



NOW,  
AT THE LAST,  
AND UNTO ETERNITY



ADVENT 2020

STEADFASTLUTHERANS.ORG

***Now, At the Last, and Unto Eternity: Advent 2020 Devotion  
Including a special 12 Days of Christmas Devotion***

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*To the glory of our Triune God  
and for the Evangelical Lutheran Church  
wherever she is found.*



Our Lord's last recorded words in Holy Scripture are "I come quickly". This of course to our very limited lifespan almost 2000 years later is often questioned especially by those outside the Church, but also sometimes by those within her. St. Peter does a great job of correcting those early Christians facing persecution with the truth of God's timing (often misquoted to support heretical errors about creation) and a 1000 years to a day and so forth.

Oftentimes the return of Christ is an object of judgment and wrath of God, inciting fear in sinners as they realize that they have many sins which have offended God and transgressed His Law. This indeed is truth for many who do not know Christ and are still trying to produce a righteousness for themselves by some other religion, usually just some different twist on the Old Adam's works righteousness religion. St. Paul and Holy Scripture use the return of Christ to be good news for the church, a comfort for Christians even. With all that this year has brought us, it is wise for us to point our attention during the Advent season to the coming of our Lord and the comfort that we can derive from such teaching. The Lord who returns is our Lord Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. If Jesus had done that already for us while we were still sinners and enemies of God – how do you think He will regard us on the last as we have been made His own by Baptism, given the great gifts of preaching, absolution, and the Supper? Will He now abandon us to our sins and His wrath? Certainly not. He has promised. These devotions are geared toward pointing you to these promises and pledges of God's good will toward us in Christ Jesus. He is coming. The day of your redemption is drawing near.

On top of this, we have added a series of devotions and devotional passages from our confessions for your celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas this year. The poem for each day comes from Rev. Andrew Richard, who has for years been a pillar in these devotions. Please rejoice in the good news of great joy for all people using those poetic verses and the subsequent devotional material.

May you have a blessed Advent and merry Christmas this year.

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer  
Editor-in-Chief, Steadfast Lutherans



## First Sunday in Advent

*Matthew 21:1-9*

*Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. . . The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. Matthew 21:2, 6*

People are terrified by the unknown. We prefer the devils we know, and so we place our bets accordingly. The uncertainty that we see now still bothers us, though. What is going to happen to me? What is going to happen to my family? How will the church, God's little flock of saints, endure?

There are many things we don't know now. But Jesus knows them all. Jesus knows all things. Jesus knows the great and grand plans. He also knows every small and insignificant detail. To Jesus, a donkey and her colt are more necessary to human history than the mightiest emperor. We focus on elections, on the power plays in Washington, or on the latest technological advancements. But little things, like riding a donkey, are more important because they indicate that the salvation of the world is going to be accomplished by Zion's humble King.

Jesus knows all things. And now, seated at the right hand of the Father, He not only knows all things, but He is able and willing to work all things together for the good of His blood bought saints. This comforts us and creates faith. And so, when Jesus directs us to hear His Word for our salvation, we trust Him. When Jesus bids us baptize all nations, we go and do as He directed. When Jesus bids us to eat and drink His body and blood for our forgiveness, we go and do as Jesus directs. These seem like little things. But, like the donkey and her colt, these means indicate something eternal and salvific. The Word and the Sacraments bear the Salvation of the World to us, not just at this time, but also until the end of time. While there are many things we do not know now, Jesus directs us to what we do need right now. And that is enough.

**Lord Jesus, comfort us by Your omniscient care, so that we might fully trust in Your directives of Word and Sacraments. Amen.**

## Monday of Advent 1 (Festival of St. Andrew)

*John 1:35-42*

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

Andrew is a "wall flower" apostle. He is overshadowed by his impetuous and talented brother, Simon Peter. Andrew and Peter do not have the same sort of relationship that another pair of brothers, James and John, seemed to have. We really don't know much about Andrew.

This is a hard thing for us to hear, because our flesh tempts us in two ways. First, we want the praise and the acclaim. If we were Andrew, we'd be angry that Peter got all the attention. And second, our flesh seeks to drive us to despair. If we are not remembered, if our deeds are forgotten, then why does anything I do really matter?

The history, found in John's gospel, kills our flesh and strengthens our new man, who loves God and the neighbor. Andrew was pointed to Jesus by John to be the Lamb of God. Andrew spent the day with Jesus. He listened to the gracious words of Jesus. And Andrew believed. He trusted John's proclamation and Jesus' words.

Andrew believed, and so he spoke. Andrew loved his brother Simon and wanted him to be saved. And so, Andrew made a bold and simple confession: we found the Hope of Israel, the Anointed One! We don't know Peter's reaction. Did Peter first pooh-poo his brother or laugh at him? Maybe, but what we do know is that Andrew brought Peter to Jesus.

We wait for Jesus' return. But we cannot forget that Jesus comes to us now through the gospel. And Jesus also comes to other people who do not yet believe. We may not have seminary training; we may even be awkward in our speech. But our Lord Jesus still uses those short confessions to elicit faith in others. Whether we are remembered or not, we take comfort in the fact that our Lord Jesus still uses us as His instruments.

**Lord Jesus Christ, You used Andrew as an instrument to bring Peter into the Christian Faith. You also used Andrew to preach Your gospel to the nations. Thank You for sending preachers among us, so that we might be saved. And guide our confession, so that You might be glorified and the neighbor saved. Amen.**

*Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.  
Jude 20-21*

Jude's general letter to the church is only a brief 25 verses. But the letter's brevity belies its deep thought and its compelling imagery. Jude's letter encompasses the fall of the angels near the beginning of time all the way to the final days. Cain, Enoch, Moses, Balaam, and Korah are all mentioned. The pithy references which the Holy Spirit drops through Jude will give the student of the Bible hours of cross-referencing, meditation, and enjoyment. Jude teaches us that the Bible is truly written by one Divine Author, the Holy Spirit.

The Christians of Jude's day were a lot like us. They bemoaned false doctrine and false teachers too. They were probably as surprised as we are at the evil that goes on in our day. But Jude comforts us. Our day is no different from the Exodus or Sodom. The false teachers of today are like the false teachers of yesteryear, like Korah, Balaam, and Cain. Jude comforts us by telling us that false teaching and God's judgement on it has been not only revealed through the histories of Israel, but also foretold by the prophets and by our Lord Jesus. We should not be surprised at false teachers; we should expect them.

