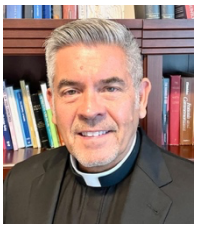
Waiting *for the* Light!



A DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

by Pastor David M. Wendel



Advent is a time which most think of as “pre-Christmas.” Already on the first day of Advent, our world seems to be on the fast-track to December 25th, with little time for us to pause, take a breath and consider what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, becomes flesh to dwell among us.

These daily devotions are intended to provide you with a brief reflection on one of the appointed daily lectionary readings, if/when you are able to carve out a few moments in your day to consider what it means that Jesus comes to be “God-with-us.” In years past, I prepared these devotions on a half sheet for each day, which was certainly brief, but also difficult to sufficiently consider the Scriptural passage. I believe the full-page format gives more time to each reading—while also being succinct enough to squeeze into a busy day!

I have titled this year’s devotional “Waiting for the Light!” as I am aware that in the northern hemisphere, we will be in the longest, darkest days of the year. It’s not a coincidence that Christmas comes at the time of the turning of seasons, so that during Advent, we are truly waiting for the light! Prophesying about the coming of Christ, Isaiah speaks of the people living in darkness, waiting for the true light to dawn, bringing renewed hope and joy. That is our prayer each Advent, as we hear the good news that Christ, our Light, comes into our world!

This Advent daily devotional booklet is based upon the daily lectionary provided in the Lutheran Book of Worship, Year I. The daily lectionary appoints three lessons for each day. For the purpose of these devotions, I have chosen one reading as the basis for each day’s reflection. The prayer following each devotional may be seen as a “prayer starter,” encouraging your thoughts to go deeper into prayer, or you may find them sufficient as printed.

This year, I have included an additional prayer form, if you have more time for devotions during Advent. At the end of the booklet, you will find the simple prayers Dr. Martin Luther suggested for morning and evening in his Small Catechism. They are brief and would take only a few additional minutes, with the devotion in the middle.

My intention is to provide options for those who are already used to daily devotions, as well as those who have never developed a regular pattern of daily Bible reading, meditation and prayer. Please feel free to share this devotional booklet with others who might be interested in daily Advent devotions!

If you would like to email me regarding any one of these devotions, either with a response, a question or a comment, I welcome your communication at d.wendel@grace43081.org!

May you be blessed by these devotions as together, we “Wait for the Light!”

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Sunday of the Week of Advent I, November 29, 2026

2 Peter 3:1-10

This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. [3] First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions [4] and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." [5] They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, [6] through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. [8] But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.

The season of Advent is usually thought of as "preparation for Christmas," giving us a few weeks to realize that soon, the holy-day will be upon us and we'd better get with it! As the days of Advent pass, the frenzy increases as we want to be prepared to celebrate the day of our Lord's birth—His advent among us.

But the Advent season also serves as the Church's call for us to remember, acknowledge and prepare for Christ's coming at the end of time, in the Day of the Lord. In our appointed reading for today, Peter says, "This is now the second letter I have written to you, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder…; that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets…" The apostle is writing a second letter of exhortation, as it seems to him that the recipients are not "remembering the predictions of the holy prophets," that there would be a Day of the Lord and that the Lord would return. Peter writes, "by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." He continues, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. But the Lord is…forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance."

And there is the reason for the "predictions of the holy prophets" about the coming of the Day of the Lord: that all should reach repentance! Advent was once observed as a penitential season, not unlike Lent. That has been replaced in some sense by Advent expectation. On this first day of Advent, let us commit ourselves to a season of repentance. Let us repent of sin, brokenness and disobedience, that we experience forgiveness and transformation as we approach Christmas!

O God, help us not ignore the coming of the Day of the Lord, but live lives of repentance for the sake of forgiveness, which results in transformation and new life in Christ! Amen.

Monday of the Week of Advent I, November 30, 2026

Isaiah 1:10-20

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomor'rah! [11] "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the
blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. [12] "When you come to appear before me, who requires
of you this trampling of my courts? [13] Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to
me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn
assembly. [14] Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a
burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. [15] When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my
eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of
blood. [16] Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before
my eyes; cease to do evil, [17] learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the
fatherless, plead for the widow. [18] "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though
your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they
shall become like wool. [19] If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;
[20] but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has
spoken."

I'm sure you are aware that an Advent-worth of devotions takes some time to prepare! As I write this particular meditation, I have completed my sermon for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 27th. And in that sermon, we are thinking about the criticism of Martin Luther (and Lutherans!), that preaching a Gospel of salvation by grace through faith without works, will end up with no good works at all! And that is a real danger, when we take the Gospel for granted, assuming that because we are saved by grace as a gift, now we don't need to do anything. And many Lutherans don't do anything! Many Lutherans receive the gift of salvation, with no concern for the response which is to flow from the good news at work in us. As I've mentioned before, Luther refused to preach to his congregation at the Saint Mary's town church in Wittenberg for two extended periods of time because he believed the people were not responding to the Gospel and so, were not worthy of the Word of God!

In our reading from Isaiah, the people of Judah were doing a lot, but they were going through the motions. The Lord God has commanded them to make sacrifices, to burn incense, to follow ritual laws and commandments. In effect, they were attending to the ceremonies of religion without the change of heart which was intended to lead to cleanliness, purity, godliness, which would issue forth in love: doing good for the neighbor, seeking justice, defending the orphan and pleading for the widow. The Lord speaks, saying, "Come, let us be reasonable: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow…if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land."

God offers us forgiveness and salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son. The Law of God shows us our sin and drives us to our Savior, who washes us white as snow, by the blood of His cross. We respond, being willing and obedient. We respond with heartfelt acts of love.

Lord God, purify us by the blood of Jesus. Create in us willing hearts and minds. Amen.

