

REFLECTIONS

First Sunday in Advent -
Saturday After the Epiphany

November 29, 2026 - January 9, 2027

Higher Things

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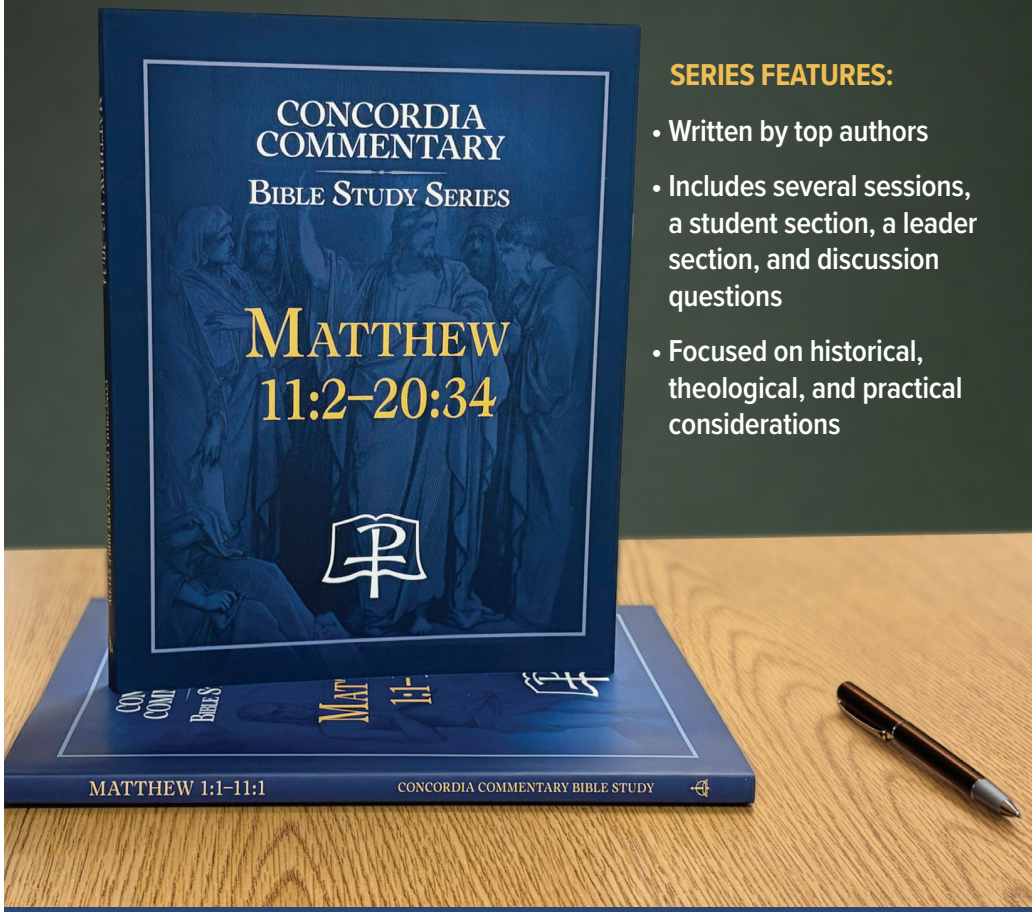
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

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. Stephen, Martyr

DECEMBER 26, 2026

Today's Reading: Matthew 23:34-39
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 49:22-26; 50:4-51:8, 12-16; Matthew 1:18-25

"[Jesus said,] 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:38)

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Victory in Christ does not look the way many people expect. There is a common, but misguided, idea that being a Christian means enjoying one earthly success after another. The thinking often goes something like this: "I follow God, and God is in control, so nothing truly painful or difficult should happen to me." According to this way of thinking, faithfulness ought to result in comfort, prosperity, health, and triumph in our public lives. Our Lord teaches something rather different. Even a simple look at life in this fallen world quickly dispels the illusion that Christians are spared suffering. Disease still afflicts believers. Families still experience grief and conflict. Financial hardship, disappointment, and death still come upon the faithful. Christians are not removed from the ordinary sufferings of human life simply because they belong to Christ. More than this, Jesus teaches that His followers will experience a particular kind of suffering because they belong to Him. The world that rejected Christ will also reject those who confess Him. Jesus speaks plainly about this. He does not hide the cost of discipleship or soften the reality of persecution. Hatred toward Christ extends toward His Christians as well. This is seen clearly in the life and death of St. Stephen. Full of faith and the Holy Spirit, he boldly confessed Christ before hostile crowds and proclaimed that Jesus is the long-promised Savior. For this confession, he was falsely accused, dragged before the authorities, and ultimately stoned to death. From an earthly perspective, Stephen's death appears anything but victorious. His death did not overthrow his enemies; he was unable to escape that suffering. He did not achieve worldly success. But Stephen is a conqueror through Christ. Even as stones struck him, he looked to heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He died confessing Christ and praying for his persecutors. And he was rewarded with the martyr's crown of salvation by being brought to heaven. Christ Himself shows us this pattern most clearly. His greatest victory came through the cross. By suffering, dying, and rising again, He conquered sin, death, and the devil. Therefore, Christians should not measure God's favor by earthly ease or outward success. Instead, they cling to Christ and His promises, trusting that even suffering cannot separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

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

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First Sunday in Advent

NOVEMBER 29, 2026

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:1-9
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-25; Amos 1:1-9:15; 1 Peter 2:1-12

> *"If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once" (Matthew 21:3)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Why does the Lord need a donkey? Donkeys played more of a supporting role in the Bible. They were symbols of wealth and were often used to carry people or things. Once, miraculously, God spoke through the mouth of Balaam's donkey. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" (Numbers 22:28). The beast of burden also bore God's Word.

Curiously, God also singles out donkeys in His law for the redemption of the firstborn. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's. Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem (Exodus 13:12b–13).

Now, outside of Jerusalem, it's not just one donkey that the Lord needs. "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me." The Lord needs them. Both get clothed with cloaks, and Jesus sits on them both (Matthew 21:7). As St. Matthew notes, this fulfills a direct prophecy from Zechariah, but it also communicates something more.

The Lord Jesus needs a donkey, specifically a female donkey. Once more, God chooses a donkey to bear His Word. But unlike Balaam's beast of burden, this donkey bears the Word who has been born of a woman. And where Balaam struck his donkey to make her speak, this donkey bears the Word into Jerusalem to be stricken.

The Lord Jesus also needs a colt. A young male donkey. If the owner obeyed the Law of Moses in the same way that he obeyed the command of Jesus, then this colt was redeemed by the blood of a lamb. And now he bears the world's redeemer, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

"The Lord needs them." Only a donkey and her colt will do.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

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

St. Andrew, Apostle

NOVEMBER 30, 2026

Today's Reading: John 1:35-42a
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 6:1-7:9; 1 Peter 2:13-25

"We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41)

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Andrew's brother gets much more of the spotlight in the Gospels, and he's a far more prominent figure in the early Church. He's the first of the inner circle of disciples, a witness to the Transfiguration, invited to pray privately with Jesus, boldly confessed Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God, was the first to witness Jesus' resurrection, and became the head of the Church in Rome. But with fame also comes infamy. Andrew's brother had a habit of sticking his foot in his mouth. Jesus literally called him "Satan," he denied even knowing Jesus, and the Apostle Paul had to stand up to him and call out his hypocrisy when it came to eating with Gentiles.

But none of that would have happened without Andrew. It was Andrew who, having first become a disciple of John the Baptist, heard his first teacher call Jesus the Lamb of God. That word sparked faith in his and his friend's hearts, and they followed Jesus and stayed with Him the rest of the day. But first, Andrew found his brother Simon (whom Jesus would later call Peter) and brought him to Jesus.

Andrew didn't have to say much to get his brother's attention. "We have found the Messiah!" Andrew recognized that Jesus was the one whom God had anointed for the special task of being the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The evangelist helpfully translates this Hebrew title into its Greek equivalent, the Christ, as a gesture to Peter's biggest moment in the spotlight. "You are the Christ," Peter would confess (Matthew 16:16). But Andrew said it first: "We have found the Christ!"

While John told Andrew and Andrew told Simon Peter, it's not flesh and blood that makes this revelation. It's the Father by His Holy Spirit working through the words spoken by flesh-and-blood human beings. Like Andrew, you have come to Christ and have seen for yourself that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, find a brother or a sister and open your mouth: "We found the Christ!"

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

All praise, O Lord, for Andrew, The first to welcome You, Whose witness to his brother Named You Messiah true. May we, with hearts kept open To You throughout the year, Confess to friend and neighbor Your advent ever near. (LSB 517:5)

Saturday After The Epiphany

JANUARY 9, 2027

Today's Reading: Introit for The Baptism of Our Lord - Psalm 89:1, 26-28; antiphon: Liturgical Text; Psalm 89:20
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 3:12-27; Ezekiel 4:1-11:25; Romans 2:1-16

> *"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" (Psalm 89:26-27)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 89 explicitly mentions David in verse 20, which reads, "I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him." God's promises are clear: David's throne will be eternal, which drives us to look beyond this earthly King, still described in Scripture as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). David was faithful, but he died before Israel split and plummeted under a series of wicked kings. In an earthly sense, his rule was a flash in the pan, no different from other earthly kings.

An eternal throne and even eternal offspring (cf. 89:29) reveal something beyond temporal kingdoms and progeny in Psalm 89. We find the answer in the Son of David, Who is Jesus. His lineage stretches back to David, as we find in the genealogies of Matthew 1 and Luke 3. God finds in David a faithful King, but more than that, Psalm 89 testifies to God's promise to bring the Messiah from the Davidic line and establish a throne impervious to the world. Shouts of "Hosanna" go forth on Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, accompanied by being called the "Son of David" (Matthew 21:9). Christian readers have the luxury of knowing the end when reading the beginning. We know Jesus' identity when in the waters of John's Baptism, the heavens open at the Father's voice, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Yet even before reaching the end, the Father's voice affirms Jesus as His Son and thus the fulfillment of that Davidic promise to establish an everlasting throne. Here, the Son of God stands with sinners in Baptism, beginning a public ministry "fitting to fulfill all righteousness" (cf. Acts 1:22; Matthew 3:15).

Reading Psalm 89 with Christ in mind as the Son of David illuminates the Psalm even further when the words in Psalm 89:26-27 are read as Jesus' Words to the Father. The preeminence of the firstborn and transcendence above earthly kings is bestowed upon the One Whose perfect obedience yields salvation for the world, a Kingdom without end; a Church in which David lives with all the offspring righteous on account of the Son of David, the Son of God, Jesus.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant to us hearts to believe and mouths to confess Your saving name. Turn us to your grace, comfort us with your love, and call to our minds those baptismal promises confirming for us that new life in Christ in Whom we live in righteousness and purity now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 1, 2026

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 23:5-8
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 7:10-8:8; 1 Peter 3:1-22

> "And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" (Jeremiah 23:6b)

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

There are two kinds of righteousness. One kind is righteousness before the world. God's Law governs this kind of righteousness and is active in good works. This is a righteousness that God expects of each and every one of us. God did not give His Law just to hear Himself speak. This is the righteousness that Moses wrote about, "the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them" (Romans 10:5; see also Nehemiah 9:29 and Ezekiel 20).