But despite the false teachers, we Christians have hope. We have a goodly inheritance, which has been handed down to us by the saints. We have the love of God, which is preached to us every Sunday and distributed to us in the holy Sacraments. Jesus has been merciful to us by delivering us from the way of Cain and Balaam and by placing us on the narrow way which leads to eternal life. And we wait, knowing that Christ shall return with ten thousands of His holy ones. He shall return to execute judgment on all ungodliness. At the last day, we shall finally be free from an evil world and from our evil flesh, on account of the righteous and loving judgements of Jesus. May He come quickly!

**Lord Jesus, come quickly with Your ten thousands of holy ones, and save us from all false teachers and doctrine. Give us the strength to contend for the faith which we have inherited, so that we might proclaim the love of God and Your mercy, which leads to eternal life. Amen.**



*And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Mark 13:26-27*

We live in the last days. All of the prophecies have happened. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. There have been many false christs and prophets; in fact, there have been at least 18 claims of Messiahship since 1900. There have been wars and famines. The gospel is being proclaimed to all nations, which began when the apostles were sent. The gospel has also had its share of persecution by kings and councils. Even the abomination of desolation has occurred, which happened when Roman armies placed their filthy idols in the temple. All the signs are here, either completed or in the process of being completed.

Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." We believe Him. The prophecies are exhausted. The leaves on the tree are budding, and we know that the summer of God's salvation is near. While we do not know the day or the hour, we do know that we can and should expect our Lord Jesus at any time.

What shall we do? Jesus does warn us to watch and be awake, for many will seek to lead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. But Jesus also comforts us. He shall return, and He shall return soon. He shall send out His mighty angels to gather all the elect up. Even though we may feel alone and isolated now, even though we are saddened and dismayed by all of the wickedness now, Christ will gather His saints together. And what we believe by faith now shall give way to sight. And what a glorious sight that shall be!

**Lord Jesus, Who warned us about the signs of the end times because You love us and desire us to endure until the end so that we might be saved. Help us to take comfort in the fact that all of the last prophecies have been fulfilled, and that we now wait eagerly to be gathered together with our fellow Christians when You return on the Last Day. Come quickly! Amen.**

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. Psalm 16:9-10*

This psalm is not about us. Both Peter and Paul teach that this psalm is about Jesus and His victory over the death and the grave. God the Father did not leave Jesus' soul in hell. Jesus' body did not molder in the grave, but He was raised from death to everlasting life. And now, Jesus sits at God's right hand, experiencing pleasures forevermore.

So, if Psalm 16 isn't about us, then how can it give us hope? Jesus didn't stay in the tomb. Jesus' body didn't rot like the bodies of our loved ones. Jesus didn't stay powerless within the cold grave. Jesus didn't remain in the pits of hell. No, Jesus, our Redeemer, rose from the dead. He is at God's right hand forevermore. He knows the ways of joy and life now.

Jesus' resurrection was proof that God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice for all our sin. Jesus paid for all our sin, and the resurrection is God's stamp of approval. We are free from sin and from the curse of the law's impossible demands. God will not leave us in hell for the sake of Jesus.

And not only that, but in Jesus' resurrection, we have hope in our own resurrection. If the Head is raised, then His members will be raised in their bodies too. We do not become angels when we die. No, Christ's resurrection shows us that we shall be freed from sin and from the consequence of sin: death and decay. But on the last day, Jesus shall raise the dead, and make them like His own glorious body.

This is the Christian's hope. We look forward to Jesus' return, when He, the Firstfruits of them that sleep, shall raise all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This psalm is not about us, but it does comfort us, even in the face of death.

**Heavenly Father, You did not leave Your Son in Sheol or allow Your Holy One to see corruption. Comfort us with the knowledge that, because we are in Christ, we too shall rise like Him. Amen.**

## Friday of Advent 1

*Matthew 24:36-44*

*For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:37*

The end of the Antediluvian (pre-Flood) world and the end of our world will be similar in many ways. Jesus says that the last days shall be like the days of Noah. The days of Noah didn't look so bad. Sure, there was violence, but there was also great technological advancement. Cain was progressive; he built the first city and his descendants also made technological leaps and bounds. Lamech's three sons were like the Steve Jobs of the ancient world. One refined animal husbandry. Another revolutionized music. The third discovered metallurgy. Life wasn't the obvious cesspool the movies make it out to be.

But the church was nearly gone. Even though Noah was a preacher of righteousness, all but eight souls did not listen. Even though the ark was being built, a visible manifestation of God's wrath and His grace, most mocked and jeered. People were driven, not by the sanctity of the marital estate, but by foul and sinful lust.

And so it is in our day. Preachers are often ignored or ignominiously made into a chaplain of our foul culture. Our world is full of technological growth apart from God. People live like married people when they are not married, a sign of unholy lust.

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Even though Christians are attacked as being hopeless and backward rustics, even though the world scoffs at the warning, Jesus is coming back.

Jesus' coming is very comforting for us Christians because our Lord is lovingly discerning. The text says that two women will be working at the mill. It took two to grind grain: one to feed the mill, the other to rotate the stone. Jesus doesn't reject both because of their proximity; there is no "collateral damage" with our Lord. No, the faithful remain; it is the unbelieving who are washed away.

While we cannot predict our Lord's coming, we take comfort that, in these days of Noah, our Lord is returning. He shall rescue His sheep and the goats shall be taken away.

**Lord Jesus, in these days of Noah, give us strength to endure and to watch for Your blessed coming. Amen.**

*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

The purpose of Christ's second coming is not to establish a millennial kingdom on earth. Christ tells us in Scripture that Christians shall suffer in this world. Those who are blessed are those who are persecuted for His name's sake. Those who belong to Christ carry their crosses. It is through many necessary tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God. The "rapture" as many evangelicals teach it isn't true; believers will not be spared tribulation in the world. Nor should they try, for it is only those, coming out of the great tribulation, who have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.

Christ tells us plainly, "In the world you will have tribulation." Christianity doesn't make your earthly problems go away. Jesus isn't some sugary soporific, which lulls you into a dreamy never-never land. The disciples had tribulation. They scattered and left Christ alone. They were afraid. The wrath of the Jews and the persecution which followed didn't go away after Jesus' resurrection; it actually intensified!