Tuesday of the Week of Advent I, December 1, 2026

I Thessalonians 2:1-12

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain; [2] but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. [3] For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; [4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. [5] For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; [6] nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. [7] But we were gentle[a] among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. [8] So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. [9] For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. [10] You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; [11] for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you [12] to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

The New Testament epistles are especially helpful to us, as they were written to believers who, like us, are living in this "in-between" time. Although the the Christians in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and Philippi lived closer in time to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, still, they struggled with how to live, waiting for the return of the Lord in power and glory. They struggled with how to remain faithful as time passed. They struggled with how to relate to each other, as believers. Paul writes about this in our reading for today.

The apostle calls to mind their courage in declaring the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. He points out that in their ministry, they have sought to please God, not humans, never using flattery or greed or glory from men. But here is the important part: St. Paul says, "But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also *our own selves,* because you had become very dear to us." These words of Paul speak to us in several ways. First, in our calling to share the Gospel of God, we seek to please God, not humans. We are not to use flattery or greed or glory from humans, so that our declaring of the good news is clear and straightforward, not tainted or colored by our own ego or agenda. Second, we are to be gentle among others when sharing the Gospel! It is easy for us to use the Gospel as a hammer, trying to drive the good news home. But that approach rarely brings results, as it generates a defensive posture in hearers. Gentleness, like a nurse taking care of her children, we are to share the love, mercy and grace of God in such a way that it opens others to the good news. Finally, as we are already thinking of Christmas gift-giving, Paul reminds us how important it is to give the gift of ourselves! Because our loved ones are very dear to us, we give our own selves!

Lord God, create in us gentle hearts in our sharing of the Gospel and help us to give ourselves, as gifts, this Christmas. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of Advent I, December 2, 2026

Isaiah 2:1-4
The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

As mentioned of the epistle lessons yesterday, the appointed Old Testament texts are especially meaningful for us during the season of Advent, as they give voice to the longing of the people of the old covenant, yearning for peace. As is the case today, Israel and Judah were in the middle of constant conflicts, as they were surrounded by larger, stronger nations. If you look at a map of the middle east during biblical times, it is obvious that the fertile crescent is really a crossroads, a pathway between great nations continually at war seeking conquest and empire. And Israel and Judah were in the line of fire.

Add to that the reality that in the time of Isaiah, the Jewish people were in a time of disobedience and corruption, as the people sought money, wealth and power, leading to idolatry of self and self-interest. Our reading today proclaims a message of hope that God would restore Judah and Jerusalem, bringing peace to His people and the nations of the world. But first, the nation and people are to return to the Lord God, repenting of sin, going up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach His ways to the people and that they would walk in His paths.

This message speaks to us, as well. Don't our hearts yearn for peace, as we pray fervently that God would act now to reconcile the nations of the world? How long must war continue in Ukraine and the middle east, with the innocent suffering? What must take place before God will establish peace? As in the time of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem, is God waiting for us to repent of our sin? Is God waiting for His children to return to Him, that He may teach His ways to us, that we will walk in His paths? As in the days of old, people and nations today seek money, wealth and power, leading to idolatry of self and self-interest.

In my installation sermon three years ago, I preached about Advent as a season of "yearning." We yearn for restoration and reconciliation. However, Advent is also a season of repenting and returning to the Lord God. Advent is a season of learning His ways and walking in the paths God has laid out for us.

O Lord our God, bring us back to you, teach us your ways and strengthen us to walk in right paths. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday of the Week of Advent I, December 3, 2026

I Thessalonians 3:1-13
Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our lot. 4 For when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction; just as it has come to pass, and as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain. 6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you, for all the joy which we feel for your sake before our God, 10 praying earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

In our reading for today, St. Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, sorry that he couldn't return to them, but affirming that as he sent Timothy on ahead to strengthen them in their faith, he has now returned to Paul and provided "the good news of your faith and love…" And Paul is comforted by their faith, in spite of current distress and affliction.

We need to hear Paul's message of encouragement, but also his exhortation to "stand fast in the Lord," being concerned for what is lacking in our faith. As we live in this in-between time, in this time between Jesus' ascension and His return in power and glory, it is difficult to stand fast in the Lord. It is also a temptation to think we know it all—that we have mastered faith, are comfortable in our lives and complacent.

Advent is clearly a time for us to take heed, to wake up and stir ourselves to faithfulness and love. We are hearing that every Sunday in our appointed Scripture readings! That now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. That we are to be awake and alert waiting for the bridegroom to return for His bride, the Church. But, are we? Awake and alert? Ready? Prepared for His coming, whenever He comes? Are we "standing fast in the Lord?" Are we concerned for what may be lacking in our faith, seeking the fullness of God's truth and light? Each of us are to consider these questions in this season of Advent. Why? So that, as Paul says, "the Lord make you increase and abound in love…that He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints!"

Lord God, rouse us from comfort and complacency, help us to stand fast in the Lord, seeking what may be lacking in our faith, through your Word, by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Friday of the Week of Advent I, December 4, 2026

I Thessalonians 4:1-12

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; 4 that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself[a] in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; 6 that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter,[b] because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. 7 For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 9 But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedo'nia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more, 11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; 12 so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.

"More and more!" As we preach the Gospel as God's free gift of grace, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are careful never to place an additional heavy burden upon those who have been saved by grace through faith. And yet, St. Paul, the apostle of the free gift of grace, encourages the Thessalonians to live and to please God—more and more! Once saved, all that follows in our life is our response to God's love, grace and mercy. And yet, Paul says, the will of God is that we be sanctified—made holy. In this passage, Paul is talking specifically about sexual/physical purity. That followers of Jesus "abstain from unchastity," "know how to take a wife in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God," "that no man transgress against his brother…"

In the Greco-Roman world, this exhortation and expectation of sanctity and holiness was more than "not easy," it was counter-cultural! Sexual and physical morality was considered folly and contrary to human nature. It was a challenge for Christians to live differently in a culture where sexual immorality ran rampant and was socially acceptable.

Is that different from life for Christians in the 21st century? Doesn't it seem that the rampant sexual immorality and deviance in the secular culture has infected the Body of Christ in such a way that talk of sexual purity, abstinence, monogamy and yes, sanctification, is seen as out-of-step with the world as it is, old-fashioned and anachronistic? So, why should Christians worry about "more and more," when we are trying to fit in with the world and not seem strict or legalistic?