The only problem is that we don't do them. At least, not as God would have us do them. We can keep God's Commandments to a certain extent. With a little determination and discipline, we can do the outward actions commanded by the Law. But if our righteousness consists only of outward actions before the world, then it is merely a righteous façade, a mask of righteousness that covers a wicked reality. It would be the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). And if we are truly honest with ourselves, we even fall short of false righteousness.

The second kind of righteousness is not a different sort altogether, but with a different point of reference. It's not righteousness governed by the Law, but by a promise. This promise can be found even alongside the Law—Moses also wrote about the promise. But it speaks to a righteousness that comes apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it (Romans 3:21). In fact, the Prophet Jeremiah promises it very clearly: "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).

This righteousness is not a constellation of lawful actions, but a person. The Lord Himself is our righteousness, and the Lord has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ, true God and man, to give His righteousness as a Gift to faith. The righteousness of God has come down from heaven like a shower to fulfill all righteousness—including the first kind of righteousness.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

He shall come down like showers Upon the fruitful earth; Love, joy, and hope, like flowers, Spring in His path to birth. Before Him on the mountains Shall peace, the herald, go; And righteousness in fountains From hill to valley flow. (LSB 398:3)

Wednesday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 2, 2026

Today's Reading: Romans 13:(8-10) 11-14
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 8:9-9:7; 1 Peter 4:1-19

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Romans 13:14)

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Salvation is nearer to us now than it was last Advent. It's nearer to us now than when we first believed. It's nearer to us now than when St. Paul wrote to the Romans, and they first believed. Every hour that passes is an hour nearer to the hour that we wake from sleep. While the world is getting itself into a Christmas frame of mind, it's good for us Christians to take a moment to look ahead to Christ's final advent before we again celebrate His first advent at Christmas.

Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone" (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, shone a new light in a world darkened by death. And since His resurrection, the dawn of the new creation has swelled to midday. "The night is far gone; the day is at hand (Romans 13:12a).

For this reason, St. Paul bids us to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12b). The works of darkness are "orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality, quarreling and jealousy" (Romans 13:13). These are things of the past, things of the old creation; they will have no place in the new creation after we wake from sleep in the resurrection.

How can we put on armor of light to protect against these dark works? St. Paul clarifies: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14a). Christ, who is the Light shining in a dark world, is also Armor against dark works. Light always beats back darkness, and Christ always overcomes the desires of the flesh.

Although St. Paul reminds us that the day has now come, we must also remember the words of our Lord: "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4). Since Jesus' resurrection, the day has grown long. The darkness deepens. Jesus' final advent approaches. So, "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14b). Or to put it differently, give no forethought to the flesh. Let it and its desires be an afterthought, and think ahead to the new creation and its unending Light.

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, put to death in us all vices and so strengthen us by Your grace that by the innocence of our lives and the constancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Collect for Innocence of Life)

Friday After The Epiphany

JANUARY 8, 2027

Today's Reading: Romans 1:18-32
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 2:1-3:11; Romans 1:18-32

"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20)

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Romans 1:18-32 is a powerful text on sin and man's responsibility for his rebellion against the Creator. Our opinions placing culpability for man's lawlessness at the foot of God's throne crumble at the Divine Word "so they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). There's no excuse for atheism, agnosticism, nihilism, or any other "ism" short of man's sinful rejection in worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. On Judgment Day, it won't pass to say, "the devil made me do it."

Three times in this passage, we see the phrase "God gave them up" (v. 24, 26, 28). For sinners with futile thinking and foolish hearts, the outcome is exchanging divine glory for "images." Idolatry is the outcrop of sinful minds and dark hearts, and so God gives them up to their "lusts" (v. 24), "dishonorable passions" (v. 26), and a "debased mind" (v. 28). Such is the consequential will of God upon sinners insisting on wickedness.

Man likes to blame others. We like to point to things like poverty, bad parenting, rotten schools, bad government, TV, TikTok, and any number of things as the reason for bad behavior. It's always someone else's fault. But this is demonic: the sinner shifting blame rather than confessing sin. Certainly, external forces can adversely affect an individual and are problems worth the Church's attention. But Paul would also say "each will have to bear his own load" (Galatians 6:5). On Judgment Day, the sinner's only plea is Jesus.

Our Old Adam has the propensity to commit all the sins in Romans 1:18-32. This isn't a passage that inflates our egos, causing us to say, "I'm glad I'm not as bad as those sinners in Rome." It's the Word of God, serving as a cautionary tale against pride and making us foolish. It's the Word of God calling us to repentance over idolatry. It's the Word of God driving us to the One Who IS the answer for sin, the Advocate in the face of accusation, the Great Physician mending the wounds.

We're called to confess, not hide our sins. We're called to repent, not deny and defend our mistakes, failings, and transgressions. We're called to confess with penitent hearts crushed by the Law but refreshed, renewed, and encouraged by the blessed Gospel of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Since He has our sins and died for them all, Judgment Day is a day of redemption for the Church. Rather than excuses, we have Jesus.

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Hail Thou once despised Jesus! Hail Thou Galilean King! Thou didst suffer to release us; Thou didst free salvation bring. Hail, Thou universal Savior, Bearer of our sin and shame! By Thy merit we find favor; Life is given through Thy name. (LSB 531:1)

Thursday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 7, 2027

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Widows
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 1:1-14, 22-28; Habakkuk 1:1-3:19; Romans 1:1-17

> *"The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives" (1 Timothy 5:5-6)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Paul's inspired instructions to the Church distinguish certain widows. There are those truly desolate and in need, while others live for pleasure. The former seeks God and His aid; the latter lives to satisfy the flesh. Our society relies heavily on government assistance. Caesar meets our obsession with safety and security, in the eyes of those who expect the government to play God. It's idolatry to make civil authority our ultimate provider. God is still the Giver of daily bread, something we miss when our hearts turn to Caesar at the expense of faith in Christ and the consolation of God's promise to provide (Matthew 6:32-34).

The widow "really in need" in Paul's day lacked the elaborate social programs inundating our society. She would've been reliant on the generosity of others, either in her family or the Church. But first and foremost was her trust in God for help. Here's the Second Commandment, "you shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God." In the meaning are those words bidding us to "call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." Bearing the Name of God and using it rightly demands our faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Our lack isn't a reason to despair, for we know from God's sure and certain Word that His love for the poor and afflicted is still expressed in the death of His Son to atone for sin and to redeem us from death. Joy still resides in the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal glory. Also, God works through people to provide for the downtrodden, such as widows and orphans. We put our hope in God, pray without ceasing, and seek God's help. Such is the posture of faith. We trust in Christ and draw comfort from His grace.

We don't live for pleasure. We live unto the Lord. The self-seeking widow worshiping fleshy indulgence is dead where she stands. The widow who trusts in Christ is alive. Even when dying, she lives, as does the Church. In that sense, the widow is an apt metaphor for the baptized believer. We cry unto God in desperation and need He satisfies by giving not only daily bread, but the Bread of Life Himself: Jesus.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious God, You are the Giver of daily bread and call us to love those in need. Make your people zealous for good works towards widows and orphans. Remind us of your promise to provide, that all we have is Yours, and kindle faith that produces fruits for others as we trust in Your mercy given us through Christ alone. Amen.

Thursday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 3, 2026

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Workers of All Kinds
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 9:8-10:11; 1 Peter 5:1-14

> *"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." (Ephesians 6:7–8)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

The economy was a bit different during the time of the New Testament. You couldn't go get a job at Starbucks. The Industrial Revolution had not yet come. Medieval feudalism was still a millennium away. The economy at that time was centered around the household. It was literally an oikonomia, the order of a household.

Households were often more than the nuclear family that we think of as a typical suburban household—dad, mom, two kids, and a dog. In addition to extended families, there were workers of all kinds. The word that the Bible uses for these workers of all kinds is douloi. It can be translated as "slave," but this term shouldn't be understood through the lens of institutionalized slavery, which developed during the modern era. Some translations will render the term as "bondservant," which is a little better.

The meaning of the term at that time could mean an involuntary servitude, but it could also mean a voluntary servitude in exchange for the necessities of life. In this latter sense, the term douloi would not be so far from how we understand the term "employee." When you get a job, you give up some personal freedom to your employer in exchange for some necessities of life.

This passage from Ephesians teaches us two things. First, our work in the world—even if you get a job at Starbucks—is an extension of our family. If you're a boss of workers, you should conduct yourself like a parent. If you're a worker, you should treat your coworkers (including your bosses) as your own family. This pleases God.

Second, and more importantly, whatever work you do, work as if serving the Lord. This is the fundamental principle for Christians and their work in the world. Work is not utilitarian, a means to an end, a necessary evil to get a paycheck. When you work to serve others in whatever work you do, you are actually rendering a service to the Lord. And the Lord also works through you to serve others. This is the economy of vocation. Our Lord calls workers of all kinds to work as His agents of service. And the Lord will reward this work, whether he is a slave (doulos) or whether he is free (eleutheros).

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Thee may I set at my right hand, Whose eyes my inmost substance see, And labor on at Thy command, And offer all my works to Thee. (LSB 854:3)

Friday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 4, 2026

Today's Reading: 2 Peter 1:1-21
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 10:12-27a, 33-34; 2 Peter 1:1-21

> *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." (2 Peter 1:3–4)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

As we prepare to receive our Lord when He returns on the Last Day, we also turn our hearts and minds to His first advent in His Incarnation. As St. John proclaims so beautifully in the Christmas Gospel, "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), and as St. Paul teaches with clarity, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19–20), the Son of God joined Himself fully and completely with our human nature in order to reconcile us to God.

The Incarnation is a personal union between God and man. The eternal second person of the Holy Trinity—the Word of God, God's Son—assumed into Himself our human nature from the substance of His human mother, the Virgin Mary. Because the divine and human natures are so intimately joined in the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, there is a true communion between the human nature and the divine nature. God is man and man is God. And by a Gift of divine grace, the human nature receives divine qualities such that the human Jesus can both walk on water and give His true Body and Blood as a Gift to be received in the bread and wine of His Supper.