So, how did the disciples endure? How do we endure? "But take heart, I have overcome the world." Jesus, by His death and resurrection, has overcome the world. The world may give us a scornful smile or a red frown; it makes no difference. The worst thing that can happen is that they kill us. And anyone who loses their life for Jesus' sake will find it.

You see, that's what Jesus' second coming is about. It is about the resurrection of the dead. On the last day, all the dead shall be raised. And those who suffered here with Christ shall reign with Him in glorified bodies. Those who laughed now shall weep then, and those who murdered the saints shall receive their just reward. Their bodies too shall last forever, but it shall be a torment, for their worm will not die and their fire shall not be quenched. Christ has overcome the world by His resurrection. We share in that overcoming now by faith and we shall overcome at last in our own resurrection.

**Lord Jesus, You have overcome the world. Continue to comfort us with Your words, so that we might have peace. Amen.**





*Jesus said "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. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" Luke 21:26b-28*

One of the most important parts of being a Christian is understanding how to perceive the world in the right way. We have learned, for the most part, to trust our eyes to know what the world is like. Today, Jesus tells us what we will see: "signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:25-26). This year, we have seen the world fall apart around us in ways we would have found difficult to believe just a year ago. The familiar question for us, then, is *what does this mean?*

Things we once thought were permanent and unshakable are crumbling into dust all around us – what does it mean? The devil will lie and tell us it must mean that God is coming in terror to destroy us, or maybe that He has simply forgotten about us and chosen not to bless us. This is why Jesus gives us these words of comfort today. He says that when you see these supposedly unshakable things falling to rubble, do not despair. Do not give up hope or think that your God has abandoned you. Quite the opposite, Jesus says; He is coming for your *redemption*.

One Day, Jesus will return in great power and glory, but this is not a cause for us believers to fear. This is, in fact, why we Christians take up our cross and follow our dear Master. Just as surely as Jesus rose after He died, so we too will rise out of our own graves and out of the ashes and dust of this decaying world to live with Him in eternal joy.

**Lord Jesus, prepare our hearts with Your Word, so that, in faith and Christian hope, we await Your coming with joy. Amen.**

## Monday of Advent 2

*Isaiah 65:17-25*

*“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.” Isaiah 65:17*

We Christians know that our Lord does great things for us now and blesses us now (chiefly, the forgiveness of sins), and yet there are high and great blessings (chiefly, the Resurrection of the Body) that have yet to be delivered. It has historically been a temptation for Christians of all times to look for their redemption chiefly in political terms or in worldly success and power. Even as Jesus told the Apostles about how He was going to send the Holy Spirit and they would be sent to preach, they couldn't help themselves: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Each time that Christians look to this world for their hope, they are sorely disappointed.

If there is anything certain about the greatest and most powerful empires in history, it is that they do not last forever. Each one rises and declares itself unconquerable – and each one is conquered or simply falls apart. We see the decay within ourselves, too. Our bodies begin to wear out. Our minds are not as sharp as they used to be. Our soul is weary from fighting against the flesh and the devil.

The Lord comforts us in our weariness – our hope is not in this world at all. Instead, He is preparing for us a kingdom which will never fall or wear out.

“At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:26-29).

**Lord Jesus, sustain us in the faith, that we may endure to the end and receive that unshakable kingdom which you prepare for Your saints. Amen.**

*“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” 2 Peter 3:11-13*

The Christian life this side of glory involves a lot of waiting. What sort of people should we be while we wait?

St. Peter tells us: We should be living lives of holiness and godliness. He does not say that we should live lives of holiness so that we may be saved; in this whole chapter Peter is obviously addressing people who, through faith alone, are already Christians. We Christians are to be holy and godly while we wait for Christ to return in judgment and glory.

So what does that look like? Go to church and bring the grandkids. As far as it depends with you, be at peace with all. Be generous with everything, and if anyone asks why you’re generous, tell them it’s because Jesus Christ has been so generous to you. Learn solid hymns by memory and sing them when your heart is feeling down. Defend your neighbor’s office, body, wife, belongings, and reputation. Don’t fake happiness, but also don’t let the troubles of this world steal your joy in Christ Jesus. Show up to work and do your job. Get to know your neighbors and invite them to church so you’ll see them in the Resurrection.

And above all, look hard for the signs of worldliness in your own life. What do you love more than Jesus? Cast it out – it is better to enter the kingdom of Heaven without it than to burn along with this world. The world to come, which our God is preparing for us, is a far better reward than all the money and power in this one. So don’t get distracted – keep your eyes on the life of the world to come, where righteousness dwells.

**O Lord Jesus, while we wait for Your return, deliver us from worldliness, protect us from the devil’s lies, and forgive us our sins. Amen.**

*“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’”* Matthew 25:34-40

Jesus gives us a good picture of the final judgment: The Son of Man gathers all the nations together and then separates them as a shepherd would cull his flock. Then the King, who is also the Son of Man, will announce the good works of those on His right who are headed into the Father’s kingdom, and announce the sins of those on His left who are about to depart from Him. But wait! Aren’t we saved by grace through faith, and not by works? Of course! But read these words carefully: The Son of Man does not weigh good works against sins, and *then* pronounce judgment. Rather, he separates the sheep and the goats first (the Bible says this is on the basis of faith), and only then does He announce the works.

The sheep (the believers) have only good works to be announced, because all their sins are washed away from them. The goats (the unbelievers) have only sin to be announced, because without faith it is impossible to please God. The sheep are surprised by their good works, because they did those works without the expectation of reward – they knew they were saved through faith alone.

**Lord Jesus Christ, pour out Your Holy Spirit on us by Your Word, that you may speak those wonderful words of blessing to us on the Last Day. Amen.**

*As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;  
for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.  
The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.  
But from everlasting to everlasting  
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—  
with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.*

*Psalm 103:13-18*

There is much to wail about in this life. Our kin and friends die, we run out of money, our health is taken from us, work is frustrating, and people are angry and fickle. There is much for us to wail about – so wail about them to God. Take your complaints, your worries, your fears, and your troubles to your God in prayer.

And when you wail to God, wail to Him as to a father. That is, you are not wailing to Zeus or some unknown god who may or may not listen, may or may not bless. You are taking everything that burdens you to the very God who made you and redeemed you with the blood of His Son.