Because "God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you." Purity and holiness, Paul says, are related to love of others, as we have been taught by God to love one another! Living pure and holy lives grows out of love for spouse, children, neighbor and community.

O God, in the midst of this crooked generation, sanctify us and make us pure. Amen.

Saturday of the Week of Advent I, December 5, 2026

Luke 21:5-19
And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, 6 "As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." 7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign when this is about to take place?" 8 And he said, "Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. 9 And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once." 10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11 there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be a time for you to bear testimony. 14 Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. 16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; 17 you will be hated by all for my name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Our reading today is always appointed for a Sunday in Advent, when we are in the year of Saint Luke's gospel. There's much to unpack in these words of our Lord, as He spoke about the coming destruction of the Temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD, the signs of the end of time and the persecution which would precede the Day of the Lord, which we heard about earlier in our devotions. Still, there is a straightforward message in this teaching: "Testify and endure!"

Of course, talk of "testifying" causes Lutherans to have sweaty palms and dry mouths! And enduring to the end doesn't sound better! Which is why the Lord doesn't tell us what we want to hear but what we need to hear. For whether we like it or not, Jesus speaks quite often about a time of difficulty and turmoil on the earth, which will include a time of persecution for His followers. And the Lord is preparing us for what is to come, so that we won't be surprised or disheartened by false messiahs, wars and tumults, nation rising against nation, earthquakes and natural disasters as well as terrors and great signs from heaven!

That sounds very much like what we're experiencing already! As we look around, there's not much missing in our world today, compared with Jesus' description! Rather than wring our hands and cower in our homes, the Lord says, "This will be a time for you to bear testimony!" And He says, "Don't worry about what you will say, for He will give us a mouth and a wisdom." Today, we may not feel prepared to testify. However, when the time comes, he will tell us what to say! There have been many times when I was faced with an opportunity to testify to the truth, and Jesus is faithful! He gave me the words!

Until that time, we will endure and we will receive eternal life, by God's grace.

Lord Jesus, give us the mouth and the wisdom to speak when we have opportunity! Amen.

Sunday of the Week of Advent II, December 6, 2026
The Day of Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra

Hebrews 13:1-16
Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body. 4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. 5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." 6 Hence we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?" 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. 9 Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent[a] have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. 12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured. 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. 15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Today is the day when the Church commemorates Saint Nicholas, bishop of Myra, who died on this day in 343. Saints are normally remembered on the day of their rebirth unto eternal life. Lutherans commemorate Nicholas for his great faith as a defender of the Nicene Creed and for his selfless, anonymous generosity to help children and the poor, in response to the love of Jesus Christ. It's worth taking time in our homes and personal devotional life to reflect upon Nicholas, if for no other reason than to keep Christ at the center of Christ-mass, remembering the real Saint Nicholas.

Our reading from Hebrews touches deeply upon the themes of the life of Nicholas, as the author calls believers to "let brotherly love continue…show hospitality to strangers…remember those in prison and those who are ill-treated…hold marriage in honor…be free of the love of money and be content with what you have… Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." For, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

As Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, so is God's truth and our faith to be the same, yesterday, today and forever! We are to show brotherly love, hospitality, generosity and goodness to all, even those in prison and those ill-treated by the world! In this sense, Nicholas is a saint worth remembering and a saint whose example is worth imitating.

The British author, Malcolm Guite wrote a sonnet for Nicholas, writing, "Help us make merry with our wealth, and joy, like you, in doing good by stealth!"

Lord, help us "make merry with our wealth" using it to do good for others! Amen.

Monday of the Week of Advent II, December 7, 2026

Luke 21:20-28
20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it; 22 for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written. 23 Alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people; 24 they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

After a day spent with Saint Nicholas, we return today to Luke 21 and the Lord speaking about the end times. It would begin, says Jesus, with the fall of Jerusalem to Roman armies in 70 AD, as General Titus put down the Jewish revolt and the burning of the Temple. That happened and now we are waiting for the culmination of those events described in our reading. Again, the Lord says "there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

I don't know about you, but these predictions of the coming of the end are not comforting. Just before, Jesus had talked about the wars and turmoils which would come, with persecutions and imprisonments. Are we to wait expectantly for that time, praying for it to come and come quickly, or would we just as soon have it delayed as long as possible? In spite of the dreadful description, the Lord says two things in Luke 21 which are to reassure us.

First, in our earlier reading, Jesus says, "Not a hair of your head shall perish." And in this passage, Jesus says, "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, *because your redemption is drawing near."*

For those saved by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the end time, the return of Christ in power and glory is not to be feared or dreaded, as the Lord will not let a hair of our heads perish, for with His return comes our redemption! With Christ's coming, our salvation will be brought to fulfillment as Jesus will take to Himself all who belong to Him, taking us from this life of pain, suffering and sorrow, to the New Jerusalem where we will live in God's presence and the Lamb of God will be our light—forever! (Rev. 21:23)

The Church's prayer during Advent is "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" We raise our heads and keep watch for His return, because then, our redemption is drawing near!

Come, Lord Jesus, come! Make our hearts ready to receive you with hope and joy. Amen.

Tuesday of the Week of Advent II, December 8, 2026

I Thessalonians 5:12-28
12 But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray constantly, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit, 20 do not despise prophesying, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good, 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 27 I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

With these sentences, St. Paul brings this letter to the church in Thessalonica to a close. It must have been a helpful and encouraging message, as it is so personal, yet full of meaningful instructions about the shape of the Christian life.

As we talk about Advent as a season of preparation, it is not uncommon for someone to ask, "Pastor, I don't know what that means, really. How am I to prepare? How can my life smooth the rough places and make ready the coming of the Lord? Certainly, there must be more to it than the usual pre-Christmas preparations—house cleaning, gift-buying, partying?"

One would do well to copy this passage from Paul and keep it handy on your desk, mirror or on your phone, as Paul's closing words of exhortation could easily be practical, real-life guidance for how to ready oneself, the Church and the world for Christ's coming:

Respect those who labor over you in the Lord; be at peace among yourselves; admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all; seek to do good; rejoice always; pray constantly; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from all evil.