The Incarnation is a singular event. But that does not mean that Jesus is the only human who partakes of the divine nature. "His divine power has granted to us all things…so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature." This communion with the divine nature is not a personal union but a union of faith in "his precious and very great promises," which He has granted to us. By faith, you come to share in the divine nature and receive His life and godliness.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Praise be to Him who, Lord Most High, The fullness of the Godhead shares; And yet our human nature bears, Who came as man to bleed and die. And from His cross there flows our peace Who chose for us the path He trod, That so might sins and sorrows cease And all be reconciled to God. (LSB 538:3)

The Epiphany of Our Lord

JANUARY 6, 2027

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:1-12
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 66:1-20; Luke 3:21-38

> *"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

At least two things are worth mentioning in this text. One, the "wise men." Who were they exactly? In the Greek, they're called magi, a term meaning sorcerer, magician, or wise man. In the Greek Old Testament, the word "magi" occurs 8 times in Daniel and is translated "magician" in the ESV (Daniel 1:20, 2:2, 10, 20, et al.). These magicians, alongside the enchanters and sorcerers, fail to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which prompts the enraged king to order their execution before Daniel arises to interpret the dream (cf. Daniel 2) rightly. The magi fail in Daniel, but in Matthew they succeed, by the grace of God, in interpreting the star and finding the Christ. Indeed, many from the east and the west will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:11). Their understanding and arrival, seeking the Christ, are the divine hand of God at work.

Two, Herod. We know more about Herod from extrabiblical sources. A summary of Herod is this: a deranged, power-hungry, politically savvy opportunist, capable architect, and shrewd leader never above slaughter to preserve power. Telling a man of his immense ego and determined will, "Where's the King of the Jews?" would've likely been a death sentence to the wrong person. But Herod the Great is too clever to show his cards. He wants to know the whereabouts of the Christ and so sends the Magi, the Wise Men, on their way, expecting their return with a location so he too can worship Him (Matthew 2:8). The Magi are truly "wise" in seeking and worshiping the Christ rather than displaying wicked reliance on divination and necromancy. God is also gracious to protect the Child from madmen like Herod. Christ is manifested before the Wise Men, who bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They don't return to Herod after heeding God's warning in a dream.

The gifts of the Wise Men symbolize various parts of Jesus' identity. The gold reminds us of God's presence in Solomon's gold-filled temple; the frankincense is the spice of sacrifice; and myrrh is placed on Jesus' corpse when it is laid in the tomb (John 19:39-40). The Child with His mother is the One sent to save, while also troubling "all Jerusalem" (Matthew 2:3). Hostility is manifesting itself in the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31). But the time for death isn't now. The manifestation to the Wise Men is the beginning of Christ showing Himself to the world that He saves by ultimately manifesting His glory in crucifixion, atoning for sin, quashing the devil, and establishing a Kingdom that can't be taken away.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

The eastern sages saw from far And followed on His guiding star; And, led by light, to light they trod And by their gifts confessed their God. (LSB 399:2)

Tuesday of the Second Week After Christmas

JANUARY 5, 2027

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 65:8-25; Luke 3:1-20

> *"Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Peter says "rejoice" because you share in Christ's sufferings. Reason, however, sees only God's displeasure and distance during trials and tribulations.

At the cross, Christ still possesses both natures, human and divine, existing in that mysterious, personal union. In His suffering, the essence of the divine nature is present in the Christ lamenting to His Father, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" It's a sublime cry echoing Psalm 22:1. We've been in these positions when God's presence in our lives seemed lost and absent—a God far away in excruciating trials impressing upon us a deep sense of guilt and shame. Still, our laments, like the Psalmist's and like Jesus Himself, flow from faith, crying out to our heavenly Father in the face of His Word, confirming for us His love and protection in painful moments. Jesus dwells within His people still, One with Him as His Body; the Church lives in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Seeing Jesus as an example is found in 1 Peter 2:21: "for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." Here, the exemplary Christ is the suffering Christ bearing wounds to heal us. Following His steps means bearing crosses under the trials placed upon us while rejoicing in our participation with Jesus by faith. Faith receives Christ while anticipating that eternal glory won for us by His cross and blood. Christ dwells within the baptized believer who can only cling to the written Word and God's promises in difficult times.

Tragedies can rouse our attention and cause us to ponder God's voice in Scripture anew. "Why, O God?" is a real question unanswerable by worldly clichés and hallmark platitudes. Instead, the Holy Spirit directs His Church to the Word Incarnate, Who tasted the bitter suffering, agony, forsakenness, and pain of crucifixion for the sake of the world groaning under sin while awaiting His return. The tribulations, trials, and suffering befalling God's people can't overcome faith's joy over sharing in the sufferings of Jesus, Who died and rose again, Whose glory adorns the Church in heaven. It's this glory we anticipate when Jesus takes us to Himself, and the waiting is over.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, you sent Your only-begotten Son Who bore our suffering, sin, and shame on the Cross. In our sufferings and trials, bear us up and impress upon us Your Word, confirming for us Your promise of sins forgiven and true life in Christ given to Your Church by grace through faith in Jesus. Amen.

Saturday of the First Week in Advent

DECEMBER 5, 2026

Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 2 - Psalm 80:1, 3, 14, 17; antiphon: Isaiah 62:11b; 30:30, 29
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 11:1-12:6; 2 Peter 2:1-22

> "But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!" (Psalm 80:7)

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 80 was written by Asaph, one of the Levitical musicians at the time of King David. Asaph is also called a "seer" (2 Chronicles 29:30), which means that he not only wrote music for the praise of God during David's reign, but his verses also prophesied of what God would do through David's Son. Although the poet-prophet sings them, they are primarily words of Jesus Christ.

"Let your hand be on the man of your right hand," sings the Psalm. By praying for the man of God's right hand, Psalm 80 prophesies the Incarnation. Because the Son of God assumed our human nature in the unity of His person, that means a man sits at God's right hand. But not just any man—it is the "son of man whom you have made strong for yourself."

The title "son of man" is both a Messianic title and Jesus' preferred self-designation. Others call Him the Son of God, but Jesus always emphasizes His true humanity by calling Himself the "son of man." But unlike other sons of men, Jesus is the Son of Man whom God has made strong in the Incarnation by communicating His divine majesty to His assumed humanity. He is the man of God's right hand, not because He sits in some place in relation to His Father, but because He occupies the place of God's power and authority.

"Let your hand be on the man of your right hand." Psalm 80 sings of two hands of God. In his book Against Heresies, St. Irenaeus calls the Son of God and the Holy Spirit the "two hands of God," by which He accomplishes His work in the world. Not only was the Son of God "incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man" (Nicene Creed), He was also anointed by the Spirit to take up His cross and raised by the Spirit from the dead. By the hand of the Holy Spirit, the Son of Man at God's right hand was made strong.

From God's right hand, Jesus sends His Spirit to you. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). Amen! Come quickly, Lord Jesus, amen!

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

You sit in splendid glory, enthroned at God's right hand Upholding earth and heaven by forces You command. We know that You will come as our judge that final day, So help your servants You have redeemed by blood, we pray' May we with saints be numbered where praises never end, In glory everlasting. Amen, O Lord, amen! (LSB 941:4)

Second Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 6, 2026

Today's Reading: Luke 21:25-36
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 14:1-23; 2 Peter 3:1-18

> *"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.

In Confirmation Class, we learned from the Apostles' Creed about Jesus' humiliation. That's when He "was conceived, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried." Written large over that, we learned, is the promise of the gospel: for you!

We also learned the good news does not end there, because "for you" is also written just as large over His exaltation. That's everything from Jesus "descended, rose again, and ascended" to He "sits at God's right hand, and will return to judge the living and the dead." Both are good news, and Jesus' message today is—don't let the devil, the world, or your own heart ever tell you otherwise. Jesus says we can look to the Last Day now as if we were looking to the very cross itself.

Jesus knows how easily we figure God has forgotten His own promises here. Life gets hard. Things go wrong. Problems pile up. Add in all the sins we commit every day, and we figure we have lost God's love and salvation, that the last Day is going to be a bummer, not a joy.

"Stay awake," says Jesus, when such "cares of this life" become so overwhelming for us, as they will. Don't give up on God, because God will never give up on you. God's love is real. God's care is real. His forgiveness is real. His salvation is real. And they are for you.

In fact, when Jesus returns on the Last Day, it won't just be Who is showing up for you, your Redeemer. It will be what shows up for you: your redemption. That means any voice on That Day that says you don't belong to God, are not righteous in His sight, are not heaven-bound but hell-bound, God will not listen to. You even have Jesus in your Baptism now with that promise every day. You even have Jesus with that promise in today's Absolution and sermon. And in the Holy Supper, you will have that same promise in Jesus' Body and Blood.

In today's Collect, we will pray that God would "stir up our hearts." But take heart, friend. That's not because our hope is in our hearts. We know our hearts. We will pray this because our hope is in the One whom the Father is already sending us. Jesus. His heart.

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.

Monday of the Second Week After Christmas

JANUARY 4, 2027

Today's Reading: Genesis 46:1-7
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 63:15-65:7; Luke 2:41-52

> *"I am the 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" (Genesis 46:3)*

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

This seems an echo of God's divine promise to Abraham. The "great nation" language appears back in Genesis 12, in God's promise to increase Abraham's offspring and give them the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7). The difference here is the location. Jacob is going to be a "great nation" in Egypt, which sounds at odds with the initial promise God made to his grandfather. Any trepidation on Jacob's part to uproot his family and journey to Egypt would've been understandable. Still, faith clings to the Word even in the face of difficulty and trial. Jacob commences his journey, stopping in Beersheba to make sacrifices to his God. Difficult journeys and hard situations shouldn't distract us from remembering the Second Commandment, "you shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God." This involves calling upon that Name "in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks" (Small Catechism, Second Commandment).

Jacob isn't left to wonder about his decision. God is merciful to confirm Jacob's journey to see his son and promises that Jacob will be a great nation in Egypt, a story that unfolds in Exodus, and one that the church knows well. The course to Canaan runs through Egypt.

Trials and tribulations afflict Israel through her wanderings in the desert. It takes decades before she crosses the Jordan (Numbers 14:33). God fulfills His promise to Abraham and gives the land to his offspring. For the Church, much is similar. We're looking for land; only our land is celestial. Our inheritance is everlasting and eternal, but not without suffering and sojourning this side of glory. Jacob received the Word of God, comforting and consoling this patriarch whose peaceful death comes before the beloved son he thought was long dead. The Church lives trusting in the promises of God Who still says, "Do not be afraid" because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). We know the end in that death is abolished, the victory is ours, and life eternal the Church inherits by a life in Christ, Who comes from Jacob's lineage to fulfill Hosea's prophecy "out of Egypt I called My Son" (Matthew 2:15). Indeed, He comes as God foretold. The Messiah would be born from a lineage flowing out of that "great nation" of Jacob (cf. Matthew 1:2-16), and His name would be "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's head, You are her one foundation; In You she trusts, before You bows, And waits for Your salvation. Built on this rock secure, Your Church shall endure Though all the world decay And all things pass away. O hear, O hear us, Jesus! (LSB 647:1)

Second Sunday After Christmas

JANUARY 3, 2027

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-23
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 63:1-14; Luke 2:21-40

> *"A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more" (Matthew 2:18)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jeremiah's prophecy finds fulfillment in Herod's bloody attempt to kill the One born "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). The deranged King unleashes death on male children two and under. Bethlehem and "all that region" (2:16) suffer the sword of boundless rage.

