neighbors, regardless of our ability (or even desire!) to do it properly. And that is actually the comforting part of these commands of God. Even though He knows you can't do it perfectly, He still gives you the opportunity. Just like learning a new skill or a new sport, God sends His Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and coach you in the way you should go. He puts all kinds of neighbors in your life so that you can learn how to love them and how to care for them with your words, actions, prayers, and more.

He has recreated you in your Baptism as His own child. He continues to speak to you and teach you through His Word and your pastor's sermons and Bible classes. He forgives you in confession and Absolution. And he forgives, sustains, and strengthens you in the Lord's Supper, too. All of these things He does for you, even though you so often fail spectacularly at keeping His Commandments and loving your neighbors. So take heart and go boldly out into this world and love your neighbors as best you can, pray for them, and give thanks for their presence in your life, knowing that when you do fail, the Blood of Christ covers even those sins.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Called by worship to Your service, Forth in Your dear name we go, To the child, the youth the aged, Love in living deeds to show; Hope and health, goodwill and comfort, Counsel aid, and peace we give, That Your servants, Lord, in freedom May Your mercy know and live. (LSB 848:4)*

# Friday After The Epiphany

JANUARY 9, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Ezekiel 3:12-27**

**Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 3:12-27; Ezekiel 4:1-11:25; Romans 2:1-16**

*"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me... But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house." (Ezekiel 3:17, 27)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

One of the most comforting (and also scary) things that it frequently takes pastors a long time to realize is what the Lord God says to Ezekiel: "I will open your mouth and you shall say." Pastors sometimes get a little squirrely because they can be too concerned about how the people in their charge will hear the Word of the Lord. But that isn't part of this discussion, is it?

Pastors speak what has been given them to speak, because they have been charged to do so by the Lord of the Church. Whether or not those with ears want to hear is irrelevant; the Word must be proclaimed so that it may accomplish that for which He sent it forth, as Isaiah says.

And this is what the hearers of that proclaimed Word need to hear: "[you] are a rebellious house." Yes, the people of God, the hearers of His Holy Word, are rebellious, and they don't want to listen. Sound familiar? Ever been a little stubborn about hearing what you needed to hear? That's the Old Adam in you, that is your sinful nature, rebelling against the pure and holy Word of God because it is not pleasant for the dark sin within to be bathed in such holy light.

Yet, God the Father gives you a pastor to proclaim His Word to you, whether you want to hear it or not, because you need to hear it. You need to know how much your God and Lord loves you. You need to hear that His Son, Jesus, became flesh for you to live your life, to die your death, to bear your sin, to make you new.

It may not be pleasant to hear, and you may not like the fact that you cannot do all of this on your own, but that's how it is. Almighty God does all of the work of saving you through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. He baptizes you into that death and resurrection, and he grants eternal life to those who trust in that truth. So hear and trust that Word, even if it is difficult.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Oh, what blessing to be near You And to listen to Your voice; Let me ever love and hear You, Let Your Word be now my choice! Many hardened sinners, Lord, Flee in terror at Your Word; But to all who feel sin's burden You give words of peace and pardon. (LSB 589:2)*

# Saturday After The Epiphany

JANUARY 10, 2026

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**Today's Reading: Introit for The Baptism of Our Lord - Psalm 89:1, 26-28; anti-  
phon: Liturgical Text; Psalm 89:20**

**Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-32; Ezekiel 19:1-24:27; Romans 2:17-29**

*"I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him." (From The Introit for The Baptism of Our Lord)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Tomorrow is the celebration of the Baptism of Our Lord and all of the strange and wonderful things that day brings: John the Baptist's confusion, the voice from the rent-open heavens, the Holy Spirit descending "like a dove." And God speaks to Jesus: "This is my beloved Son."

The Introit for tomorrow helps set the stage with language you see all over Holy Scripture. Language of Father and Son, seen and explained by psalmists, prophets, Jesus Himself, and the writer to the Hebrews, to mention only a few.

In all of this, there is the clear proclamation that God the Father has sent God the Son to accomplish the task for which He was sent. The Son is obedient to the Father's will and direction, and the Father honors Him for his steadfastness in the task ahead, even though it means a gruesome sacrifice to come.

The picture of perfection. The ideal that we sinful believers can never obtain on our own. The Son of God becomes man, submits Himself to God's holy and righteous Law, lives a perfect life in our place, and stands as the substitute for our own deaths. Then, he gives the benefits of that perfection to all who call upon Him in faith. And in response, God the Father establishes His Son as the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He elevates Him to the highest place to honor what He has done for us and our salvation.

That shows you there's a lot going on in the background of a simple Baptism in the Jordan River, doesn't it? Our Lord and God does nothing halfway; He has a plan for everything. And that plan is to bring salvation to His people, to the world, to all who call upon His name in faith and trust.

A Baptism to set the stage for every Baptism. A Baptism that works the miracle of resurrection and salvation for all those baptized in the name of the Triune God. So the Father honors the Son for His saving work for you. And in response, we, too, give thanks to God for His mighty work.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*New songs of celebration render To Him who has great wonders done; Love sits enthroned in ageless splendor; Come and adore the mighty One. He has made known His great salvation Which all His friends with joy confess. He has revealed to ev'ry nation His everlasting righteousness. (LSB 792:1)*



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