This is not only helpful advice for how to prepare for Christmas—it's helpful advice for living the Christ-like life! To be kind to all, be patient, be at peace, give thanks, pray. And most importantly, let the Holy Spirit dwell in you richly—deeply, as you hold fast to what is good! And here's the best part: God is at work in you, making this a reality in your life! God Himself will keep you sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! It is the Holy Spirit at work in us, who transforms us in our inner being so that we reflect the light and life of Christ, in us, that we will indeed be sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—because He is with us and in us! As Paul says, "God is faithful and He will do what He has promised!"

Lord God, sanctify me, make me holy, by the presence of Jesus in me. Make me yours in word and deed, that for Jesus sake, I will be sound and blameless on the day of Jesus' coming. Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of Advent II, December 9, 2026

Isaiah 6:1-8
In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6 Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

The beloved song, "Here I am, Lord," comes directly from this passage in Isaiah. Lutherans (and others!) love to sing that song! I wonder if we realize what we're saying in that hymn?! The Lord God is calling Isaiah to speak hard and harsh words to Israel. Isaiah, if he accepts, will be speaking a message of judgement and wrath to the people. Most of us would hesitate to respond, "Here am I, Lord, send me!" Our response might be, "Is there someone else you can send, Lord?" Thankfully, unlike Isaiah, we are not being called to proclaim doom and judgement. We are called to spread the good news of Jesus and His love!

As I continue to write these Advent devotions for December, I am also preaching sermons on the Sundays after Pentecost in September. This Sunday we will hear the account of the father who asks his two sons to work in the vineyard. One says no, but then goes. The other says yes, but doesn't. Jesus asks, "Which of the two did the will of the father?" The one who went and worked!

In the church, we are often called to some work or task in ministry. Some are all too ready to respond, "Here am I, send me," but do not fulfill the work or task. What is it that moves Isaiah to not only say, "Send me," but to actually fulfill his difficult calling to preach Law and Gospel to God's people? It is the vision he receives of the Lord God in His glory, which moves and motivates Isaiah, as he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, with the seraphim all around, praising God singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." And then, one of the seraphim takes a burning coal from the altar, touches Isaiah's lips, cleansing him of his sin, preparing him to speak the word of the Lord! What is it that moves and motivates us to say yes to God's call and to actually do His will? Every Sunday, we enter the church where we see God in His glory, revealed in the real presence of His Son, Jesus, transfigured before us in Word and Sacrament. This is why so many congregations used to sing the hymn, "Holy, holy, holy…" every Sunday as the opening hymn, connecting Sunday worship with Isaiah's vision of God on His throne, with the smoke of incense filling the Temple! It is that vision on Sunday morning which causes us to respond, "Here I am, Lord, send me!" And we mean it!

Lord God, give us eyes of faith to see your glory and presence every Sunday, as Jesus is present in the Word, written, read and preached and in the Sacrament of the Altar. Amen.

Thursday of the Week of Advent II, December 10, 2026

Luke 22:1-13
Now the feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. 2 And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death; for they feared the people. 3 Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; 4 he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. 5 And they were glad, and engaged to give him money. 6 So he agreed, and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude. 7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." 9 They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" 10 He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house which he enters, 11 and tell the householder, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12 And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready." 13 And they went, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

How are we to focus on the coming of Christ and Christmas when the daily devotional reading is about the disciples preparing for the Lord's Supper?! Talk of Holy Week seems an intrusion into Advent, somewhat distracting as we are trying to have a holy and meaningful pre-Christmas season.

And yet, the connection between the two begins with Jesus telling Peter and John to prepare the Passover, to find and prepare the large upper room for Jesus and the twelve, where they are to make ready for the Passover, where the Lord would institute the Lord's Supper. And the connection is that our preparation for Christmas ought to also include preparing ourselves to receive Jesus in the Lord's Supper, on Christmas Eve! A member family once told me, after Christmas, that they had been so busy getting ready for Christmas, that they hadn't planned sufficiently to make it to worship! In the midst of all that is included in "making ready" for our celebration of Christ's birth, how does a person or a family neglect to plan for worshiping the Christ child?

On Sunday mornings during Advent, we hear repeatedly the call for us to "Prepare the way of the Lord!" To "remain watchful and awake!" "To make ready for the coming of the Lord!" While I, as pastor, never want to begrudge the faithful their many preparations for Christmas, from cleaning the house for visitors to sending holiday greetings and having gifts for all, it's often helpful for us to hear a word of release, a reminder that we don't have to do all, be all, make the holidays the best ever! We place great pressure upon ourselves, not wanting to fail to do something which will make Christmas "less than perfect."

Well, the perfect Christmas is a Christmas when we make time and space for worshiping the birth of the Word made flesh to dwell among us. The perfect Christmas is a Christmas when we gather together with the community of faith to celebrate the incarnate presence of Christ the Lord! "O Come, all ye faithful…come and adore Him—Christ the Lord!"

O God, free us from many things, that we ready ourselves for the one thing, Christ! Amen.

Friday of the Week of Advent II, December 11, 2026

Isaiah 7:10-17

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." 13 And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el. 15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. 17 The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that E'phraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria."

This wonderful prophecy, foretelling of the coming of Immanuel, "God with us," is one of the most common and familiar texts of Advent. And yet we often are unaware of the context and the depth of meaning in the prophecy.

At this time, Syria (Aram) and Israel in the north are attacking Judah in the south, evidently trying to force Judah into a pact to fight together against Assyrians. King Ahaz, of Judah, is uncertain, not trusting the Lord God, who is willing to provide a sign of His presence with Judah. Although Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, God gives it anyway—promising to send a son, through a young woman, and this son will be called Immanuel, thus assuring Judah of God's presence, God's power and God's sovereignty. The intention was to strengthen the faith and trust of God's people who often wavered and were lacking in trust.

And no wonder. Although God was present, speaking through His prophets, God's people experienced God as distant and far off. If Ahaz were to go into battle, he wondered if the Lord God would go with him. It's not that God WAS distant and far off, but the people, even King Ahaz, failed to experience the presence and power of God at work among them.

