



ISAIAH TWAS
FORETOLD IT



DEVOTIONS FOR ADVENT

STEADFAST LUTHERANS | ADVENT 2024

“Isaiah Twas Foretold It”

An Advent Devotional on the Messianic Prophecies of Isaiah

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STEADFAST PRESS
Believe. Teach. Confess.

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

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to us a Savior,
When half-spent was the night.*

("Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming", LSB 359, stanza 2)

Scripture is full of prophecy, which is nothing other than promises that God makes through His prophets. Since God is God, full of goodness and mercy, He fulfills everything He promises.

Isaiah is the prophet of Advent, of Christmas, and so much of the rest of the Church Year. This Advent, we are going to go through some of the common prophecy texts related to the incarnation and birth of Jesus – all from Isaiah. For each prophecy you will also get to read related texts and the fulfillment texts as well. Use this devotion to the benefit of your soul's health.

God is always faithful to His Word. When He says it, it happens. It may not be immediate like "Let there be Light" and there was light, but even though Isaiah spoke some 700 years before the incarnation, Christ's assumption of humanity was just as sure and certain as Let there be light brought light.

This is important for us as we continue to gather to hear God's Word. It is important for you to know this when it comes to reading God's Word in your devotions this year. What God says, He will do. He keeps His promises. This goes for the promises about Jesus, but also about the promises He has made to you about how the fruit of the work of Jesus, completed in the past, is given to you know in the present. As you gather around the Word of God, realize God has promised to work through that Word of God, through your hearing of it. As you gather then in your congregation's services (and go to the extra ones, it is a benefit to your soul and also to your fellow Christians, and an encouragement to your pastor) realize that the Word will come to you – and what God has promised will happen. Absolution. God promised that it will really mean forgiveness in heaven even as on earth. Communion. Yes, God has said what the bread and wine are – how by the power of the Word they are also the Body and Blood of Jesus – but even more – God has promised that these are given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. As you are reminded in liturgy and song of being baptized, realize the promises God has made to you in baptism. They are true. He said it, and it will happen – just like the light exists and just like Jesus really came as was promised and prophesied.

And God has said He delights in your prayers and praises. Offer them throughout your days, at home, at work, at school, at church, and wherever else you find yourself. God has promised. He is faithful. On that you can always rely.

And then by all means take the faithfulness of God into your daily interactions with the world around you. Share the good work of God. Speak of His trustworthiness. Praise His faithfulness before others. It is good for even the unbeliever to hear of this trustworthy God who does not desire their death, but has made promises that even they can benefit from.

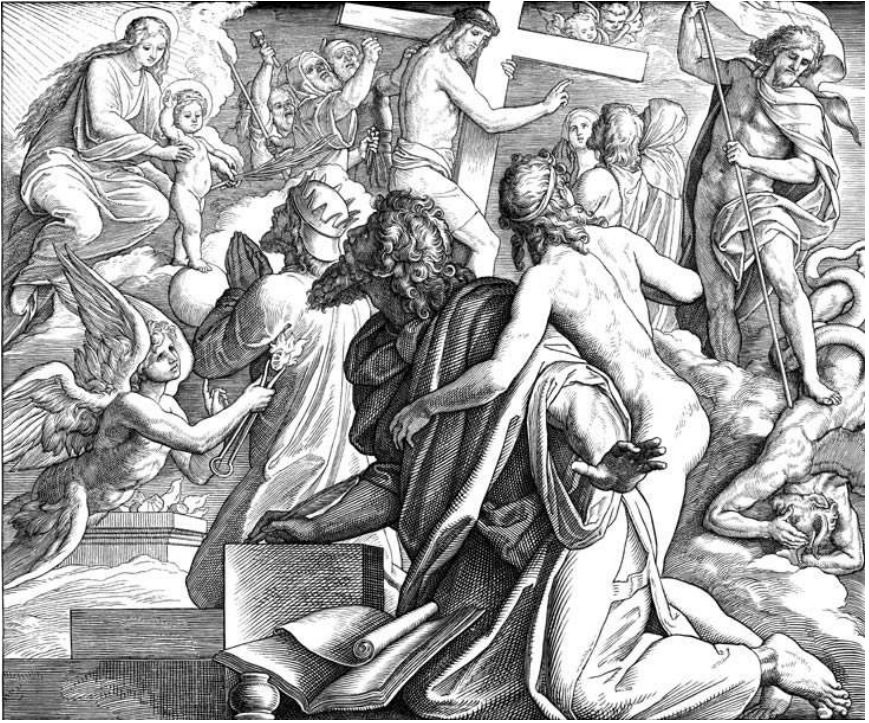
God bless your Advent this year. May these devotions health to exercise your faith and bring good health to your soul.