He will have compassion on you; He will hear and answer. His love is with you and will be from everlasting to everlasting. He will not leave you or forsake you, He will not harbor His anger forever, and He will not treat you as your sins deserve. And if His will is to chasten you and purify you so you learn to trust in Him and let go of your idols, suffer His chastisement with patience, knowing He works all things for your good.

**Almighty Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us the faith and patience to endure all earthly afflictions, that on the Last Day we may enter Your eternal kingdom of joy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



*“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.*

*“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.*

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” Malachi 4*

The last words of the Book of Malachi – indeed, the last words of the Old Testament – prophesy that God will send Elijah the prophet, and then the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings for all who fear the name of the Lord.

When the Christian contemplates the Law of Moses, he finds accusation, sin, and death. Therefore, we take refuge not in the Law of Moses, but in the very Sun of Righteousness, the Son of God. Under His wings there is healing and protection, as a hen protects her chicks from the hawk.

The Law of Moses exposes the great terror that awaits many on the Day of Judgment, who refused the forgiveness of sins offered freely in Christ Jesus. But there is safety under the wings of Jesus. The way is simple and is a light yoke – this safety is for all who believe. Flee to Him for shelter and protection, and there you will find joy, peace, and deliverance from death.

**Lord Jesus, protect us with Your healing wings, that we would not be destroyed in the Day of Judgment but enter into Your kingdom of glory. Amen.**

*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:1-5*

When we see the world around us simultaneously falling apart and coming against the Church, we need to know how we can overcome this world. St. John, in the Spirit, tells us that all who believe overcome the world by faith. What immense joy there is, that our Lord Jesus calls us to believe in Him, and then through that faith saves us and gives us victory over this dying world!

We who believe are born of God, which means we have already died to this world. While we must still live in this world until that day our Lord has appointed for us, we do not belong to it. We are sojourners, strangers – we are only passing through. While there are things and people in the world that we have come to love, we know that the world is opposed to Jesus Christ, His gospel, His Church, and all Christians. We know that the Lord will bring the world to an end, but He will not bring us to an end. Far from it! Rather, He prepares a place for us, and on the Last Day he will call us to our true home with Himself forever. This is why we must and do endure in the Christian faith, even in the midst of suffering, because one Day all struggling and suffering will end, and will yield to an eternal kingdom of joy in Christ.

**Dear Jesus Christ, our Savior, send Your Spirit through Your Word, that we may endure in the faith and at last overcome the world. Amen.**



## Third Sunday in Advent

*Matthew 11:2-11*

*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Matthew 11:11*

John the Baptist was one of a kind. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. He was the prophet of the Most High, who went before the Lord to prepare His ways. He was the voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” He, though unworthy to untie the strap of Jesus’ sandals, baptized the Son of God in the Jordan River. Thus Jesus honored him by saying, “Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

But Jesus has an even greater honor for you: “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” All who believe in Christ and Him crucified are part of the kingdom of heaven and thus, by Christ’s own declaration, greater than John. All who have been baptized have received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit you have been adopted as sons of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. He gives you such boldness and confidence to cry out, “Abba! Father!” Even the least in the kingdom of heaven—from the newly baptized infant to the sinner who repents and believes on his deathbed—is greater than John the Baptist, for all in the kingdom of heaven have received its treasures by grace alone through faith alone and will inherit eternal life.

Our theme for this third week in Advent is “Unto Eternity,” considering the glorious promises of Holy Scripture about heaven. It is our future hope that we should be in the blessed presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, free from sin, death, and all evil. At the same time, however, it is a present possession for the Christian. Your citizenship not only will be in heaven someday; it is in heaven now. And that changes everything about your life here on earth, as you await from heaven a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**We praise You, O God, for You have redeemed us and made us heirs of Your glorious kingdom. Amen.**

*Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

*1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

There is no greater blessing on earth than the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace. Other earthly blessings have their place, sustaining our bodies and lives, but only the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments sustain us in body and soul unto life everlasting. That we may obtain this blessing, God instituted the office of the ministry in the Church.

But while the blessings given by God through the ministry have eternal effects, the ministry itself is not eternal. Someday it will be brought to an end. Someday the forgiveness of sins will cease. They will no longer be necessary. The office of the ministry will not be needed in heaven, for there we will know fully. Forgiveness will not be needed in heaven, for there will be no sin, only perfect love. In this way, love is the greatest, for it remains eternally. Faith alone justifies, but faith is the conviction of things not seen, and in heaven we shall see God face to face.

Until then faith remains necessary. Apart from faith there is no forgiveness of sins, no life, no salvation, and finally no hope of heaven. Therefore, attend to the hearing of God's Word and the reception of the Sacrament. For these strengthen you in faith until that day when all that you have believed here will be seen eternally.

**Lord Jesus, grant to us an increase of faith, hope, and love by Your holy Word and blessed Sacrament. Amen.**



*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Suffering has a good purpose for the Christian. It is the means by which God leads Christians through this world into eternal life. After all, it was through suffering on the cross that our Lord Jesus made atonement for our sins and won life and salvation for the whole world. Thus, if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him.

And what is the glorification of Christ but His resurrection and ascension? He who suffered for a little while rose again after three days, never to die again, for death no longer has dominion over Him. Forty days after that He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, where He lives and reigns to all eternity.

Such is the glory that awaits all who bear their cross as believers in Jesus. Though the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh attack and oppress us, these attacks and oppressions are but momentary afflictions, which not only precede an eternal weight of glory but even prepare us for it. All who remain faithful to Christ unto death will rise again in their bodies to life everlasting in His blessed presence, where they will never suffer again. Therefore, let us not lose hope, for an eternal home in heaven waits for us, a place that is even now being prepared for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who will come again and take us to Himself.

**O God, strengthen our faith in the midst of suffering, that we may look to the unseen things that are eternal. Amen.**

*[Jesus said,] “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!*

*Luke 12:35-38*

The Church’s prayer at the end of the Bible is “Come, Lord Jesus!” From the time of His ascension until now Christians have eagerly awaited Christ’s return on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, just as He promised. Though terrible signs will accompany his return, Jesus says to His believers, “Now when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Despite the chaos taking place around them, Christians are not to cower in fear but to stand tall in the end.