So, the Lord God would do a new thing! He would send His only begotten Son, Jesus, to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior and Deliverer of God's people. And this Son would come, not as a ruler on a throne, not as a powerful, important priest in the Temple. God's Son would be conceived in the young maid, Mary, by the Holy Spirit of God, to be born a human to be as close to God's human children as a brother, a family member, a friend. The Son would be Immanuel, God with us! The Son, while human, would come to be with us in such a way that even death itself would not separate Him from us, or us from Him! The Son of God would be born as we are born, would die as we all die, to be raised from death, to conquer death so that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God, in Jesus: neither angels or principalities or things present or things to come will ever separate us from Immanuel, God with us.

And we trust in His presence. We place all our faith in God's only begotten Son, Jesus!

God our Father, we give thanks for Jesus who is with us always, our strength and our hope and our comfort in life, and in death. Amen.

Saturday of the Week of Advent II, December 12, 2026

II Thessalonians 3:6-18
6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. 9 It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. 13 Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing. 14 If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all. 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

In this second letter of Paul to the church in Thessalonica, the apostle is warning the people against "idleness." Evidently, there were some in the congregation who were not willing to share the work! As households may be in the throes of preparation for Christmas, we can imagine parents warning their idle children, "If you will not work, you won't eat!"

Paul contrasts the idlers with the faithfulness of the Lord, who is trusted to do what He has promised, for the sake of His people. On the other hand, Paul points to those who are living in idleness, not in accord with the tradition that they saw in Paul and his companions. He uses himself as an example, reminding the Thessalonians that he was not idle when he was with them, did not eat anyone's bread without paying, but toiled and labored night and day, so as not to be a burden to them.

This would be an easy text to turn into a legalistic hammer, preaching against those in any congregation who are not sharing the work, not really involved in the ministry of the congregation in any significant way. We talked in a newsletter how the church is not a cruise ship, with a few doing all the work of ministry, which everyone else sits idly on the deck enjoying the ride!

But Paul's intention is to emphasize the shared commitment and responsibility within the Body of Christ. In the Corinthians correspondence, Paul likens the Church to a body, in which all the parts of the body have a different, although important purpose. In the Church, there is to be a mutuality and a shared sense of responsibility, so that all together fulfill their calling as active members of the body of Christ!

Lord Jesus, we give thanks that you are faithful and can be trusted to do what you have promised, as you save us from sin and death. Stir us, as well, to be active members. Amen.

Sunday of the Week of Advent III, December 13, 2026

John 3:22-30
After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Ae'non near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized. 24 For John had not yet been put in prison. 25 Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying. 26 And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

Because we have been using the appointed daily lectionary for these devotions, we have not had the heavy dose of John the Baptizer we usually hear on Sundays during Advent. Often, the first and second Sundays of Advent focus in some way on the ministry of John, cousin of Jesus, who was sent to be a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord! Our reading above brings to mind John and his disciples who were questioning the relationship between Jesus and John—and their disciples who were each baptizing. John makes it clear elsewhere in the gospels that his baptism is with water, but the baptism which Jesus will initiate will be with water and the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that John's baptism was ceremonial, a ritual cleansing for Jews who had sinned and needed cleansing. Jesus' baptism, on the other hand, would bring actual forgiveness of sins, renewal and spiritual regeneration.

The baptism Jesus brought may have it roots in Ezekiel 36, where the Lord God says, "25 I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances."

This washing, this baptism would bring cleanliness from sin and disobedience, but also a new heart and a new spirit—infused in the newly baptized by the Spirit of God. It would give to the baptized a new start and a new life, causing the person to "walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." This is a clear description of Christian baptism, initiated by Christ Himself, when He was baptized in the river Jordan!

The question is, are we living clean and pure lives, with a new heart and a new spirit? As the baptized people, are we walking in God's statutes, careful to observe His ordinances? Baptism is to take out of us our human hearts of stone and replace them with living hearts, full of love, compassion and yes, obedience. As we discussed Advent as a penitential season, it is a time for us to return to our baptisms, to be washed and renewed again, day by day as Martin Luther instructed, that every day would be a new beginning and renewal, in Christ Jesus!

O God, help us to live every day with new hope and joy, because we are baptized! Amen.

Monday of the Week of Advent III, December 14, 2026

2 Peter 1:1-11

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 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, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. 5 For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; 11 so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The two epistles of Peter are part of the so-called "catholic" epistles, meaning in this instance, that they were not written to particular churches, but to the whole Church. Catholic as an adjective, as originally used, comes from the Greek *kata-holos,* or literally "of the whole," meaning as Saint Vincent of Lerins defined "catholic:" what has been believed always, everywhere and by all. So, Peter wrote his two epistles to the church as a whole, to Christians everywhere, rather than to specific congregations dealing with specific issues.

Commentators point to three goals in this second letter of Peter: to stimulate Christian growth, to combat false teaching and to encourage watchfulness as we wait for the Lord's return. Our reading from chapter 1 deals with spiritual maturity and Peter's desire for Christians to grow and mature! He begins, however, with God's actions on our behalf.

In the greeting, Peter points to the fact that now, we are all of equal standing, in the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, the newest, most immature Christian is of the same standing as Peter, Paul and the other apostles! In Christ, we all have the gift of salvation, equally! Our salvation, then, allows us to escape the world's corruption and become partakers of the divine nature. As we said yesterday, in Christ, the believer is to have a new heart, a new spirit and a new life! And we are to grow in spiritual maturity. We are to "supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is significant that new life in Christ is to begin with faith and end with love!

Lord Jesus, supplement our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, godliness and love. Amen.

Tuesday of the Week of Advent III, December 15, 2026

Isaiah 9:2-7
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Mid'ian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

As the secret is out, you can imagine me laboring over these devotions on a sunny, 70 degree fall day, with Advent and Christmas music playing to keep me in the mindset to be writing devotions to be read in the cold, dark days of winter! And yet, reading our Scripture passage for today, one needs no other inspiration. This prophecy from Isaiah is one of the most common readings for Christmas eve, beloved as it tells of the child to be born, the son to be given, who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!" It is a gift that we hear this passage so often that we may recall it by heart. It is also true that when we know a passage well, the impact may be lessened. The perfect example is John 3:16—so familiar, it sometimes doesn't strike us as deeply as it should.