In Christ,

Rev. Joshua Scheer

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Julius Carolsefeld's depiction of the fulfilled prophecies of Isaiah

First Sunday in Advent

Matthew 21:1-9

“This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’ ”” (Matthew 21:4–5, ESV)

The season of Advent has come. A season of celebrating our Lord’s many advents (then in history, here in the means of grace, at the Last Day in glory). A season which we also use to hear the message of repentance and reconciliation as we approach the good news of great joy for all the people at Christmas.

Matthew’s Gospel has a strong focus on teaching the fulfillment of what was said in the Old Testament concerning Jesus. Today’s Gospel lesson tells of one such occasion, the fulfillment of what is spoken by both Zechariah (Zech. 9:9) and the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 62:11). Both of these verses are a part of the quote given in Matthew 21:5.

What does such a fulfillment teach us? First of all, the content of the prophecy and fulfillment can teach us about what God in Christ was doing – coming to save in righteousness, to redeem and make a holy people for Himself. Behind even these specifics, each time we hear of prophecy and fulfillment we learn more about our God – who always keeps His Word.

So when God says it, it is so. That’s just the plain and simple of every promise and prophecy we find in Scripture. This goes from the prophecies about the lineage of Jesus and His birth, to those of His coming in glory at the Last Day. And this basis – the trustworthiness of God’s Word, is then our foundation in the present as we gather to hear His Word, be reminded of our baptism, hear the absolution, and partake in the Lord’s Supper. He fulfills what He has said. So faith comes by hearing. Baptism now saves you. Forgiveness is true in heaven just as on earth. It is the body and blood of Jesus given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. God keeps His Word. In an age when everything becomes unreliable, it is nice to know that there will always be one sure thing – our God who keeps His Word faithfully for our sake.

Lord Jesus, help us to hear Your Word and learn to trust You more and more with each hearing. Help us to see how faithful to Your promises you have been, how faithful you are even now, and yes how we can be certain about what you have promised for the future as well. Amen.

Monday of Advent 1

Isaiah 7:10-14

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14, ESV)

This is the greatest sign promised in the Bible. God will become man, but without the corruption of Original Sin, and this Immanuel is a sign for Salvation to all who would believe. It is also a sign of judgment upon unbelief.

King Ahaz was not a faithful ruler. When God through the prophet Isaiah graciously promised to fulfill a sign for him, Ahaz tried to hide his hardness of heart by a pious “don’t put God to the test”. Here’s the thing, when God says – put me to the test - to not do so is sinful and wrong. Ahaz scoffed at the generosity of God in offering to give a sign. He received judgment for it.

God gave the sign of the Virgin Birth, which is really a furthering of the promise already made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. This is the mystery of the incarnation, of how a divine nature and a human nature are not two persons or two Christs but one person, one Christ. Thus, in the face of hardened unbelief, God makes a sign of Salvation, but as with all matters of Salvation, when opposed by unbelief, they become a judgment.

So, which is it for us? Surely the promise and sign of the Virgin birth of Jesus, of Immanuel (God with us) is a sign of salvation. Here, we find how God will become our brother. Here we find how He will be our Savior. Here, 700 years before the sign is fulfilled, the prophet of God speaks, and we 2000+ years after its fulfillment are still blessed in hearing it. For with this promise, this sign, we find a Savior who is like us in every way, yet without Original Sin, that corruption we all inherit from the first Adam.