Matthew here cites Jeremiah 31:15, which adds important context. In the Old Testament, Rachel's weeping comes from the Babylonian captivity God imposes upon Israel for her idolatry. However, Jeremiah quickly preaches words of comfort, peace, restoration, and mercy in verses 16-20. Rachel weeps, but hope is coming. According to Matthew, this passage has a final fulfillment in the coming of Christ to save and restore His people, still lamenting a sinful world. Now comfort is in the Messiah, the One who has come to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Sadness overwhelms parents losing their innocent children to Satanic tyranny. Innocent children die because of Christ. This isn't to say they had no sin, but that they did nothing outwardly warranting Herod's bloodbath. It was hatred, madness, and fear that his throne would be displaced by the true King, and this fear wasn't unfounded. The True King would survive and establish His throne and Kingdom by blood, but on His own time for the reason foretold: to "save His people from their sins."

God's Kingdom reigns over the Herods of this age, trying to play God. Jesus continues interrupting a world hell-bent on destroying the Church. Even abortion is the devil's attempt to kill life lest the Church grow. Baptized babies threaten the ruler of this world. Thankfully, Rachel's weeping finds comfort in the Child whisked away to Egypt at God's command. Herod would fail, Jesus would live, and God's perfect plan is fulfilled. This should comfort us in our weeping over those sins we can't fix or bear on our own. Restoration and salvation, the true Peace drying our eyes and renewing our souls, lie in the One Herod couldn't kill, the One Who would die on His own time (John 10:18) and live beyond the death He destroys. Indeed, this makes for a merry Christmas, a season of joy in the One Who saves His people.

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.

Monday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 7, 2026

Today's Reading: Malachi 4:1-6
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 24:1-13; 1 John 1:1-2:14

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

You want to be holy but are not. On and on it goes as your sin rises over your own head (Psalm 38:4). All the lust, pride, greed, cheating, filthy language, despair, and unbelief you struggle with every day. You fear it is hopeless. You fear you are hopeless.

Such fear does not speak against your status as God's child. In fact, like St. Paul, without hyperbole, you confess there is nothing good dwelling in you (Romans 7:18), that you have "neither root nor branch" of your own to hold onto or lift you up to God.

Such despair is actually worked in you by God Himself. It's what He does with the law. Like sending forth a conquering Hercules, God sends forth His word of law to conquer every presumption of our own righteousness in His sight. Why? So we learn to place no trust in ourselves but instead in His promise to be merciful and gracious to all now because of Jesus and His sacrifice upon the cross. That is the ultimate "Torah," or teaching of Moses.

Did Jesus die on the cross for you? He did. There is your root and branch before God that lifts you all the way to heaven. Did Jesus rise from the dead for you? He did. There is your root and branch before God that holds on to you and promises you righteousness in God's sight. Risen from the dead, is Jesus there for you every day now, every moment, yes—even every sin—with the promise of His cross in His Word, in His Water, and at His Supper? He is. There is your root and branch before God that reaches out and holds on and saves you from all your sins.

And one more. Is Jesus coming on the Last Day to make good His "It Is Finished" promise to you from the cross? Yes, He is. There is your "leaping like calves from the stall," leaving behind and treading underfoot anything and everything that could ever drag you into Hell. Not now. Not anymore. That's the promise of Jesus' return on the Last Day.

You fear it is hopeless? You fear you are hopeless? Guess what? God promises otherwise. As Jesus rose from the dead for you, He will rise in the skies for you on the Last Day. And "for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sin's debt, that fearful burden, Cannot His love erase; Your guilt the Lord will pardon And cover by His grace. He comes, for you procuring The peace of sin forgiv'n, His children thus securing Eternal life in heav'n (LSB 334:5)

Tuesday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 8, 2026

Today's Reading: Romans 15:4-13
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 24:14-25:12; Obadiah 1-21; 1 John 2:15-29

> *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." (Romans 15:13)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

St. Paul calls God "the God of endurance, encouragement and hope." Like presents under the tree, all are Gifts for you and me.

St. Paul calls God "the God of endurance" because He bears with you. You cannot wear Him down. Struggles and all, sins and all, God keeps chasing you with His goodness and mercy so that you will dwell in His house forever (Psalm 23:6). That's His promise to you every day now in your baptism.

St. Paul calls God "the God of encouragement" because He is always with you. While your sins have the power to chase Him away, your baptism into Christ has a greater power than that. Sins and all, struggles and all, your baptismal promises still stand. God is with you to save you from your sins. How encouraging is that?

And that is what makes God "the God of hope." There is never a night when you put your head on the pillow, a morning when you rise to face a new day, or a moment in between, when God is not pleased with His baptized child resting in His nail-pierced hands.

"The trouble is," you say, "I don't feel worthy." "I remember that Staupitz used to say," Luther once wrote about his father confessor, "'More than a thousand times I have vowed to God that I would improve, but I have never performed what I have vowed. Hereafter I shall not make such vows, because I know perfectly well that I shall not live up to them. Unless God is gracious and merciful to me for the sake of Christ and grants me a blessed final hour when the time comes for me to depart this miserable life, I shall not be able to stand before Him with all my vows and good works.'"

"This despair," Luther would add, "is not only truthful but is godly and holy." That's because God's promise is exactly that. The God of endurance, encouragement and hope will grant you "a blessed final hour," because He's got this now. He's got you. And He will never let go. The cross promises you that.

So if you are missing the "joy and peace in believing," it might be because you are not looking in the right place. Look away from yourself to the Tree. Not the Christmas tree. The cross. The cross is why God is called the "God of endurance," "the God of encouragement," and "the God of hope." The cross teaches us He can also be called "the God of all peace and joy."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He comes the pris'ners to release, In Satan's bondage held. The gates of brass before Him burst, The iron fetters yield. (LSB 349:2)

Saturday of the First Week After Christmas

JANUARY 2, 2027

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. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:4–7)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Belonging somewhere is vitally important for humans. As much as people may say they want their "alone time," or that they are perfectly happy being by themselves, in reality, we are social creatures. Whether it is being part of a family, a group of gamers, or a sports team, everyone has a place in this world among others. Certainly, there are those in our world (maybe it is you) who don't feel like they're part of a wider group. That they are truly alone in this world, not welcome, or at home, with others. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially for the baptized of God.

At the time of St. Paul, there were very well-defined groups of people belonging to certain castes or layers. And they would never mix, never change societal levels; they would keep their previous status. Slaves were not family, even if they spent their entire lives in one household. You had no upward mobility as far as society was concerned, so why even bother?

This is what made the Gospel such a world-changing proclamation. It didn't matter who you were in this world; once you were baptized into God's family, once you became a child of God, none of those previous divisions mattered anymore. The lowliest slave and even the Emperor would be the same in each other's eyes in the church, because that's what God said they were—sons and heirs. Our broken and sinful world today has done a very good job of breaking society into separate factions and groups. It is easy to find your identity in something not even remotely religious or Scriptural, and that is dangerous. If you feel like you have been cut off or separated from others, stop and take a moment to remember your Baptism. Remember that God the Father has called you by name and made you His child. Gather with your brothers and sisters in Christ before God's throne of mercy and once again hear Him tell you how much he loves you and has done for you in Christ. You are His child. He has made you His heir. You always have a place before Him with your fellow baptized.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, once with sinners numbered, Full obedience was Your path; You, by death, have consecrated Water in this saving bath: Dying to the sin of Adam, Rising to a life of grace; We are counted with the righteous, Over us the cross You trace. (LSB 404:4)

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

JANUARY 1, 2027

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.

Did you know that New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, the New Creation, and circumcision are all more closely related than you might have thought? Today is the eighth day of Christmas, the day upon which the infant Jesus was circumcised and named according to God's Law. It was the same with every Jewish boy born since the time of Abraham. You may remember that Zechariah was struck mute until he named John the Baptist on the day of his circumcision, which was the eighth day of his life.

Maybe you've made a New Year's Resolution, a vow to live your life somewhat differently in 2027. If so, you look ahead with a renewed mind; you have made a positive change in your life. While that is certainly commendable, the real new life you should focus on is underneath that resolution.

Easter Sunday is also, in a sense, "New Year's Day." It is the first day of a new era, of a new life. It is the inauguration of the New Creation, that age where all that is wrong and broken and sinful are destroyed and purged from the universe, and the perfect reality of life in God's presence forever takes center stage. And because Easter Sunday is the day after the seventh day of the week, the day after the Lord Jesus rested from all His work that He had done, you can certainly see it as the ultimate Eighth Day, the same day in which God's people are made new. In fact, we often refer to Baptism as our own "eighth day," and many baptismal fonts have eight sides to reflect that reality. For just like Jesus, we are named by God the Father at Baptism, and our names are then written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

By all means, make those resolutions and seek to keep them. But realize that behind that good intention is the infant Jesus who actually did all that he promised, and even in the shedding of his blood on this day kept all of God's Law perfectly for you. That's where this is all tied together neatly: Jesus' blood, shed for you, not only on Golgotha, but also in Bethlehem. Blood that covers all of your sin, so that you may enter into that New Creation with Him for all eternity.

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. (Collect for the Circumcision and Name of Jesus)

Wednesday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 9, 2026

Today's Reading: Isaiah 26:1-19
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 26:1-19; 1 John 3:1-24

> *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD is an everlasting rock" (Isaiah 26:3-4)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Perfect peace." Isaiah uses the same word twice, "shalom, shalom." It means more than the absence of bad stuff. It means before God, your place, like "a strong city" with "walls and bulwarks" (26:1), is secure and certain. It means God's got this now. He's got you. That even if you should die, you will rise from the dead to live forever with Him (26:19). It means that God forgives you and is working all things together now for your eternal good. Isaiah even says the word twice, "Shalom, shalom," to emphasize God's faithfulness to that very promise, the promise He made with you the day Jesus died on the cross for you. "Perfect peace."

Why, then, does "perfect peace" seem so elusive for us? Us. That's why. That is the whole point behind today's reading. These words are not spoken into thin air. They are spoken to worriers and doubters, to disbelievers just like you and me. They are words designed by God to call us away from our endless obsession with self to a much happier obsession with Jesus.