That's true of this reading. Isaiah has been prophesying to a people deeply troubled. While speaking to kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian exile, they were currently in conflict with Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, who wanted the southern kingdom, Judah, to join together to fight against the greater threat of Assyria. It was an uncertain time, with great political pressure which caused a lack of faith and trust in the Lord God! When Isaiah says that the people have been living in a land of deep darkness, it wasn't an understatement. Life seemed dark, dark, dark to the Jews living in Judah and Jerusalem! To them, the words of Isaiah came as a beam of renewing, life-giving light! On them, light dawned with the hope and promise proclaimed in Isaiah's prophecy! The child to be born would bring more than peace between nations, but peace between God and man, peace in the heart and peace in life.

Some might consider our time one of deep darkness. In addition to conflicts between nations and peoples, our nation is divided and conflicted. There are factions, it seems, everywhere and little openness to honest discussion and sharing of opinions. And our young people and families struggle with the darkness of depression, drug abuse and unbelief. The prophesy of Isaiah speaks to our hearts and lives as well: this Christmas we will again have the light of Christ shining on us, bringing us hope, joy and peace, as we celebrate and receive the incarnate presence of Jesus, Immanuel; Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

Lord Jesus, we are people sometimes surrounded by the darkness of a corrupt and sinful world, which brings shadows into our homes and lives. This Christmas, be our light! Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of Advent III, December 16, 2026

Mark 1:1-8
The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way;
3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—" 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Finally, we have an appointed Gospel reading in the daily lectionary about John the Baptizer! Having just spoken of John in our devotion for Sunday, Advent III, we might just say, "Ditto!" But there's more that should be said about this passage.

The first Sunday in Advent, November 29th, 2026, we began a new church year, with most gospel readings from Mark. If you aren't aware, we have a three-year cycle of readings, with Matthew, then Mark, then Luke. The Gospel of John doesn't have its own year, but sections are scattered throughout the other years. We will be hearing from the Gospel of Mark, primarily, through the end of the liturgical year, Christ the King Sunday, November 21, 2027.

What's interesting about Mark is that he includes no birth narrative in his gospel. Matthew focuses on the angel coming to Joseph, while Luke emphasizes Mary's role in the birth of Jesus. Both gospels have a genealogy: Matthew connects Jesus with Abraham, the Father of Israel, while Luke's genealogy shows how Jesus is in the lineage of Adam, the Father of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Why is there no birth narrative in Mark?

Mark is considered the oldest of the gospels, so the first and most important question some 20+ years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension was, "Who is this Jesus?" His ministry began with His baptism in the Jordan River by John, His cousin. That is marked as His ordination to public ministry, as the Father spoke from heaven, affirming, "This is my beloved Son," and the Holy Spirit descended, anointing Jesus as prophet, priest and king. John's work, as the last of the great prophets, signaled the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Mark states in his introduction. It was later that Christians began to ask questions, wanting to know more about Jesus' parents, His birth and the years in-between Jesus' birth and His baptism. God provided more information and answers through Matthew and Luke as they transcribed their gospels. After all that background, what does this reading have to do with us and our Advent journey to Christmas? We are messengers called to prepare the way of the Lord! We are to be voices crying out in the secular wilderness of this world, "Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!" Our world needs messengers who are reminding the world that Christmas is about Christ!

Lord God, help us boldly raise our voices in this secular generation, proclaiming Christ. Amen.

Thursday of the Week of Advent III, December 17, 2026

2 Peter 2:1-16

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; from of old their condemnation has not been idle, and their destruction has not been asleep. 4 For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked 8 (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, 11 whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord. 12 But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant, will be destroyed in the same destruction with them, 13 suffering wrong for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation, carousing with you. 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

As we discussed previously, the second letter of Peter includes warnings against false teachers and false teaching. I have included the reading from Peter from yesterday and today because together, it makes sense. Peter is concerned in the Church about false prophets and teachers and how believers may be tempted to follow their licentiousness, reviling the truth of Jesus Christ! And Peter is warning all Christians in the first century to reject such falsity, relying on Christ to "rescue the godly from trial/temptation," while "keeping the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement."

Lutherans are known for wanting to be "nice," not being arrogant or judgmental. Who are we to judge, we ask? Certainly, God is judge and will judge the unrighteous at the day of judgement. However, we are constantly admonished in Holy Scripture to beware of false teachers and false teaching. To do that, we must hold fast to the Word of truth, know the Holy Scriptures and trust the Bible as God's Word, that God, in His Word, will never fail us or lead us astray! As this was important in the early Church, it is critical today—as Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever!

God, keep us steadfast in your Word, curb those who by deceit would lead us astray. Amen.

Friday of the Week of Advent III, December 18, 2026

2 Peter 2:17-22
17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved. 18 For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved. 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire.

You may, at this point, be done with the second letter of Peter, as he goes on and on about false prophets and teachers! These devotions have convinced me to focus on the Epistles of Peter in our online Bible Study in January, when we can have a discussion about these themes, especially the warnings against heresy!

But the message in our reading today is important for us to hear! In our passage today, Peter reminds us that while false teachers are "uttering loud boasts of folly," "enticing with licentious passions" those who have only recently escaped from the pagan, secular world (new believers), the truth is these false teachers are "waterless springs and mists driven by a storm." They offer the world, but will not deliver the living water which springs up to eternity! They promise freedom, but are themselves slaves of corruption, for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved.

This is the problem with false teaching and religion: it's offers much and delivers nothing at all! Consider those things which we make idols, assuming they will provide us with freedom, only to disappoint us. Money, power, influence, career—we strive for these, placing all our trust in them, hoping they will provide happiness and contentment, yet our hopes are dashed as we find they are false gods, "waterless springs," Peter labels them, which offer false promises. And even worse are the Christians who have escaped the defilements, sin and corruption of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but become entangled and overpowered by the idols of the world, being led astray, away from Christ! It is all too easy and tempting to wander away from the truth of Jesus Christ, becoming lost. Peter says it would be better to have never known Christ, than to know Him, to receive Him and then leave Him!