This means that this promised sign of the incarnation and virgin birth had everything to do with the atonement needed for us sinners to be reconciled to God. True God, sufficient sacrifice. True man, sufficient substitute. Full satisfaction made by Him on our behalf. This is what this promise and sign mean for us – our salvation.

O Lord Jesus Christ, help us to cherish the fulfilled sign of Your incarnation and always hold by faith as a sign of our Salvation. Use the Light of Your Word to rebuke unbelief and bring repentance. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 1

Galatians 4:4-7

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

Here in the text today we find the person of Jesus Christ taught and confessed. The eternal Son, sent forth by God the Father, born of a woman. Jesus is both true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary. This is what Isaiah helped us to understand in His prophesy.

And yet, there is so much more in this passage – of note is that phrase “fullness of time”. This is ultimately tied back to Isaiah’s prophecy of the sign given to Ahaz. At the right time, the perfect time, the complete time – at just this moment in the history of the world – God sent forth His Son. Born of a woman – not of a man and woman according to the natural way – but conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

For those of you who are historically minded, this can bring all sorts of thoughts about how God used nations and empires and common everyday, ordinary things to bring about this fullness of time. And to think that at that very moment of our Lord’s conception – such a miraculous mystery happened that we can rightly say that God came to earth and became man.

As awesome and striking as this fullness of history is, we should remind ourselves of the purpose of Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ’s incarnation and birth. As St. Paul says, it happens in order to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons. No longer slaves to sin, but sons of God – made so by the work of Jesus in redeeming us, but also in sending us His Holy Spirit through Whom we cry to God our Father. No longer suffering under the guilt and condemnation of the Law but forgiven and saved.

In your own way, God has acted toward you in the fullness of time. When you were baptized, God aligned history to make it happen. As you gather around the Word, God has so made it happen. The purpose remains the same – your redemption, your adoption as sons, your being an heir of God awaiting the richness of eternity. This fullness is yours today, but it all comes because of the fullness of time when Christ came and fulfilled the Word of God for our salvation.

Lord Jesus Christ, grant us to so mark our days and see the fullness of time You have given for us. Help us in remembering our Lord’s birth to see how You do all things for our salvation. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 1

Luke 1:26-38

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:37–38, ESV)

The words of the angel Gabriel are the simple explanation to Mary’s question – how can this happen? And Mary’s response to the angel is a fine example of faithfulness in receiving whatever God has said.

Ahaz could have asked the same questions (see Isaiah 7:10-14 again), but he was not responding in faith. Instead, he had hardened himself against God. Unbelief reigned, and so he refuses to even ask clarification or explanation – he just rejects what God wanted to give. Mary is the opposite. She receives the Word, asks for some explanation, and accepts what Gabriel tells her. Mary is an excellent example to us all of the virtue of faith.

How do these two verses help us? First see that the angel starts with teaching the truth about who God is and what He can do (anything). Then see Mary receive the instruction about God, confess that simple faith. We too have opportunity to do this whenever we hear the teaching of the Word of God. We can either receive it like Mary or like Ahaz. We can receive the Word as faithful Christians, or we can reject the Word as arrogant unbelievers.

Where our reason and senses fail, when the knowledge this world provides falls short (how can this be?)– there we must know and believe that nothing will be impossible for God. This can help us to live in a constant, sure trust and hope in our God both now and for the future.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to receive Your Word and promises with simple trust. Stop us from ever rejecting it, and where we have grant us repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 1

Psalm 45:7-17

“I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.” (Psalm 45:17, ESV)

Psalm 45 reads like a song of bride for her bridegroom. It is a song of high praise for Christ the King who is God sung by His bride the Church. The text also points to the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God refers to the Father. The King is the Son. The oil of gladness is often related to the Holy Spirit, with Whom the Son was anointed (see Isaiah 61 and Luke 4:18-19).