We are to look forward to our Lord’s return because He, the Master, is coming to serve us, His servants, and take us to the feast. When our Lord Jesus Christ ascended from earth to heaven, He ascended in triumph, having conquered sin, death, and the devil by His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. This triumphant celebration is described in Scripture as a wedding feast in heaven. At this feast the Lord sits in the place of honor. But He will come back to earth from that wedding feast to invite His servants to recline at table with Him—that is, to share in the joy and celebration of His resurrection.

Therefore, be ready. Stay awake. You do not know when your Lord and Master Jesus Christ will return from the heavenly feast. Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning through His Word and prayer. Blessed are those servants whom Christ will find awake!

**Lord, strengthen us to remain steadfast in watching for Your glorious return, not with fear but with joy. Amen.**

*And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating."*

*Luke 12:42-47*

Jesus is the Master who comes to serve His servants. If He, our Lord and Teacher, comes not to be served but to serve, even as He gave His life as a ransom for many, how much more ought His servants be willing to serve one another? While this is true for every Christian, it is especially true for those who have been set over Christ's household, the Church. Pastors are given responsibility to feed them, that is, to preach and teach and administer the Sacraments.

Woe to that pastor who takes the Lord's delay in coming as license to exercise his office to puff himself up and pursue selfish gain! The judgment against such pastors on the Last Day will be severe: "The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful."

Therefore, pray for your pastors. Support them by coming to Church, by hearing the Word they preach, and by receiving the Sacrament they administer. Encourage them as they carry out these divinely instituted tasks, for "blessed is that servant whom His Master will find so doing when He comes."

**O God, bless our pastors, and keep them faithful in their duties as they care for our souls until Your Son's return. Amen.**

*“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

*Revelation 7:15-17*

Christians often default to the negative side of eternal blessedness when thinking of heaven, that is, what will not be there. There will be no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat, no tears, no pain, no suffering, no death. It’s easy to understand why we are drawn to what will be lacking in heaven. Every day on earth we are confronted by suffering, sorrow, and death. Who doesn’t long to be set free from such ills?

But even as we look forward to such freedom in heaven, we must never forget the first and greatest ill that will be absent in heaven: sin. Only when sin is gone forever will all of the terrible effects of sin be gone forever as well.

Thanks be to God that in heaven there will no longer be any sin—not only the guilt of sin, but sin itself will be no more. This is accomplished through the blood of the Lamb, shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. All those who have been washed in His blood will be holy and righteous before God’s presence. In heaven sin and its effects will no longer afflict them.

Though we are still in the midst of a sinful world, with all its dreadful consequences, and though we still daily sin much, even now our sins are not counted against us for the sake of Jesus Christ and His holy, precious blood. Thus, as those who stand forgiven by grace alone, we truly have the hope of heaven, the hope of the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

**Be with us, O Lord, as we walk through this valley of sorrow to our heavenly home, where we will finally be free from sin and all its effects. Amen.**

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-5*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. But in a short time, His very good creation became very bad, having been corrupted by sin. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God and to be set free from its bondage to corruption.

That will happen someday. When Christ returns in glory and all things are made new, paradise will be restored. As once a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, in the new creation the river of the water of life will flow through the middle of the street of the city. The tree of life, which once stood in the midst of the Garden, will stand on either side of the river. Though Adam and Eve were driven out and kept from the tree of life by cherubim and a flaming sword, in the new creation the tree's fruit and leaves will be for all whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. And those who are written in the Lamb's book of life will not only serve God and worship Him, but also reign with Him forever. Thus we pray now and until the end, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

**O Lord God, keep us in the one true faith and, at the last, bring us to our eternal home with You. Amen.**

## Fourth Sunday in Advent

*John 1:19-28*

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

Advent is a season to ponder and prepare for the coming of the Lord. Thus far our devotions have dealt faithfully with our Lord's Second Coming. Today we hear of John's pronouncement of the Lord's first coming in grace. We hear that the prophets like Isaiah before John were also preparing God's people for God's coming to them to redeem them.

The task of the Church and her preachers has not changed much from those days. We have a different perspective having been blessed to see the fulfillment of so many things already in Christ's first coming. There is such a cloud of faithful witnesses that all testify to the faithfulness of our God to keep His Word. Whether it is the promises of Isaiah fulfilled in John, or the words of John being fulfilled in Jesus, or even further the words of Christ fulfilled as told by the angels on Easter morning – He is not here, He is risen just as He said. Our Lord fulfills His promises. They are sure.

There is a striking contrast between the world and our Lord then. It's as striking as the difference between the investigators the Pharisees and John the Baptizer. The world doesn't know the truth, even if it inquires. Our Lord speaks the truth and it comes to be. It happens just like He says.

So what? Even if our Lord speaks truth and fulfills promises, what good is that to us when we live in this world full of lies and troubles? The good is that our Lord has spoken His promises to us and for our good. You have heard many of them throughout this devotion so far. Even as our Lord's first coming was for great joy for all people, so His second coming will be such a joy to His own people – those who believe and are baptized. He has said so. The preaching you hear today is meant to help prepare you for what is to come – the Jesus coming is for your comfort, not for your terror.

**Lord Jesus Christ, help us by Your Spirit to trust Your promises and rely upon them at all times. Amen.**

*“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:5–7, ESV)*

The sufferings of Christians are considered evidence of being considered worthy of the kingdom of God. The world treated Christ with malice. The Church should expect no better. St. Paul writes that this is evidence. How can Christians endure such things? Surely not by some manly resolve or defense. No, we endure by the power of Him who makes us to remain steadfast.

There is a theme in St. Paul’s writings about his sufferings. He expects them to end suddenly with the return of Christ. In a way, His faith in Christ and expectation of His return, and his hope of what glory was coming in that return helped sustain him through some of the hardest things. It is no different for Christians who face suffering and even persecution for the Lord’s sake today. When you suffer, remember that Christ has promised that such suffering is good for you, a blessing even.

The comfort here is that the Lord will not let the suffering of His own go on forever and that such suffering is what He uses to help His own. There is also His promise that those who afflict His Church will themselves be repaid by Him for their evil deeds. As the end approaches, and each day is closer than the last, the time of the wicked comes closer to its end. So we endure while trusting Jesus at His Word and hoping in His return.

**Dear Jesus, help us to endure suffering with trust and hope in Your promised return. Turn back the enemies of Your Word and bless them with conversion. Help us to live meek lives with trust that vengeance only belongs to you and that You will repay. Amen.**

*“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’” Acts 1:10–11*

This is a text for the feast of the Ascension of our Lord. As Advent is wrapping up, it is an important text in our consideration of the coming of the Lord to see what manner our Lord ascended to the right hand of the Father (a position of ruling and reigning over all things). In doing this we can find much comfort.