Is it too crude the week before Christmas, to cite Peter's reference to the "true proverb," "The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow (again) in the mire?" As we have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus, we remain steadfast in the truth, refusing to "wallow again in the mud, the muck and the mire" of this sinful world! Let us be always wary of those who would lead us away from Christ and Him crucified and risen, for us and our salvation!

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Keep us on the narrow way. Let us not be led astray. Keep us focused on you as we prepare to celebrate your presence among us. Amen.

Saturday of the Week of Advent III, December 19, 2026

Jude 17-25
17 But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." 19 It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 And convince some, who doubt; 23 save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. 24 Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, 25 to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

Is there any time in the year when it is easier to become distracted, become disheartened, lose our focus on Christ? The one time when we might wish to be most attentive to our spiritual journey, preparing for the Christ-mass, we are blinded, if not by twinkling lights and sparkling ornaments, then by busyness and business and an overfull calendar! While Jude, in his one chapter epistle, warns us as did Peter, that there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions, setting up divisions, worldly people devoid of the Spirit, Jude also provides encouragement in this pre-Christmas season. And what is Judes encouragement?

"But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

As we prepare to enter into the final week of Advent, those are profoundly helpful words! In the midst of all that is happening around us; in spite of commitments and calendar, build yourselves up on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourself in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ—unto eternal life! Sometimes we are Martha, busy with many things, allowing ourselves to be busy with many things, keeping us from the one thing which matters: sitting with Mary at the feet of Jesus!

That seems an unreasonable suggestion, doesn't it? On Saturday before Christmas week? Could we take time, make time to sit with Jesus? Could we carve out a bit of time from our preparations to have a holy hour, or a holy fifteen minutes, or a holy five minutes to sit at the feet of Jesus, waiting for Him, watching for Him, silently meditating on the mystery and meaning of His coming as Immanuel, God-with-us? It won't do for us to view this as a burden and another item to add to our "to-do" list. But is it helpful as permission? Is it helpful to us to think of Jesus' words to Mary as permission for us, as well, to sit at His feet for a brief time? The Lord says Mary has chosen the needful thing, and it won't be taken away from her. Maybe we need to hear this as Jesus' permission for us to be free to spend a brief time in late Advent "building ourselves up on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Lord Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, help me find time to sit at your feet, experiencing your presence as the Word made flesh, living among us full of grace and truth. Amen.

Sunday of the Week of Advent IV, December 20, 2026

John 3:16-21
16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. 18 He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

I beg you, I implore you to take time to read, hear and ponder deeply this passage which proclaims in a few short verses, the mystery of the miracle of our salvation! As we said a few days ago, we often hear a text so frequently that we no longer hear it, it no longer touches us deeply, it no longer reaches to the depth of our being in a life-changing, life-transforming way.

How can we ever speak or read these words and not be moved by them? "For God, the great, almighty, eternal God of the stars and planets, galaxies and universes, so loved the world—so loves YOU, that He gave His only Son—His ONLY Son…not to condemn you or the world, but that the world—that all people who will ever live, will be saved through His Son, Jesus."

Are we worth the life and death of God's only Son? Are you worth that? You are worth that much to God—the great, almighty, eternal creator of stars and planets, galaxies and universes. The Father didn't send His Son to save planets and universes. He sent His only Son to save you—and me. Ponder that, if you will.

And this Son of God is the embodiment of God's light and truth. In Jesus, God's eternal light has come into the world to expose and conquer the darkness of humanity's sin and corruption, so that as surely as the sun rises in the morning, the light of Christ will shine on us, giving hope and joy, every day.

When we speak of "salvation history," it can sometimes sound like "systematic theology," something beyond the understanding of the ordinary believer. But salvation history, the history of our salvation is proclaimed clearly in John 3:16-17. We don't need to know or understand more than that—for God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. Please take the remainder of your devotional time today to meditate upon this mystery of our salvation—God's love for us, in Jesus.

O God, what more can we say than "thank you." Thank you for your love, for giving us life, for sending your Son, Jesus, who has secured for us abundant life and eternal life, through His saving death and resurrection. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday of the Week of Advent IV, December 21, 2026

John 5:30-47
30 "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. 31 If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true; 32 there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true. 33 You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. 39 You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive glory from men. 42 But I know that you have not the love of God within you. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44 How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

I sometimes cringe when a pastor says, "It's all about Jesus!" Of course, it is all about Jesus! Our salvation is all about Jesus. We have been saved because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It just seems there's so much more that should be said than just, "It's all about Jesus." Because it's also all about the Holy Spirit, even as it's all about the Father!

In our reading from John's gospel, Jesus is putting John the Baptizer in proper perspective, as he was the forerunner, sent to prepare the way, to bear witness to the truth about the coming of Jesus. John was "a burning and shining lamp" to light the way, but John pales in comparison to Jesus, who was sent to embody the Father completely. Jesus says, "The Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in your…you search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life." And yet, Jesus says, the Scriptures simply bear witness to Jesus, who comes in the Father's name, to reveal the fullness of the Father to those who have not known Him or received Him.

The Lord Jesus never failed to witness to the unity of the divine Godhead. The Son was sent by the Father to reveal the divine Godhead as "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." The Godhead is a trinity in unity, as we confess in the Athanasian Creed. Christmas is a proclamation of that trinity in unity, as the Father sent the Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. To say that "It's all about Jesus" is an incomplete statement. Rather, it's all about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We praise and glory you O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in your holy Church. Amen.

Tuesday of the Week of Advent IV, December 22, 2026

Revelation 20:11-21:8
11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. 21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; 3 and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."
5 And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. 7 He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

It may seem out of place to include a passage from Revelation in our devotions just days from Christmas! And yet, what started with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is brought to completion at the end of Revelation. Everything Christ came to do culminates finally when we are taken upon into the holy city, New Jerusalem, when the dwelling of God will be with men, and God will dwell with us, wiping away all tears, where death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain, for the former things will have passed away. Jesus came that God might make all things new—a new heaven and a new earth—and a new you, when you will never again suffer or be sick or face death.