Much of the Psalm speaks of what Christ will do for His Church. This relates to what it means to have Immanuel, God with us – true God. And yet also true man - conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. So the Psalm addresses Him as both God and man, but yet one King, who does all for His bride (bride language is often used for the Church – see Ephesians 5).

The final verse speaks of the Church’s high praise of Christ for what He has done. It also shows how the work of Christ is for all people, that the Church will be as Revelation chapter 7 describes it – from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. It also speaks of the eternal life which Christ bestows upon His Church.

The incarnation of Christ is essential to His work of redeeming the nations. God has to be with us if we are to have any hope at all, especially in regard to eternal life. The King who is God and man shall be forever praised by His bride, the Church.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for becoming man to redeem us. Thank you for making us a part of Your bride, the Church. Help us to praise you both now and forever. Amen.

Friday of Advent 1

Genesis 3:1-21

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15, ESV)

Here we have the very first promise of God regarding our salvation. It is often referred to as the Protoevangelium, or the first Gospel. It is hard to see it in the ESV translation, but the older King James captured something for the average reader when it said the “seed” of the woman.

Far from being a biological textbook, this promise of God was hinting at the special way in which Jesus would enter the world, of how God would be with us. He would be born of a woman in a special way.

This is what Gabriel says to Mary when he explains that the Holy Spirit will be involved here. That the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. The natural way in which children are created would not be the same as our Lord’s conception. This was promised in the garden, right after the Fall into Sin, but also then explained further as Isaiah spoke to Ahaz.

This offspring of the woman will be given the task of destroying the work of the devil (see 1 John 3:8). What is the work of the devil – sin, which earns death and damnation. Jesus, the offspring of Mary, has earned forgiveness of sins, thus undoing death and damnation as well. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He brings Salvation. In other words, He has crushed the serpent’s head.

As to the bruising of the heel, it is easy to see that this redemption costs this one offspring of the woman. Jesus suffered and died. The cross is fully pictured here. So we have incarnation and crucifixion, but also the victory of the resurrection and ascension all in this text. God had this plan for us. He does not desire to leave us in our sins, trapped under the fear of death, on our way internal eternal condemnation, but desires that all would be saved and come to trust in Christ, the promised offspring of the woman, the Son of the Virgin Mary, the fulfillment of the sign given to Ahaz.

Lord Jesus, grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may always cherish you as the fulfillment of God’s promises and as our rescue and victory over sin, death, and condemnation. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 1

Romans 5:12-18

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” (Romans 5:17–18, ESV)

In Adam all die. (1 Corinthians 15:22). This is the fact that Romans 5 lays out for us. Adam, in sinning through the whole of mankind into sin. This original sin of Adam has brought corruption to mankind. This is why there are sins which just happen in us (coveting, hatred, lusts) seemingly “automatically”.

In Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22). God saw the corruption of mankind, and in the promise of the offspring or seed of the woman, later given more light in the promise of the sign of the Virgin birth, made a way for all to be out of the curse and guilt of Original Sin. By the holy incarnation of Jesus Christ, we have both a brother in the flesh, sharing our human nature completely, but yet without any of the corruption that Original Sin worked. This was the foundation to Christ Jesus bringing the free gift of righteousness and justification for all men.

Among the sinful, corrupt children of Adam now lives and reigns a Righteous One, Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has become flesh and blood with us. He is adorned with the image of God. He is the Holy One. This was not just done outside of nature, but God has seen fit to enter the world in some ways such an ordinary and yet in all other considerations such an extraordinary way.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for being our brother and yet not sharing in the corruption of Original Sin. Thank you for being the Righteous and Holy One. Help us to always trust in the righteousness you provide to and for us. Amen

Second Sunday in Advent

Luke 21:25-36

“But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36, ESV)

It is easy to be asleep. It is easy to be lulled to sleep by the cares of this life. Physical drunkenness will put you to sleep, but spiritual drunkenness will also make you insensible to spiritual things. These are hidden traps. Not only are they in the dark, that is, difficult to see, but they are also soul darkening. They make the light that should be in us dark. Don't sleep. Stay awake.