The angels announced that Jesus will come in the same way the apostles saw Him go. This is not only talking about His coming in the clouds, but also other parts as well. Christ Jesus left the Apostles with their benefit and blessing in mind. He had told them that His going back to the Father was good for them, for not long after this our Lord sent His Holy Spirit by whom these sent ones of Jesus proclaimed and gathered the Church around the preaching and Sacraments in those first years (and by the same Spirit we still gather around preaching and the Sacraments). Jesus had said this was good. So, in the same way His return will be for our good.

If you look at Luke’s other account of the Ascension in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel, you will find that Jesus ascended as He blessed His apostles. As He is the God of blessing at Creation, so He is a God of blessing at His Ascension, and so He will be the same God of blessing at His return. It’s a strange thing to expect the return of Jesus to be anything but what He has already shown Himself to be – the true God, full of all blessing for His own. I guess the question then goes back to “who is His then?” Baptism provides you with all the answer you need to that question.

The last point about His ascension is that Jesus ascended to heaven still bearing the marks of His crucifixion. He is the Lamb who was slain but lives. He bears the marks of what He was willing to do and endure so that your sins are forgiven. Jesus will return in the same way, still bearing the marks of His love in His own body. For you the Last Day is a good day.

**Lord Jesus, please come soon as You have said, and help us by Your Spirit to trust in the goodness and benefit of Your coming. Amen.**



*“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 3:1–3, ESV)*

No, I am not getting you ready to read the names for Christmas Eve from Luke 2. This section of Scripture is often overlooked, but it is a very important one for you to understand the world into which our Lord came, and the task we have as Christians waiting for His appearing.

A Roman emperor Tiberius, Gentile governor Pilate, usurping and fake King like Herod, and a divided land ruled by others, including one who will be killed by Herod in order to have his wife. This is the world into which our Lord came and was going to bring the Kingdom of God to bear. It was far from the united kingdom of David, but a conquered place ruled over by pagans.

To make it worse, the text mentions two high priests. The religion of that day was as messy as was the earthly kingdom. But our Lord came into such a mess to redeem those caught in the mess. There is application here of course to His second coming. As the world falls apart, it is reminder that the kingdom of God is not of this world. How many parables did Jesus use to show the absolute differences between this world and God’s kingdom? Christ came in the flesh with preaching and teaching into a world and church that were far from ideal. So also, if you have listened to His Word, you will know that the world and even the Church will have this problem until the end. His promises still remain. He still came as our substitute in order to fulfill all righteousness. He is still coming to be our rescuer and deliverer, even if the times get darker still. This is our comfort in the face of the world that is falling apart – Christ comes as well, and of His rule there shall be no end.

**Dear Jesus, as our world gets worse please help us to keep our faith fixed on You and Your salvation. Amen.**

## The Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Eve

*“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” Luke 2:1–20*

**Lord God, heavenly Father, we give thanks that in your great mercy and compassion you allowed your dear Son to become incarnate and through him redeemed us from sin and eternal death. Enlighten our hearts by your Holy Spirit that we may always be thankful for such grace and be comforted in all trouble and temptation, and at last obtain eternal salvation; through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Christmas by Veit Dietrich)**

## The Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day

*“Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!” Psalm 97:11-12*

1. Rejoice, O righteous, in the Lord!  
Shout for joy with merry hearts!  
Today our fortunes are restored;  
Light is sown and gloom departs.  
The Sunrise visits from on high;  
Now raise to Him a gladsome cry,  
And tell again the mystery;  
Let wingèd verses fly!

During the twelve days of Christmas, each day’s devotion will include one stanza of a twelve-stanza poem for reflecting on the wonder of the two natures of Christ. Today we begin with joy on the day of our Lord’s birth. Leo the Great captures this joy well in one of his sermons on the Feast of the Nativity:

“Our Savior, dearly-beloved, was born today: let us be glad. For there is no proper place for sadness, when we keep the birthday of the Life, which destroys the fear of mortality and brings to us the joy of promised eternity. No one is kept from sharing in this happiness. There is for all one common measure of joy, because as our Lord the destroyer of sin and death finds none free from charge, so is He come to free us all. Let the saint exult in that he draws near to victory. Let the sinner be glad in that he is invited to pardon. Let the gentile take courage in that he is called to life. For the Son of God in the fulness of time which the inscrutable depth of the Divine counsel has determined, has taken on him the nature of man, thereby to reconcile it to its Author: in order that the inventor of death, the devil, might be conquered through that (nature) which he had conquered.” (Sermon XXI; *NPNF2-12*, pg. 128)

The Son of God has come in human flesh. “When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad” (Ps. 14:7).

**Heavenly Father, give us joy as we celebrate the coming of Your Son in our flesh to save us. Grant to us a merry Christmas for Jesus’ sake. Amen.**

## Second Day of Christmas – St. Stephan’s Day (Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>)

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1*

2. Before the earth had base or frame,  
God begat His only Son,  
In being and in substance same,  
With the Father ever one.  
But unlike human progeny,  
Who from their fathers come to be,  
There never was when He was not;  
He is eternally.

For the remainder of the Christmas season, each day’s devotion will consist of a Scripture reading, a stanza of a Christmas poem, a quote from the *Book of Concord*, and a prayer. Most of the readings from the *Book of Concord* will be from *The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, Article VIII: On the Person of Christ, which is excellent reading as we meditate on the Incarnation of Our Lord.

“We believe, teach, and confess that the Son of God, although from eternity He has been a particular, distinct, entire divine person, and thus, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, true, essential, perfect God, nevertheless, in the fulness of time assumed also human nature into the unity of His person, not in such a way that there now are two persons or two Christs, but that Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary, as it is written Rom. 9:5: Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever.