Fix your eyes there, because Jesus is why God had you baptized. You are clothed in Jesus' death and resurrection now. Shalom. Shalom. Keep your gaze there, because Jesus is why God sends you a pastor. Pardoned by His Word, your death has no claim on you anymore. Shalom. Shalom. And "stay" your mind where God "stays" it, on Jesus. Because Jesus is why God sets a Table before you, so He can feed you the Supper of perfect peace—Jesus' Body and Blood for you, for the forgiveness of sins. Body and Blood that death cannot touch, cannot claim, in you now, at the Holy Supper. Peace. Peace. Shalom. Shalom.

"When we look at ourselves," writes Luther, "we find plenty of sin." No shalom looking there. "But when we look at Christ, we have no sin." Luther could also have written, "When I look at myself, I don't see how I can be saved. But when I look at Jesus, I don't see how I can be lost."

Keep the faith (26:2), friend. God never calls us to trust in ourselves. He calls you to trust in Jesus. Jesus only. Jesus always. Jesus period. Our "forever rock." Shalom, my friend. Shalom!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure: Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r. (LSB 761:1)

Thursday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 10, 2026

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Employers and Supervisors
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 26:20-27:13; 1 John 4:1-21

> *"Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him. (Ephesians 6:9)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We thank God the chains and shackles marking the slavery of this country prior to the Emancipation Proclamation have been abolished. Still, 'masters' and 'slaves' exist in various ways. Only when Jesus returns on the Last Day will slavery, along with every other evil of this fallen world, disappear in the trash bin of history. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

How do these words, then, speak to us in our day? Here is how: as the Catechism teaches us to think "workers of all kinds" when considering "slaves," it teaches us to think "employers and supervisors" when considering "masters." And what is the Catechism's message to "masters" today? There is only one Master, or Supervisor, over us all. And He is Jesus.

What does this mean? It means good news for everyone, even "supervisors and employers," for it means we are all under the Master, or Supervisor, Who does not play favorites. Like I said, good news for everyone—because imagine if Jesus did play favorites. Would He die on the cross for all of us? No. Would He promise the cleansing of His cross to everyone in Baptism? No. Would the pardon spoken by pastors in His stead and by His command be for all? No. And would the promise of His cross be for all at His Supper? No. Thank God, Jesus does not play favorites. His favorite thing is to be the Savior of us all.

Armed with such a gospel, the Catechism encourages "employers and supervisors" to approach those under their employ as Jesus approaches them: with humility and kindness. Yes, they have a responsibility to the companies they work for. That will mean rewards for good work and punishments for bad. But it will also mean—whether rewarding or punishing, it is precious souls they are dealing with, people for whom Jesus was willing to die so that, whether slave or free, supervisor or worker, they will live forever now as royalty, kings in heaven.

What an honor, then, and privilege, for "employers and supervisors" to have workers under them and to bend their own "human pride" and to walk the "servant way," "forgetting self," and serving the greatest need of all—being a Jesus to them.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

You bid us bend our human pride Nor count ourselves above The lowliest place, the meanest task That waits the gift of love. Lord, help us walk Your servant way Wherever love may lead And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other's need. (LSB 857:4-5)

Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus

DECEMBER 31, 2026

Today's Reading: Luke 12:35-40
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 60:1-22; Luke 1:39-56

> *"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks… You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luke 12:35-36, 40)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Staying up all night to "ring in the new year" has been popular for centuries, millennia even. Are you planning to do the same tonight? Do you or your family have any special rituals or traditions you will observe as the clock strikes midnight?

Now, consider this: what if every night was like tonight? Would you be able to keep your energy level up and not get bored or complacent, waiting night after night after night for the big celebration to happen? That's essentially what Jesus asks His disciples to do here. To always be ready and prepared for His return on a day that no one—not even Jesus Himself—knows. To be watchful for the return of the victorious conqueror, no matter the day or time.

It can get old, can't it? We've all been told, all our lives, that "Jesus can return at any time!" And how have we—as the Christian Church—responded? Mostly with a yawn. It's been almost 2,000 years, after all, since he said "Behold! I am coming soon!" But that's the thing about God's time. "Soon" means something completely different for the Eternal God than it does for those of us who only live for several decades.

That doesn't excuse your sleepiness and laziness, though. Your Old Adam tries to lull you to sleep. To distract you from the one thing needful with the things of this world. And that's why Jesus urges His disciples here to focus. To shake off the distractions and keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. To look to the New Creation, the New Age, the New Heavens and New Earth with joy and anticipation, even if they have no idea when it will come to be.

Faith, that's the real point here. Trusting in the promise of the Risen Christ that He will indeed return, so that you live your life always ready for that return, always focused on His good and gracious Gifts: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Keeping those Gifts in the forefront of your mind at all times helps you remember that He will return for you.

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)

Wednesday of the First Week After Christmas

DECEMBER 30, 2026

Today's Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 58:1-59:3, 14-21; Luke 1:26-38

> *"He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked." (Isaiah 11:3–4)*

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

"He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good, for goodness sake!" Those lyrics from a much-loved Christmas carol about an all-seeing old man with a long beard often confuse our understanding of our good and gracious God. Too many people see God the Father like a more powerful and judgmental Santa Claus, ready to unleash fire and brimstone and destruction instead of just a stocking full of coal.

Of course, Isaiah does say that God reserves the right to do just that to the wicked! But hear what else the prophet says. It is only the wicked who shall receive such judgment. The poor and the meek, on the other hand? Righteousness reigns. Not with His eyes or ears, but with His just nature will God decide your fate. Maybe we've lost the plot when it comes to being 'just' and what 'justice' truly is, so a quick reminder: God the Father will judge all people justly. Objectively, by the rulebook, and not with emotion.

God the Father sees His Law clearly, and everyone is judged accordingly. Not by who they are, or what they can offer, or how hard they've tried, but by their nature as repentant sinners who trust in His mercy, or by their nature as those who reject Him and His grace and trust in themselves instead. For sure, like Santa Claus, God the Father does see you when you're sleeping and awake. He does know you better than you know yourself. Maybe that terrifies you. It certainly makes me uncomfortable some days!

Yet, even in that, your Heavenly Father means it for good, for He sends His Holy Spirit to guide and keep you in His Word and faith until the Last Day. He gives you pastors, teachers, and parents to guide you in the way you should go. To lead you to His altar of mercy and grace, where you can hear and receive His Gifts freely.

Naughty or nice, it's never too late to return to the Lord your God. He is always standing at the ready to wrap you in His arms and welcome you into His eternal kingdom.

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree, Free them from Satan's tyranny That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save, And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:4)

Friday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 11, 2026

Today's Reading: 1 John 5:1-21
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 28:14-29; 1 John 5:1-21; 2 John 1-13; 3 John 1-15

> *"This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood." (1 John 5:6)*

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

The New Testament was not written to an academic community gathered around study cubicles. As important as academic communities and study cubicles are, the New Testament was written to a worshipping community gathered around the Font and Altar of Jesus. As such, the New Testament should be read and heard as always pointing us to the sacraments that deliver Jesus to us. That truth jumps off the page today with "this is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ."

What probably first comes to mind when we hear "water and blood" is the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side as He was pierced on the cross. But as God used a rib from the first Adam's side to give life to Eve—life that did not last forever, the "water and blood" that flowed from Jesus' side, the Second Adam, points to the water of Baptism and the blood of Holy Communion, which God uses today to give us life that does last forever.

"This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ." Came to us there, and still does, to find us there. Came to us there, and still does, to bring forgiveness, life, and salvation to us there. Came to us there, and still does, for "Whoever has the Son has life."

Do you have the Son? What is the testimony God has borne concerning Jesus in the water and the blood? "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." These three agree: you have the Son, because in the Water and the Blood God gives Jesus to you.

"But what if I don't feel it?" you ask. "I sin every day and my life is a mess." Luther says, "You should not believe your conscience and your feelings more than the Word." St. John says, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son."

Sins, messes and all, you have Jesus now. And the only testimony you need to tell you that—the only testimony God pays attention to on your behalf now, "is He Who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ." Rest at peace then in Jesus, for you have Him now. His Font and Altar promise you that. And with the Son, you have life now that will last forever.

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts flow from the font Where He calls us His own; New life He gives that makes us His and His alone…The gifts are in the feast…the body and the blood Remove our ev'ry sin; We leave His presence in His peace, renewed again. (LSB 602:2,3)

Saturday of the Second Week in Advent

DECEMBER 12, 2026

Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 3 - Psalm 85:1-2, 6, 8; antiphon: Phil. 4:4-5
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:1-14; Jude 1-25

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

The death of a loved one. A cancer diagnosis. The end of a marriage. A friend's betrayal. A national calamity. Bad grades. There is a lot in life you would not, and should not, rejoice in. It wouldn't be reasonable. But no matter who, where, what, when, or why, there is no need to despair or fly off the handle, because there is always this to rejoice in: the Lord.

Tomorrow's Introit explains. "LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob." While it did not always look that way for Jacob in life or in death, we can suspend our own reason and judgment and take to heart the promise of tomorrow's Introit: "You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin." As God says, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," let the record reflect God's faithfulness to His promises to Jacob and all His children. "You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin."

No matter what you are going through in life or in death, no matter the trial or trouble, you are not alone. Jesus is with you. With His own Word, Water, and Supper, He is telling you: "Your iniquities I forgive, your sins I cover. I got this, now. I got you. I am your God. And I will never let go."

Tomorrow's Introit asks of God, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" With tomorrow's liturgy, hymnody, Absolution, sermon, Supper, and saints, God will answer with a resounding "Yes!" It's why the psalmist is so confident, "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints." God will speak peace to you tomorrow, because He will speak Jesus to you tomorrow.

Tomorrow's Introit will add, "But let them not turn back to folly." That means, no matter who, where, what, when, or why—keep looking in the mirror and saying, "Hello there, you saint!" Because that is who you are now—a saint. With your sins always forgiven and covered by Jesus, nothing you are going through proves otherwise. To think otherwise is just folly.

"Rejoice in the Lord always." "Let your reasonableness be known to all men." There truly is a reason that gives our joy an always "able." He is Jesus, the God Who is always at hand.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me. Who can robe me of the haven That God's Son for me won When His life was given? (LSB 756:1)

Tuesday of the First Week After Christmas

DECEMBER 29, 2026

Today's Reading: Luke 2:(22-32) 33-40
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 55:1-13; Luke 1:1-25

"[Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.'" (Luke 2:28–32)

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

These words of Simeon are probably most familiar to you as the Nunc Dimittis, the Post-Communion Canticle in our Divine Services. The context of this song is that the promise given to Simeon by God has been fulfilled; he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Salvation, the Savior of all mankind. Now, in his arms, he holds that salvation, and his only response is to speak words of praise and thanksgiving.