Just as dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life put you to sleep, our Lord Jesus gives us signs which keep us awake in the Spirit. He tells us what is coming. Like a loud alarm clock, the signs in the sun, moon, and stars should ring in our minds and hearts. Like a strong cup of coffee, the distress of nations ought to jolt us out of sinful security. The budding of the trees, which seems so far away, is a reminder that all the prophecies concerning the end have already occurred. Jesus' word hasn't lied. The temple has been destroyed. There has been war and rumors of war. The love of many has grown cold. The lawless one, the Antichrist, has been revealed. Rather than frightening pictures which make us faint, these signs of the end are merely the budding of leaves. These things let us know that the Kingdom of God and of His Christ is so very, very near.

The world wants you to sleep. It wants that blessed day of our Savior's return to catch you unawares in the dark. It's a trap, a snare. Don't listen to the lies of the world, which coddle you and rock you to sleep. Don't listen to Satan, who wants to send you false dreams of safety and security. But Jesus doesn't want you to sleep. He wants you to be awake. And the best way to be awake is to read and listen to His word. As He Himself says: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

Dear Jesus, awaken us by Your Word that we may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and finally stand before You. Amen.

Monday of Advent 2

Isaiah 9:2-7

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” (Isaiah 9:2, ESV)

This is a prophecy, not only concerning our Lord’s birth, but also concerning His preaching ministry in Galilee. *“And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (Matt. 4:13).”* Capernaum becomes Jesus’ base of operations.

What is this darkness? This is the darkness of sin and death. The darkness hides God’s truth from these people. The darkness is the darkness of the tomb. These people are spiritually dead and don’t even know it. They are oppressed. This oppression is not primarily physical but spiritual. Here, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would break the yoke of His people as well as the rod of the oppressor. The spiritual slavery, a heavy yoke indeed, is replaced with Jesus’ own yoke, which is easy and light. With the coming of the Messiah spiritual oppression and slavery, wrath, punishment, and judgment are brought to an end. His deliverance is a perfect and everlasting salvation.

How does our Lord do this? He is born. He, the God of all, does not despise the Virgin’s womb. David’s Lord becomes David’s Son. Instead of darkness, He brings light. Instead of oppression, He brings true and good government. Instead of war, He brings peace because He is the Prince of Peace.

The Son is given so that He might preach. His preaching increases His spiritual government. This increase of Christ’s rule and the peace which He has won for mankind shall have no end. This Christ and Prince does not fight with worldly weapons. He fights with words. His preaching is the iron rod which shatters nations. His preaching is the double-edged sword which converts hearts. His preaching is the white knight from Revelation who goes forth to conquer through the sharp arrows of His word.

This prophecy is still fulfilled today. Many still sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Christ wants to increase His government so that they too might be enlightened by His Word and be saved.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving Your Son, the Prince of Peace, Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 2

1 John 2:7-14

“At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”
(1 John 2:8, ESV)

The apostles don't preach a novel commandment. God doesn't change. His commandments and His words are as old as the beginning. They are eternal. And yet, these commandments are not decrepit or obsolete. They are not old wine skins or an old garment. No, this old commandment and this old word which we have had from the beginning strikes us as new and vibrant. Why? This current age, this present darkness is fading away. Our children possess forgiveness. Our fathers have known Christ from the beginning. Young men have overcome the evil one. Those whom we know and love shine with the light of Christ. It is a joy and a wonder to see the darkness of this world flee when a four-year-old says his prayers. It is a thrilling sight to see young men overcome the devil by faith. It is touching to see fathers, who have known Jesus from their childhood, hand down the Jesus that they know to their families. The old commandment and the word which we heard at the beginning shines forth each and every day in so many ways.