“We believe, teach, and confess that now, in this one undivided person of Christ, there are two distinct natures, the divine, which is from eternity, and the human, which in time was assumed into the unity of the person of the Son of God; which two natures in the person of Christ are never either separated from, or mingled with, one another, or changed the one into the other, but each abides in its nature and essence in the person of Christ to all eternity.” (*SD VIII.6-7*)

**Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for sending Your Son to become man for our sake. Grant us to speak of this great mystery rightly, according to Your Word, that we would not fall into false belief and thereby forfeit the benefits of Christ’s saving work. Amen.**

### **Third Day of Christmas – St. John’s Day (Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>)**

*“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:38-40*

3. The Father had a gracious plan;  
With His will the Son agreed.  
Though God had not yet fashioned man,  
Even then He knew our need.  
For He foresaw our dreadful fall;  
So in His love, to save us all,  
The Son would come as one of us,  
And end our deathly thrall.

“We believe, teach, and confess also that now, since the incarnation, each nature in Christ does not so subsist of itself that each is or constitutes a separate person, but that they are so united that they constitute one single person, in which the divine and the assumed human nature are and subsist at the same time, so that now, since the incarnation, there belongs to the entire person of Christ personally, not only His divine, but also His assumed human nature; and that, as without His divinity, so also without His humanity, the person of Christ or *Filii Dei incarnati* (of the incarnate Son of God), that is, of the Son of God who has assumed flesh and become man, is not entire. Hence Christ is not two distinct persons, but one single person, notwithstanding that two distinct natures are found in Him, unconfused in their natural essence and properties.” (SD VIII.11)

**Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for loving us from eternity. Dear Jesus, we rejoice that You have come according to the Father’s will and in Your love have delivered us from all evil. O Holy Spirit, make us to know the love of God, and lead us by the Word to do the Father’s will. Amen.**

#### **Fourth Day of Christmas – Holy Innocents/Martyrs (Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>)**

*“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” Psalm 80:1-3*

4. “Stir up Your pow’r and come, O Lord!  
Leave us not in sin’s disgrace!”  
For many years we thus implored,  
“Shine on us Your saving face!  
For in Your image we were made,  
Yet Your command we disobeyed.  
We cast aside Your precious Word,  
And with our life we paid.”

“In virtue of this [union of the divine and human natures] He also wrought all His miracles, and manifested this His divine majesty, according to His pleasure, when and as He willed, and therefore not first after His resurrection and ascension only, but also in His state of humiliation; for example, at the wedding at Cana of Galilee; also, when He was twelve years old, among the learned; also in the garden, when with a word He cast His enemies to the ground; likewise in death, when He died not simply as any other man, but in and with His death conquered sin, death, devil, hell, and eternal damnation; which the human nature alone would not have been able to do if it had not been thus personally united and had not had communion with the divine nature.” (SD VIII.25)

**O Jesus, You have come as our Savior and made Your face to shine upon us. Continually save us from all things that would harm us. Amen.**

## **Fifth Day of Christmas (Dec. 29<sup>th</sup>)**

*“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Galatians 4:4-7*

5. The time was come, the promised hour;  
God’s announcement then was heard,  
And by the Holy Spirit’s pow’r,  
Mary’s womb received the Word;  
And what He was He still remained:  
True God, His deity maintained.  
And He became what He was not:  
Our flesh, and yet unstained.

“And we admonish all Christians, since in the Holy Scriptures Christ is called a mystery upon which all heretics dash their heads, not to indulge in a presumptuous manner in subtile inquiries, concerning such mysteries, with their reason, but with the venerated apostles simply to believe, to close the eyes of their reason, and bring into captivity their understanding to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5, and to take comfort [seek most delightful and sure consolation], and hence to rejoice without ceasing in the fact that our flesh and blood is placed so high at the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God. Thus we shall assuredly find constant consolation in every adversity, and remain well guarded from pernicious error.” (SD VIII.96)

**Dear Father in heaven, by the Spirit of Your Son we call upon You. Let not our human reason pry into Your divine mysteries, but content us with Your Word. Give us delight in the Incarnation of Your Son, and through Him grant us consolation in all adversity. Amen.**

## Sixth Day of Christmas (Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>)

*“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8*

6. O wonder! He came forth in birth,  
Infinite in finite frame,  
And Him who holds up all the earth,  
Mary held, and called His name,  
“Dear Jesus, now on Satan tread!  
Oh bruise for us the serpent’s head!  
Our refuge is in You alone;  
To You our hands are spread.”

“If now you are asked, What do you believe in the Second Article of Jesus Christ? answer briefly: I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord. But what is it to become Lord? It is this, that He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and all evil. For before I had no Lord nor King, but was captive under the power of the devil, condemned to death, enmeshed in sin and blindness.

“For when we had been created by God the Father, and had received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under His wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved.

“There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God in His unfathomable goodness had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness, and came from heaven to help us.

“Those tyrants and jailers, then, are all expelled now, and in their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, every blessing, and salvation, and has delivered us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, has won us, made us free, and brought us again into the favor and grace of the Father, and has taken us as His own property under His shelter and protection, that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.” (LC II.27-30)

**Dear Jesus, You have rescued us from the devil’s power and claimed us as Your own. Preserve us ever in Your kingdom, and speed the day when You will crush Satan under our feet. Amen.**



## **Seventh Day of Christmas – Eve of Circumcision and Name of Jesus (Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>)**

*“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John. 1:7*

7. Our Lord appeared at thirty years;  
With His flesh He did great deeds.  
His touch healed lepers, opened ears,  
Raised the dead, and cured disease.  
Two natures, God’s and man’s, unite—  
A mystery of great delight!—  
For by their union Jesus’ flesh  
Can act with Godly might.

“[T]he Scriptures speak not merely in general of the Son of Man, but also indicate expressly His assumed human nature, 1 John 1:7: The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin, not only according to the merit [of the blood of Christ] which was once attained on the cross; but in this place John speaks of this, that in the work or act of justification not only the divine nature in Christ, but also His blood *per modum efficaciae* (by mode of efficacy), that is, actually, cleanses us from all sins. Thus in John 6:48-58 the flesh of Christ is a quickening food; as also the Council of Ephesus concluded from this [statement of the evangelist and apostle] that the flesh of Christ has power to quicken; and as many other glorious testimonies of the ancient orthodox Church concerning this article are cited elsewhere.” (*SD VIII.59*)

“Just as in glowing iron there are not two kinds of power to shine and burn [as though the fire had a peculiar, and the iron also a peculiar and separate power of shining and burning], but the power to shine and to burn is a property of the fire; but since the fire is united with the iron, it manifests and exercises this its power to shine and to burn in, with, and through the glowing iron, so that thence and from this union also the glowing iron has the power to shine and to burn without conversion of the essence and of the natural properties of fire and iron.” (*SD VIII.66*)

**Heavenly Father, cleanse us from all sin by the blood of Jesus, Your Son, and grant us to do only those things which are pleasing to You. Amen.**

## **Eighth Day of Christmas – Circumcision and Name of Jesus (Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>)**

*“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Romans 3:21-25*

8. He brought himself beneath the Law,  
Though the edicts were His own.  
His life had not a single flaw,  
Nor was He to evil prone.  
He was no heir to human sin,  
But perfect, unlike Adam’s kin,  
And He fulfilled the Law as man,  
Our righteousness to win.