Simeon is now at peace, for he has seen the fulfillment of centuries of promises from God. The Lord works in His own time, on His own schedule, and Simeon was blessed to be alive when the "fullness of time had come." Now, he knows the Lord God hears his prayers and keeps His promises. You can contrast St. Thomas and his "moment of doubt" before seeing the Risen Christ and exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" You could argue that Thomas wasn't sure of God's promises anymore, because he knew that the dead do not rise, so what good could possibly come from Jesus's death for all?

And then you have to place yourself somewhere in between these two men, don't you? Are you waiting to see the Lord like Simeon was, or do you doubt His presence and power, like Thomas? Do you wonder if the Lord is ever going to come to you, or are you afraid He's already left you behind? Both options are really the same thing—I'm not sure if God hears me, or sees me, or even cares about me.

There's a reason the Nunc Dimittis has become a much-loved liturgical text for us: the Lord's Supper—the bodily presence of Jesus for you in the Sacrament. You hear the Lord's promise of forgiveness, you lay your sin upon him, and He speaks Absolution over you. And then, at the altar, the Lord Himself comes to you, sacramentally hidden in bread and wine made Body and Blood to fulfill every promise He's ever made: forgiving all of your sin, giving you life everlasting, and making your salvation certain. After receiving this majestic treasure in faith and trust, you can respond with Simeon and all the saints from his day until now, "My eyes have seen your salvation!"

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Let all together praise our God Before His glorious throne; Today He opens heaven again To give us His own Son, To give us His own Son. (LSB 389:1)

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

DECEMBER 28, 2026

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-18
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 52:13-54:10; Matthew 2:13-23

> *"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 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, because they are no more.'" (Matthew 2:16–18)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

Could there be a more distressing Scripture reading for the fourth day of Christmas? Why must we face such a horrific tragedy only a few days after one of the greatest celebrations of joy on the Christian calendar? We noted yesterday that some of these commemorations and festivals are held when they are because of their closeness to Jesus, and the Holy Innocents are no different. These young boys' deaths proclaim an unforgettable sermon. Satan cannot stand the Lord of Life. He absolutely hates the Redeemer of the world. He will go to any lengths he can think of to stop God from saving His creation. He uses Herod to try to end the salvation story before it even begins, shouting to the world the rejection of God's grace and anger at God's good Gifts. There is a lot of Law here; the idolatry of the self screams aloud: "I know better than God does!"

Still, you may question why God the Father allows such wanton and terrifying violence, especially among those innocent of wickedness. Certainly, these children were as sinful as all people, but their only 'crime' was being born in Bethlehem around the same time as Jesus. And it gets even harder to hear these words when you realize that Jeremiah had prophesied this day more than 500 years earlier. He and God's people knew this day was coming, and there was nothing they could do to stop it. But the death of Jesus had been prophesied even earlier- all the way back to Genesis 3. A death that would make right all that has gone wrong.

In the Holy Innocents, you see a picture of Jesus's suffering for you. You also see this sinful, broken world attacking God's good and gracious Gift of life. But that suffering has an end, and it is an end that is bathed in Jesus's blood for you. Blood that brings life for you, and for the Holy Innocents.

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Third Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 13, 2026

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:2-10 (11)
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:15-30:14; Revelation 1:1-20

> *"Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (Matthew 11:2-3)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

It's the Third Sunday in Advent. The day in which we celebrate the incarnation of our Lord, the coming of the Christ in bodily form to fulfill everything that He had promised to do for millennia. But for John the Baptist, that day had already come and gone. He had been there, in a sense, I suppose, leaping in the womb as the mother of our Lord greeted his own mother. He had been there, too, out at the Jordan calling people to repentance and comforting people with the Gospel. And then there was that whole, "Behold, the Lamb of God," thing that he did when he pointed to Jesus, AND that whole Baptism of Jesus when the Father boomed His voice from above. After all of that, you would assume that John wouldn't have a doubt in his mind about Jesus…

But that isn't fair. John was a sinner. And because he was a sinner, there were times in which doubt crept into his heart. No one is immune to breaking the First Commandment, after all… Which brings us to the harsh reality that sometimes this fallen world in which we live, in all of our brokenness, makes us sit and doubt the very promises of our Lord. I'm not immune to that. Neither are you. Broken people are just that: broken. And sometimes, a lot of times, almost all of the time, there isn't anything that we can do to help with that brokenness.

Which is fine for Jesus. Not as if He is fine with our brokenness and doesn't care the least bit about it, nor is He sitting on the other side of the coin disgusted by the fact that we can't, for the life of us, convince ourselves that His promises are true. Instead, Jesus is fine with our brokenness and our inability to rectify the mess we have made for ourselves, because that is the very reason He became incarnate in the first place!

There is no need for a Christ unless the broken sinners of this world need saving. And we most certainly need saving. And so it is that Jesus remains faithful to us, even when, especially when, we struggle to remain faithful to Him. He is the one at work in us and for us in order to save us from all of our sin, doubt, death, and despair. So shake a fist to the heavens if you need to and ask Jesus if He really is the Christ. His answer is, and always will be, a resounding "Yes!" And He is the Christ for you!

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Monday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 14, 2026

Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:1-8 (9-11)
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 30:15-26; Revelation 2:1-29

> *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:1-2)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass." My goodness! This is the truth more than we would like to admit. I know that most of you reading this are far, far younger than me. Your death seems to be an eternity away, and I pray that is the case. But no matter how young and vibrant you may be, the truth of the matter is that you are still like grass: here one day, gone the next.

It's our sin that makes this so. It's our sin that has broken this world and turned these fleshly bodies of ours into weeds that will quickly wither away. Everyone knows this; it is the human condition. And even if old man death isn't creeping inside your window this evening, you still feel the effects of sin on your body and your soul. The Lord hates this! Has hated it since that first Fall into sin and the first bite of the fruit that cast our perfection to the winds. And so He sends a Word of promise through the mouth of Isaiah, a word of promise that will endure forever. A Word of promise that became incarnate, took on our withering flesh in order to redeem it in full and bring it back to perfection through His own righteousness.

And so that Word is proclaimed to you and given to you; spoken into your ears, poured upon your foreheads, and placed upon your lips. It is most certainly a for you promise and a for you comfort. Through Christ, your warfare is ended. Sin, death, and the devil are all conquered through the power and authority of that weak and pitiful cross. Never for a moment doubt this truth; even though you most certainly will. But even when you do doubt it, especially when you do doubt it, hear those comforting Words again. Christ forgives you all of your sins! So much so is the victory of the cross certain for you that you receive double, DOUBLE, for all of your sins! Forgiveness to take them away and the righteousness of Christ to make you whole once again! And just like the Good Shepherd that He is, He gathers you in the arms of His Church that you might forever be comforted until He leads you to the eternal pastures of your heavenly home!

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 sorrows' 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 437:1)

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

DECEMBER 27, 2026

Today's Reading: John 21:20-25
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 51:17-52:12; Matthew 2:1-12

> *"So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?' This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true." (John 21:23–24)*

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

A lot of things happen around Christmastime, and it isn't just the gifts, travel, special services, and decorating. You may have noticed that there are several Saint Days and Festivals that may be observed beginning December 21 and running through Epiphany. It's no accident that these days are observed during this season on the calendar.

Today, we remember St. John the Evangelist, and one reason for his commemoration being so close to Christmas is because of his close relationship with Jesus. If you remember, it was into his care that St. Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, was given at the crucifixion of Jesus. John sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper and was among the "inner circle" of disciples (along with Peter and James) who were with Jesus during important events such as the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus's daughter, and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Even though John was in the "inner circle" of disciples and later composed one of our four Gospels (along with his three Epistles), this doesn't make him some sort of super-Christian. He was a sinner like everyone else who ever lived. The Lord God simply chose him for a vocation that placed him at the forefront of the life and growth of the Christian Church. Later in life, while serving the Lord's church in Ephesus, he was exiled to Patmos as punishment for proclaiming Jesus as God and Savior. Even then, he was steadfast in his faith and didn't waver from proclaiming Christ crucified for our salvation.

We remember St. John the Evangelist today because of that unwavering faith. Because of the example he set for countless generations of Christians to follow, that even in the midst of trouble and challenge, Christ Jesus is with you to strengthen you and, at the last, carry you to his side. May you always remember that the forgiveness proclaimed by St. John is yours, and may his words strengthen you in your faith now and to life everlasting!

In the Name ✢ of Jesus. Amen.

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

St. Stephen, Martyr

DECEMBER 26, 2026

Today's Reading: Matthew 23:34-39
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 49:22-26; 50:4-51:8, 12-16; Matthew 1:18-25

> *"[Jesus said,] 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:38)*

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Victory in Christ does not look the way many people expect. There is a common, but misguided, idea that being a Christian means enjoying one earthly success after another. The thinking often goes something like this: "I follow God, and God is in control, so nothing truly painful or difficult should happen to me." According to this way of thinking, faithfulness ought to result in comfort, prosperity, health, and triumph in our public lives. Our Lord teaches something rather different. Even a simple look at life in this fallen world quickly dispels the illusion that Christians are spared suffering. Disease still afflicts believers. Families still experience grief and conflict. Financial hardship, disappointment, and death still come upon the faithful. Christians are not removed from the ordinary sufferings of human life simply because they belong to Christ. More than this, Jesus teaches that His followers will experience a particular kind of suffering because they belong to Him. The world that rejected Christ will also reject those who confess Him. Jesus speaks plainly about this. He does not hide the cost of discipleship or soften the reality of persecution. Hatred toward Christ extends toward His Christians as well. This is seen clearly in the life and death of St. Stephen. Full of faith and the Holy Spirit, he boldly confessed Christ before hostile crowds and proclaimed that Jesus is the long-promised Savior. For this confession, he was falsely accused, dragged before the authorities, and ultimately stoned to death. From an earthly perspective, Stephen's death appears anything but victorious. His death did not overthrow his enemies; he was unable to escape that suffering. He did not achieve worldly success. But Stephen is a conqueror through Christ. Even as stones struck him, he looked to heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He died confessing Christ and praying for his persecutors. And he was rewarded with the martyr's crown of salvation by being brought to heaven. Christ Himself shows us this pattern most clearly. His greatest victory came through the cross. By suffering, dying, and rising again, He conquered sin, death, and the devil. Therefore, Christians should not measure God's favor by earthly ease or outward success. Instead, they cling to Christ and His promises, trusting that even suffering cannot separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Tuesday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 15, 2026

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 30:27-31:9; Revelation 3:1-22

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

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

Pray for your pastors! There are several good reasons to pray for your pastors: their vocation is a difficult one, they get depressed, they struggle with temptation, and they are subject to all of the cares of this world, just like you. But another very important way in which you should pray for your pastors is that they proclaim the Word of God in all of its truth and purity, and they administer The Sacraments rightly in accordance with God's commands.