One of these ways in which the old commandment and word shows itself as new is with our brothers. These are our brothers in the Christian faith. We love them, even when they are unlovable. It's hard. But hatred is darkness. It blinds us. It keeps us from the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. We have been forgiven much by our God, Whom we cannot see. But we love God because He first loved us. Therefore, let us show our love for God by loving the ones we can see: our brother. If there is anger or bitterness, remember that you were once by nature a child of wrath. If sins have been committed against you, remember how much Jesus has forgiven you your sins. Jesus identifies with believers. Those who curse believers are themselves cursed. Those who bless believers are blessed. Christians are the apple of God's eye. He loves them. We love them too, because we have been so greatly loved.

Lord Jesus, help us to love our brother whom we see, so that we might love You, Whom we do not see. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 2

Matthew 4:12-17

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

What is preaching? Is preaching a lecture? An information dump? Is preaching merely a setting of the Lord’s table? What should preaching be? That’s the question which is answered by our text. Jesus began His work of salvation with preaching. He preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus doesn’t preach anything new. In fact, John the Baptist preached the same sermon. And yet, there is a difference. John was the forerunner. He prepared hearts and minds for the Messiah.

Jesus’ preaching wasn’t a preparation; Jesus’ preaching brought light. That’s what Isaiah said. This mixed population of Jews and Gentiles sat in darkness. Theirs was an indifferent, sluggish attitude. The shadow of spiritual death had enveloped them. This hellish darkness shut out the light of life streaming from the Old Testament prophecies. But now Jesus Christ, the true Light, shone forth. Christ began His ministry in Galilee. He preached to those who were spiritually lazy and religiously blind. Jesus preached in this spiritually uncultivated place more than He did in Jerusalem and Judea.

Why? It was here in the heart of darkness that Jesus’ preaching was peculiarly needful. The application is clear. There are so many who dwell in darkness today. They are religiously sluggish. They are oppressed by terrible spiritual forces, and they don’t even realize it. Jesus wanted these people, who seemed cold, indifferent, and unreceptive to the light of gospel, to be saved. We should want and desire the same thing. God’s Word works. Preaching works. It is a light in the darkness. It wakes up the spiritually dead. It gives new strength to those who sluggishly sit. It enlightens hearts and minds. And look at the result! Many in Galilee do believe. They are saved. It is in the most unlikely of places that God grows a great harvest of faith and love. So let us speak God’s word boldly and without fear, for it is a light to those who suffer in the grips of a terrible darkness.

Lord Jesus, let Your Word be a light and lamp so that we and others might be saved from the darkness of sin. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 2

Psalm 96

“Before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.” (Psalm 96:13, ESV)

The psalmist tells us to sing a new song. This is like the new commandment we heard about in 1 John. In one sense, this song is not new but as old as the shattered bliss of Eden. But this song also becomes new because the Messiah, promised for so many centuries, has come. His glory is declared to the heathen. Christ did not come only for the lost sheep of Israel; *“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world* (1 John 2:2).

What shall the Messiah do? He shall judge the world. God the Father *“has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17:31).” This is terrifying to sinners. If we are judged by righteousness, then we will be condemned. Why then are the heavens glad? Why does the earth rejoice? Why do the trees sing for joy?

The unbelieving wicked will be judged by the eternal and righteous Law of God. But those who cling to Christ shall be judged, not by their own righteousness, but by Christ’s righteousness. It is as Paul says in Romans 4:5: *“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”* The Judge’s perfect righteousness will be applied to us by faith. We will be judged innocent because Jesus is innocent. This is why we sing a new song. This is why all creation rejoices with us. Christ’s judgment is not terrifying to us. *“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 5:24).” This is why we sing. This is why we rejoice. We are not judged, but already possess eternal life.

Lord Jesus, You are the Lord Who will judge the world in righteousness and the people in faithfulness. Give, strengthen, and preserve our faith that we might not be condemned, but pass from death to life. Amen.