Readers are often put off by Revelation, confused by the various images and symbols. Some choose not to read the Revelation to John, missing the rich meaning and message. But here's the clue to understanding this apocalyptic book: the key is verse 19:10, "Worship God." In the midst of persecution and struggle against the demands of the Roman Emperor to be worshiped as divine, the vision given to Saint John was, "Worship God." Don't worship emperors or kings, don't worship false idols of clay and stone. Worship God alone, and receive a place in the new heaven and new earth which will be yours through Jesus, the Lamb who was slain.

As we look upon the baby born in the manger, keep one eye on that New Jerusalem, where we will dwell with God forever, and the Lamb of God will be its lamp!

Thank you, God, for the new life which is ours now and for eternity, through Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of Advent IV, December 23, 2026

Luke 1:26-38
26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" 35 And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36 And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

We're nearing the end of our Advent journey and we've discussed many things in these devotions. Now, let's talk about you!"

As the year of our Lord, 2026 draws to a close, how are things in your life? Are you facing challenges which will become real and pressing in 2027? Will you be dealing with transitions? Job changes? Changes in home or family? Illness or loss currently or still to come? Barriers or obstacles in your way? Uncertainty or instability?

Are there any more inspiring words in Holy Scripture than, "For with God nothing will be impossible!" And there are few more inspiring examples for us in life, than Mary's response to God, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Many of us struggle with trusting God to do what seems impossible, especially when it comes to challenges and changes in our lives. We look at the future and we may only see closed doors, brick walls and lost opportunities. At the same time, we also struggle with giving ourselves completely to God and His will and His word. For that matter, we struggle with knowing God's will and word!

But the example of Mary and the words of the angel Gabriel are given to us because we do struggle with faith and trust in life. As we find it hard to trust God to make the impossible, possible, we need the encouragement of Mary and the inspiration of Gabriel. We need to hear the Biblical testimony again and again—that with God, all things are possible!

As we approach Christmas, take to heart the words of Gabriel and Mary and let them be an encouragement and an inspiration to you, as you open yourself to God's will and word!

Lord God, I am trusting you to make the seemingly impossible, possible in my life! Amen.

The Nativity of our Lord, Christmas Eve, December 24, 2026

Luke 1:39-56
39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be[a] a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." 46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, 52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

The daily lectionary refrains from using the same readings the faithful will be hearing in worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The daily readings are intended to add to the readings in worship, not supplant them. It is a blessing for us to hear Mary singing her song, the Magnificat, on Christmas Eve. And why is that?

Mary's song speaks of the topsy-turvy-ness of God's plan, in Jesus. You might think Mary would be bitter or resentful, given how her life has been turned upside down by this unplanned pregnancy! Instead, she is magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in God. A handmaiden is usually the lowest on the totem pole, but she has been raised up and given a place as the most blessed among all women. And the mighty are being cast down, while the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are filled, the rich have been sent away empty. In spite of the sin and disobedience of Israel, God has helped them, sending them a Savior, in remembrance of His mercy, as promised through the prophets!

Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on the Magnificat: "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. The 'great things' are nothing less than that she became the Mother of God, in which work so many and such great good things are bestowed on her as pass man's understanding…For on this there follows all honor, all blessedness, and her unique place in the whole of mankind…that she had a child by the Father in heaven, and such a Child! No one can say anything greater of her or to her…It needs to be pondered in the heart what it means to be the Mother of God." As we ponder what it means that God sent His only Son, we also ponder what it means that Mary is the Mother of God—and that we are His sisters and brothers.

O God, when you became human in Jesus, you turned the world upside down, humbling the mighty and raising up the lowly. Humble us and lift us up this Christmas, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Nativity of our Lord, Christmas Day, December 25, 2026

John 3:31-36
31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony; 33 he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit; 35 the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

Martin Luther said in a Christmas sermon:

"Let us then meditate upon the Nativity just as we see it happening in our own babies. Behold Christ lying in the lap of his young mother. What can be sweeter than the Babe, what more lovely than the mother?! What fairer than her youth! What more gracious than her virginity! Look at the Child, knowing nothing. Yet all that is belongs to him, that your conscience should not fear but take comfort in him. Doubt nothing. To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience and guilt, if you come to this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save."

It has been a joy walking with you through this season of Advent penitence and preparation, with anticipation and fulfillment, as we have now arrived at Christmas! My hope and prayer is that you have been able to gather with your congregation for worship each week and that these simple devotions have added something meaningful to your journey.

If you are homebound, infirmed or have been otherwise unable to join personally in the church's worship, be assured, I have written each of the devotions with you in mind, as I have prayed that absent Sunday worship, you have been able to share, still, in our common Advent spiritual preparations. May God bless you if you are celebrating Christmas alone, aware of our love and prayers for you!

For all who have made use of these devotions, I trust that they have in some small way deepened your spiritual growth and movement during Advent! And—I hope they have heightened your celebration of Christmas, having given additional time to Scripture, prayer and devotion as a part of your Advent routine.

As Luther says, "Let us then meditate on the Nativity, behold Christ lying in the lap of his mother…Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience and guilt, if you come to this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save."

Almighty God, you have made yourself known in your Son, Jesus. We pray that His birth as a human child will set us free from the old slavery of our sin; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (LBW Christmas collect)

Martin Luther's Daily Devotions
The Small Catechism, 1529

How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening.

Morning Prayer

In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read your daily Scripture and devotion.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection (+) of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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

If you choose, in addition, say this little prayer:

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 You to keep me this day also from sin and all 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 Wicked One may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, or whatever your devotion may suggest.



Martin Luther's Daily Devotions
The Small Catechism, 1529

How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening.

Evening Prayer

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall bless yourself with the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read your daily Scripture and devotion, if you didn't in the morning.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

If you choose, in addition, say this little prayer:

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 Wicked One may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