The reason for this prayer of yours should be self-evident. It is not good to preach or proclaim things that are contrary to God's Holy Word. In so doing, people are led astray and guided down dark paths that could very well lead to darkness instead of the light. And you don't want this for yourself, or for the people who sit next to you in the pews.

But there is another reason why you should pray this prayer for your pastors to your heavenly Father. It is so that you may be comforted by the truth of the Gospel! This is what the apostle Paul is teaching us in our text for this morning. The task given to the apostles (and then handed to pastors like yours) is an important one, perhaps the most important task that we could ever imagine.

As stewards of the mysteries of Christ, they have been charged to distribute those mysteries of the Gospel to hurting people, broken by their own sin, the sin of others, and this fallen and messed up world. Your Lord desires to give you the Gifts of the cross here in time and space, exactly in the very place and very situations in which you need them the most. Broken by sin, you need that sin forgiven! Covered in shame, you need that shame remitted. As death comes ever closer to sneaking in through the window, you need the assurance that death cannot hold you or any of your loved ones who have fallen asleep in the Lord.

And so pray for you pastors that they might faithfully carry out the task of stewardship that has been given to them, because you need those Gifts of the cross. And because Christ knows that you need them, He promises to listen to your prayers and makes sure that the mysteries of God are unveiled for you!

In the Name ✣ of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts Christ freely gives He gives to you and me To be His Church, His bride, His chosen, saved and free! Saints blest with these rich gifts Are children who proclaim That they were won by Christ And cling to His strong name. (LSB 602:1)

Wednesday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 16, 2026

Today's Reading: Revelation 4:1-11
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 32:1-20; Revelation 4:1-11

> *"From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal." (Revelation 4:5-6)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

So John sees an awful lot once he is caught up by the Spirit. So much that (I would venture to say) he struggles to put it into words. He does the best that he can, and we are given all that we need, but still what we receive in heaven is going to far exceed anything that we can understand by reading Revelation. The truth is there in those words; the reality behind us is something our finite minds can't comprehend. And yet, what we have is enough for us right now...

We get a picture of the Father, if we can even call it as such. Later, in chapter 5, the Lamb will be introduced. And so what we have in chapter 4 is what Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, has already accomplished for us. Everything is already done. It was finished on the cross. But in time, that thing of creation, the fulness of Christ's victory on the cross, hasn't yet come to fruition.

That is why we see the sea of glass standing before the throne of God. It is clear as crystal, and yet it is still there. By the time Revelation 21 rolls around, the sea has disappeared; it is no more. This might seem insignificant, but it holds more truth for us than we might ever know. The sea is the division that is still present right now in time and space as we know it. Even though it has been conquered by Christ, we still live in this fallen world with all of its brokenness, with all of its sin, with death still ever-present.

As Luther penned in "A Mighty Fortress," we need not fear these things. For Christ has the victory over them all. But there will be a time in which He makes all things new. There will be a time in which the sea, as crystal still as it is now, will be gone. There will be a time in which there will be no division between God and man. It will be like the Garden of Eden, and yet better, because there will be no chance of corruption, no chance of rebellion, no chance of death. New means New, which means perfect, as God had always intended and by which Christ has already conquered by the cross. We wait in the "now, but not yet," knowing that the "not yet" is already our reality. We just wait patiently to experience it in full.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Heav'nly hosts in ceaseless worship "Holy, holy, holy" cry; "He who is, who was and will be, God Almighty, Lord Most High." Praise and honor, pow'r and glory, Be to Him who reigns alone! We, with all His hands have fashioned, Fall before the Father's throne. (LSB 949:1)

Feast of the Nativity

DECEMBER 25, 2026

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.

Jesus's birth is the greatest event in all of human history. In the incarnation, the eternal and everlasting Son of God took on human flesh. He received a true human body from the Virgin Mary. He took to Himself a human soul, a human mind, and all that properly belongs to humanity. He did not merely appear to be a man, nor did He temporarily wear humanity like a mask. Jesus Christ is true God and true man forever. This is one of the great wonders of Christmas: God has united Himself to mankind. The Creator entered His creation. The One who formed man from the dust of the earth became a member of our race. From the moment of His conception in the womb of Mary, the Son of God bound Himself to humanity in a permanent and unbreakable way. Christians enjoy an even greater blessing still. Beyond this general union of God with humanity in the incarnation, believers are united personally to Christ through faith. The Scriptures speak of Christ dwelling in His people and His people dwelling in Him. Theologians often call this the mystical union: the intimate and ongoing communion between Christ and His Church. Jesus is not distant from His Christians. He remains with them, comforts them, forgives them, and sustains them by His Word and Sacraments.

More than this, the entire logic of salvation depends upon God becoming man. St. Athanasius of Alexandria famously taught that the salvation of humanity required God Himself to enter our human condition. Adam, the first man, plunged the human race into sin through his rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Since a man sinned, it is fitting that a man should bear the penalty for sin and fulfill God's Law on behalf of humanity. But there is a problem. No mere human being could accomplish this. Sin is too great a burden. Even if a man could somehow live without sin (which fallen humanity cannot do), he still would not possess the worth necessary to satisfy the debt owed by all mankind. Only God possesses the holiness, righteousness, and power sufficient to overcome sin, death, and the devil. Because of this, the incarnation is necessary. Jesus became man so that He could suffer, die, and rise again for us. As true man, He stands in our place. As true God, His sacrifice is sufficient for the sins of the entire world. Christmas, therefore, is far more than a simple winter holiday. It is the celebration of our salvation. The Child Who laid in the manger is God Himself come to redeem His people. Merry Christmas!

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Christmas Eve

DECEMBER 24, 2026

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

> *"But as [Joseph] considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'" (Matthew 1:20-21)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It must have been a hard thing for Joseph to hear. No man expects to find out that his betrothed is with child before they have come together as husband and wife. St. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a just man. He did not wish to shame Mary publicly but intended to divorce her quietly. God knows hearts and chooses well. Not only did He choose a devout and faithful virgin woman to bear the Christ, but He also chose a godly man to serve as the earthly father of Jesus. When the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and revealed that the Holy Spirit had conceived this Child, Joseph listened. He took Mary as his wife, brought her into his home, and faithfully cared for both her and the child entrusted to him. There is much for Christians to learn from Joseph. First, God works according to His own wisdom and timing. The coming of the Messiah did not happen in a way that seemed easy or honorable in the eyes of the world. Joseph surely understood the possibility of ridicule and suspicion. Yet he accepted the calling God had placed before him and carried it faithfully. Second, Joseph shows us something important about Christian manhood and masculine vocations. Men are often called to sacrifice themselves in quiet and ordinary ways. Fathers give themselves for their children. Husbands labor and sacrifice for their wives. Pastors pour themselves out for their congregations. Such duties are not always glamorous or publicly praised. Often, these vocations require enduring hardship, misunderstanding, or weariness for the good of others. Joseph's life reflects the pattern of the greater Son entrusted to his care. Jesus Christ, the true and perfect Man, gave Himself completely for us and for our salvation. He bore the cross willingly to redeem sinners. In our own limited vocations, Christian men are likewise called to lives shaped by sacrifice, service, and steadfastness. However, this is not only a hardship. There is also deep joy in receiving and carrying out the duties God gives. Joseph had the privilege of protecting, providing for, and raising the Savior of the world. So also Christians find joy and peace in faithful service, trusting that God works through even humble vocations for the good of His people and the glory of His Name.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 17, 2026

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Youth
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 33:1-24; Revelation 5:1-14

> *"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.

The Table of Duties in the Small Catechism teaches us well what the Law actually looks like. We are given specific instructions and guidance as to how we are to interact in this world in our specific vocations. Some of these vocations are given to us for our whole life. Others of them are specific for certain situations; here today, gone tomorrow.

The youth, to you, are given certain things. God has formed things up in such a way as to have others in authority over you. Peter calls them "elders," but we might know them as parents and teachers and pastors and anyone who has the wisdom of years past our own. These people have been placed there by God in order to raise up the youth, to instruct them in the way that they should go, to point them to Christ, and proclaim the salvation that comes through Him.

And so, some of this instruction is for our spiritual good. Pastors and parents are the key contributors to this. Other instruction is for our earthly good. It shouldn't surprise you that the wisdom that comes with more and more years on earth often surpasses that which we have when we are younger. It is a humbling thing to grasp this and hold fast to it, to believe it and actually allow it to form us in our own lives.

Bottom line, what I am trying to say is that our Lord would have us listen to our elders when we are young. They have wisdom that you do not. And while there is plenty to say about the exuberance that comes with youth, there is just as much to say about the wisdom that comes with age. Listen to these people that God has given to you. Learn from their mistakes and from their instruction. For this is the way in which God has formed up this thing called life. We are not wiser than our elders, and we are certainly not wiser than God.

And in the end, God would have this all to be for your benefit; most importantly, eternal, but also temporal. For He loves you and wants to care for you. And He oftentimes does this through those whom He has placed around you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Shepherd of tender youth, Guiding in love and truth Through devious ways; Christ, our triumphant king, We come Your name to sing And here our children bring To join Your praise. So now, and till we die, Sound we Your praises high And joyful sing: Infants and all the throng, Who to the Church belong, Unite to swell the song To Christ, our king! (LSB 864:1, 4)

Friday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 18, 2026

Today's Reading: Revelation 6:1-17
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 34:1-2, 8-35:10; Micah 1:1-7:20; Revelation 6:1-17

> *"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (Revelation 6:9-10)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Revelation offers different perspectives on the same event: the time between Christ's Ascension into heaven and His coming on the Last Day. The Seals and the Trumpets and the Bowls of wrath, they are all different ways to talk about the same thing.

And so it is that, in our text for this morning, we see the Seven Seals being opened. And we get those horses and riders: a white one and a red one, a black one and a green one. Each of them shows us the brokenness of this fallen world and how things play out because of sin and death. Fear not these things; they must come to pass. But Christ your Lord already has the victory over them. If you need proof of that, go back and read Chapter 5.

What I want us to focus on for today is that Fifth Seal that is opened, the one that shows the souls who wait patiently under the altar. These are the faithful who have been brought through this Valley of Death. They cry out for vengeance. We do the same thing as we are still wailing in this Valley, waiting to be taken home. Vengeance is what we always want, but vengeance isn't ours to give or force or dictate when and how.

That is why those in our text are given white robes and told to rest. The white robe is the righteousness of Christ. And they can rest securely knowing that the Lamb already has the victory over all these things. And that victory is given to us; it is given to you in your Baptism! And so vengeance will come when and how God sees fit. It is far above our pay grade, and it is good that it is. Better for us to rest securely, even as we suffer through these things. For Christ has all of those things placed under His feet. And more importantly, He has you, too. You are His, and there is nothing that can take that away from you. Rest securely in the promise that the cross and the empty tomb are all that you need; and they are already given to you. Jesus will take care of the rest...