“However, now that man has not kept the Law of God, but transgressed it...the Gospel is properly a doctrine which teaches what man should believe, that he may obtain forgiveness of sins with God, namely, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the curse of the Law, has expiated and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we again enter into favor with God, obtain forgiveness of sins by faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and eternally saved.

“For everything that comforts, that offers the favor and grace of God to transgressors of the Law, is, and is properly called, the Gospel, a good and joyful message that God will not punish sins, but forgive them for Christ’s sake.

“Therefore every penitent sinner ought to believe, that is, place his confidence in the Lord Christ alone, that He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4:25, that He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, 2 Cor. 5:21, who of God is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption, 1 Cor. 1:30, whose obedience is counted to us for righteousness before God’s strict tribunal...” (SD V.20-22)

**Dear Jesus, You have fulfilled the Law for us and bestowed on us Your righteousness. Grant that we trust in Your works and not ours for our salvation, and make us to love Your commandments. Amen.**

## **Ninth Day of Christmas (Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>)**

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Romans 8:31-34*

9. Then Jesus with His cross was armed;  
Forth He came, our foe to fight.  
His deity was no way harmed,  
Nor did natures disunite.  
And thus no common mortal cried;  
There on the cross God truly died;  
The devil’s head was trampled down,  
And we were justified.

“We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said, God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if ‘God’s death’ and ‘God died’ lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: ‘God died,’ ‘God’s passion’ ‘God’s blood,’ ‘God’s death.’ For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.” (SD, VIII.44)

**O Jesus, we praise You for shedding Your divine blood and dying for our salvation. Set Your cross always before us, that we would hope in You alone for everlasting life. Amen.**

### **Tenth Day of Christmas (Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

*“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:21-24*

10. All hail our Lord, whose birth we praise!  
He is firstborn from the dead!  
And over all, for length of days,  
God the Father makes Him head.  
To Christ as God no change this brings,  
For He was always King of kings,  
But now as man enthroned on high  
He rules and fills all things.

“For the Holy Scriptures, and the ancient Fathers from the Scriptures [in which they were fully trained], testify forcefully that, for the reason and because of the fact that it has been personally united with the divine nature in Christ, the human nature in Christ, when it was glorified and exalted to the right hand of the majesty and power of God, after the form of a servant and humiliation had been laid aside, did receive, apart from, and over and above its natural, essential, permanent properties, also special, high, great, supernatural, inscrutable, ineffable, heavenly prerogatives and excellences in majesty, glory, power, and might above everything that can be named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come [Eph. 1:21]; and that, accordingly, in the operations of the office of Christ: the human nature in Christ, in its measure and mode, is equally employed [at the same time], and has also its...power and efficacy, not only from, and according to, its natural, essential attributes, or only so far as their ability extends, but chiefly from, and according to, the majesty, glory, power, and might which it has received through the personal union, glorification, and exaltation.” (SD VIII.51)

**Dear Jesus, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to You. Defend Your Church from every evil, and grant that Your pure Word have free course on earth. Amen.**

## Eleventh Day of Christmas (Jan. 4<sup>th</sup>)

*“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Colossians 2:9-10*

11. The Lord ascended, yet is near,  
Giving us our joy afresh;  
And His two natures still cohere;  
He is always in the flesh,  
For Jesus is Immanuel;  
Our God with us does ever dwell,  
And with His flesh and blood He feeds  
His ransomed Israel.

“For here you must stand and say: Wherever Christ according to the divinity is, there He is a natural, divine person, and He is there also naturally and personally, as His conception in His mother’s womb well shows. For if He were to be God’s son, He must, naturally and personally be in His mother’s womb and become man. Now, if He is naturally and personally wherever He is, He must also be man in the same place. For there are not [in Christ] two separate persons, but only one person: wherever it is, there it is the one undivided person; and wherever you can say, Here is God, there you must also say, Then Christ the man is also there. And if you would point out a place where God is, and not the man, the person would already be divided, because I could then say with truth: Here is God who is not man, and who never as yet has become man.

“However, no such a God for me! For it would follow hence that space and place separated the two natures from one another, and divided the person, and yet even death and all devils could not divide or rend them from one another.

“And there would remain to me a poor sort of Christ, who would be a divine and human person at the same time in no more than in only one place, while in all other places He must be only a mere separate God and divine person without humanity. No, friend, wherever you place God, there you must also place with Him humanity; they do not allow themselves to be separated or divided from one another. There has been made one person, and it does not separate from itself the [assumed] humanity.” (SD VIII.82-84)

**O Lord, preserve Your Holy Supper among us and give us faith to believe Your words concerning it. Amen.**

## **Twelfth Day of Christmas (Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>)**

*“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Timothy 1:8-10*

12. All praise to You, Incarnate Lord,  
For Your great Nativity.  
Your birth has sheathed the flaming sword;  
Banished is all enmity.  
So let Your peace with us abide  
Throughout this blessed Christmastide,  
And at Your last Epiphany  
Receive us to Your side.

“Therefore we regard it as a pernicious error when such majesty is denied to Christ according to His humanity. For thereby the very great consolation is taken from Christians which they have in the aforecited promise concerning the presence and dwelling with them of their Head, King, and High Priest, who has promised them that not only His mere divinity would be with them, which to us poor sinners is as a consuming fire to dry stubble, but that He, He, the man who has spoken with them, who has tried all tribulations in His assumed human nature, and who can therefore have sympathy with us, as with men and His brethren,-He will be with us in all our troubles also according to the nature according to which He is our brother and we are flesh of His flesh.” (SD VIII.87)

**Heavenly Father, give us joy, now and every time we think on the Incarnation of Your Son. Keep us steadfast in the true faith our whole life long, that we would be prepared to receive Jesus on the day of His appearing. Amen.**