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; But now, how glorious they appear! Those martyrs stand, A priestly band, God's throne forever near. On earth they wept through bitter years; Now God has wiped away their tears, Transformed their strife To heav'nly life, And freed them from their fears. They now enjoy the Sabbath rest, The heav'nly banquet of the blest; The Lamb, their Lord, At festive board Himself is host and guest. (LSB 676:2)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Advent

DECEMBER 23, 2026

Today's Reading: Philippians 4:4-7
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 43:25-44:20; Revelation 11:1-19

> *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Rejoicing. Reasonableness. Lacking in anxiety. Thanksgiving. Peace. These are the promises of God and the fruit of faith. Yet, if we are honest, these things often seem distant. Especially at this time of year, anxiety and sorrow can press heavily on us. Finances may be stretched thin because of Christmas shopping and travel. Family conflicts that remained quiet for months suddenly threaten to boil over at the dinner table. The busyness of the season can leave us exhausted rather than joyful. And for countless Christians, Christmas also brings painful reminders of loved ones who are no longer gathered around the table or seated in the pew beside them. How can Paul say such things in a world so filled with trouble? Because he knows the Prince of Peace and the Author of salvation. He knows Jesus Christ crucified and risen. Paul is not naïve about suffering. He himself endured persecution, imprisonment, hardship, hunger, and uncertainty. But he still spoke of joy. Why? Because Christian joy is not built upon favorable circumstances. It is built upon Christ. Earthly happiness rises and falls with changing conditions, but the joy given by Christ rests upon something unchanging: the death and resurrection of the Son of God for sinners.

Jesus never promised His Christians freedom from hardship in this life. In fact, He often promised the opposite. The Christian life is marked by crosses, trials, temptations, and grief. But Christ does promise peace in the midst of these things. This peace does not mean the absence of evil or conflict. Rather, it means having a firm foundation underneath you when everything else shakes. This is all to say something simple: Christ does not forget you when life becomes difficult—quite the opposite. In suffering, He draws near through His Word and promises. St. Paul says that the peace of God "will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The image is that of a fortress or a military guard standing watch. Christ Himself guards His Christians against despair. He preserves them in faith. It is no accident that pastors often conclude sermons with these words from Philippians. The peace of God comes through the Word of God. Christ uses His preached Gospel to establish peace where there was fear, joy where there was sorrow, and confidence where there was anxiety. Where Christ is present with His Gifts, there He creates thanksgiving, reasonableness, endurance, and hope. When anxieties rise this season, remember where your peace is found. It is not in perfect circumstances, nor in flawless family gatherings, nor in financial security. Rather, your peace is Christ Himself.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

If thou but trust in God to guide thee And hope in Him through all thy ways, He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee, And bear thee through the evil days. Who trusts in God's unchanging love Builds on the rock that naught can move. Amen. (LSB 750 v.1)

Saturday of the Third Week in Advent

DECEMBER 19, 2026

Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 4 - Psalm 19:1, 4-6; antiphon: Isaiah 45:8a
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17

> *"Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout." (Isaiah 45:8a)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The first part of Isaiah 45, the chapter from which our antiphon of the Introit for the Fourth Sunday of Advent comes, is all about this guy named Cyrus. Isaiah is speaking about a savior who hasn't even been born yet, but whom God will raise up to save His people from a captivity that hasn't even begun. It is a mind-boggling thing to think about if you just take a moment to take it all in.

What is amazing about all of this is that God is speaking and showing how He is in control of all things. As Creator of the universe, all things are placed under His feet. Nothing surprises Him. Nothing throws Him for a loop that He doesn't already know how to untie. And so Isaiah writes for a people not yet born of their salvation from a nation that has not yet enslaved them by a man who does not yet exist. But it is all written so that God's people can look forward and know of the promise and look backward and know that God will keep His promise.

But even more amazing is that this Cyrus fellow is not even of the utmost importance. In the then and there he mattered, and God raised him up to free Judah from the Babylonians. But more than that, Cyrus was a picture of Christ, pointing forward to the greater Savior with a capital "S." Cyrus was a "mini Jesus" insofar as he was a redeemer sent by God to accomplish salvation for God's people.

Cyrus is a perfect example of how the Savior is not going to be the sort of Savior that we expect. For as strange as it is that God used a heathen to free His people from bondage, that pales in comparison to the very fact that God Himself became man in order to save us from the bondage to sin and death and the power of the devil.

And this is the very thing that we are days away from celebrating: the incarnation of our Lord; Immanuel, God with us, all for our salvation. So when you sing this Introit tomorrow in church, remember Cyrus and, in so doing, remember that your God has already done the unimaginable in order to save you from your sin. Blessed Advent Four! Our salvation is closer than you can imagine!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:1)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Advent

DECEMBER 22, 2026

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-19
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 43:1-24; Revelation 9:13-10:11

> *"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God does not leave His people to guess what He is like or what He demands. He speaks to us. And in speaking, He binds Himself to a concrete manner of bringing that word. In this case, a prophet who carries His Word.

In Deuteronomy 18, God promises that His presence will be with His people even after Moses is gone; Israel will not be left leaderless or wordless. God promises a continual Gift. He will raise up prophets from among the people. These will be those through whom His own words will be spoken. The prophet does not invent truth, improve upon it, or adapt it to changing tastes. He receives. He speaks. He delivers what has been given. This is not merely an Old Testament arrangement that fades away with time. It reveals how God always deals with His people. He does not descend to each person privately with new revelations tailored to individual preference. Instead, He sends a messenger. He places His Word in human mouths so that it may be heard, received, believed, and obeyed. That is why His warning is so serious: "Whoever will not listen... I myself will require it of him." To reject the prophet's word is not to disagree with a human opinion; it is to reject the voice of the Lord who sent him.

This reaches its fulfillment in Christ, the Prophet like Moses in the greatest sense. Jesus does not merely speak God's Word; He is the Word made flesh. Even now, Christ continues to speak through those He sends. The pastoral office is not self-appointed speechmaking. It is a divinely instituted ministry of delivery: "I will put my words in his mouth" applies not only to Moses and Jesus, but to your pastor who comes to you today with the Word of God. So when a preacher rightly proclaims the Scriptures by giving the Law that exposes sin and the Gospel that forgives it, you are not hearing a human commentary. You are hearing God's own speech placed into human lips for your salvation. And this is both for comfort and spiritual seriousness. Comfort comes because God has not left you to search for Him in uncertainty. He has given His Word through clearly identified speakers. And seriousness is required because His Word is not optional spiritual advice. It is a matter of life and death. To hear the preacher rightly is to hear Christ Himself. And to receive that Word is to receive the One who sent Him. To receive Him is to receive His Gifts of mercy, life, and salvation.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; curb those who by deceit or sword would wrest the kingdom from Your Son and bring to naught all He has done. Amen. (LSB 655:1)

Fourth Sunday in Advent

DECEMBER 20, 2026

Today's Reading: John 1:19-28
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:18-41:10; Revelation 8:1-13

> *"So they said to him, 'Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said.'" (John 1:22-23)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

Religiously unusual people tend to compel our attention. Their habits, their speech, and their way of life stand out. St. John the Baptist certainly fits that description. He lived in the wilderness, wore rough clothing, and ate a simple, unrefined diet. People noticed him for these unusual habits. However, when they pressed him to define himself, John refused every title that would place the spotlight on him. He was not the Christ. He was not Elijah. He was not the Prophet. Instead, he said simply, "I am a voice." He is neither the message nor the focus. This answer cuts against our modern instincts. We are always trying to establish an identity. That is, we try to build a self-identity out of something solid, something recognizable, something that sets us apart. Whether through fitting in or standing out, we want to be known by something in ourselves. Even in the Church, that temptation remains. We can become focused on appearances, personalities, or distinctiveness, as though these were the point of it all. John strips all of that away from us. He is a voice sent to speak a Word that is not his own: "Make straight the way of the Lord." This is a call to repentance. The crooked is made straight not by self-improvement, but by being brought low before God. The proud heart must be leveled. Sin must not be managed or excused but confessed. Into the wilderness of repentance, into that place where all pretense is stripped away, the Lord comes. The One to whom John pointed does not come to admire the prepared or reward the impressive. He comes to forgive sinners. He comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit. He comes to take away the sin of the world.

Paradoxically, this is what matters about John's identity. He is not great because of his lifestyle, his boldness, or anything interesting in himself, but because he delivered Christ. Christ comes to you now in the same way: through the external Word, through preaching, through Baptism. As such, your identity is not what you construct or perform but is found in what He gives. Identity is not something you must build or defend. You are not the Christ. You are not the Savior. But you have been baptized into Him. Your sins are forgiven. Christ has come for you and still comes to you, making you truly yourself.

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

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

St. Thomas, Apostle

DECEMBER 21, 2026

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

> *"Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:29)*

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

We tend to trust what we can verify. Culturally speaking, we are told that those things which are certain are those we can see, touch, measure, or confirm for ourselves. Everything else remains, at least to some degree, uncertain and untrustworthy. Thomas speaks for all of us when he insists on seeing the risen Christ with his own eyes and touching His wounds. He does not want a report of the Resurrection; he wants proof. Despite this, when Jesus appears, He does not reject Thomas. He gives him exactly what he asked for. "Put your finger here… place your hand into My side." The risen Lord met Thomas in his doubt, not to leave him there, but to bring him to faith. And Thomas confessed what is at the heart of it all when he called Jesus, "My Lord and my God." This same crucified and risen Lord says to us, "[b]lessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This certainly implies a rebuke against our tendency toward disbelief in God's work and Word. But even more, it is a promise to you who have not been given the Gift that Thomas was. It is not as though those who believe without seeing have achieved something greater, as if faith without seeing were a superior human accomplishment. Instead, it is a declaration of how Christ will continue to come to His Church. You have not seen the risen Jesus with your eyes, but this does not mean that Christian faith is blind. You have not placed your hand into His side. But that does not mean you are left with something less certain or less real. Christ does not leave you to speculation or imagination. He comes to you through His concrete Word. The same Lord who stood before Thomas speaks through the Scriptures. The same voice that called forth Thomas's confession now calls forth one from you. Faith is not built on what you construct or confirm for yourself, but on what is given to you from outside of you by the Holy Spirit. It is helpful to have the testimony of those who saw; even more, it is good to have the faith-creating Word. The Word does not come alone, as if it merely communicated ideas about God; it brings what it says. When Christ speaks forgiveness, sins are truly forgiven. When He gives His promises, they are as certain as His resurrection. When He places His Name upon you in Baptism, you are united with Him in His death and resurrection. The blessing for you is not in believing without evidence, but in receiving Christ as He gives Himself to you now. You do not see Him, yet you have Him in His Word and sacraments, crucified and risen for you.

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.