Friday of Advent 2

1 Samuel 2:1-10

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.” (1 Samuel 2:9, ESV)

The song of Hannah reminds us of the Magnificat, sung by Mary. There is rejoicing. There are great reversals. The powerful are put down. The humble and powerless are exalted by the God who kills and makes alive.

Amid so many promises, it is good to return to our theme of darkness and light. The wicked will be cut off in darkness. This is spiritual darkness. God will deprive them of His grace and mercy. They will not have His Holy Word, for they have rejected it time and time again. Their own strength, in which they trust, shall fail them. No one is able to prevail against God by his own strength. No one is the captain of his own fate. No one is a self-made man.

This is a warning to us. We ought not trust in our own might. We might find might in our family. We might find might in our wealth. We might find might in our health. These are all good gifts of God. But these good gifts are often misused. We do this when we trust in these gifts rather than in the Giver of all good gifts. But not by might shall a man prevail. These things will one day fade. To trust in them is to sit in spiritual darkness. To cling to these things instead of to the Savior leads to wickedness and eternal death.

But there is also comfort here. God will guard the feet of His faithful. That means that He will keep us upright. He will save us from tottering and falling. He will keep our feet on the straight and narrow path that leads to life. The Holy Spirit not only creates faith in our hearts, but He will also bring that good work to a completion in the day of Jesus Christ. God still works in you. He wants you to be saved and He guards your steps every day.

Heavenly Father, You inspired Hannah’s song. Help us to rejoice in all Your wonderful works. Guard our steps and continually remind us that we will not prevail by our might, but only by You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Saturday of Advent 2

Psalm 88

“Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” (Psalm 88:12, ESV)

Psalm 88 is an instructive poem. This hymn was written by Heman, the Ezrahite, who was one of the four wise men at the time of Solomon. Psalm 88 is a hymn for public worship. This psalm is very sorrowful. The singer is in trouble. He has no strength. He is alone. His emotional and spiritual suffering are so great that it is affecting his body, especially his eyes. He has prayed, but God is not answering. Things are so bad that this singer is “counted among those who go down to the pit.” Indeed, darkness is now the singer’s only companion.

But this is all wrong! Surely God will not let the singer die? The dead don’t get miracles. The dearly departed don’t praise God. God’s miracles and His righteousness cannot be known in death. Here, the singer reminds God of His promises. The thought is that the psalmist, while he was still alive, wanted to praise the Lord for his deliverance from all the misery afflicting him. God loves repentance and faith. He doesn’t want the death of the sinner. That’s why the Lord should not let his afflictions reach such a climax as to bring him to the realm of death. If the psalmist dies, then every opportunity for worshiping the Lord would be over.

Jesus is not known by the darkness. No, Jesus is the light which banishes the darkness. Jesus’ righteousness makes a forgetful land into a land which remembers and praises our Lord’s resurrection. This is why when we die we don’t really die. Jesus is the God, not of the dead, but of the living. Therefore, when we depart this life, we are not in darkness but in the light of His presence. The blessed dead are not in an afterlife of forgetfulness, but they know our Savior and serve Him day and night, remembering His promises. The blessed dead are not dead but alive in Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, deliver and save us from eternal death in the pit and banish the darkness, which is often our companion. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

Matthew 11:2-10

“And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Matthew 11:4–6, ESV)

Why did John the Baptist send word by his disciples to Jesus? Was John beginning to doubt that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah? Was he growing discouraged as he sat in Herod’s prison? Was he still serving as the messenger preparing the way before the Lord, pointing his disciples to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

In the end, why John sent his disciples to Jesus is not as important as the fact that Jesus sent those disciples right back to him: “Go and tell John what you hear and see.” Whether John was strong in faith or weak in doubt, whether he wanted his disciples to believe in Jesus or wanted reassurance for himself, Jesus knew exactly what John needed. He needed to hear the Gospel.

So do you. Whoever you are, whatever you are feeling right now, you need to hear the Gospel too. Whether you are filled with joy and gladness or sorrow and sighing, whether you are strong or weak in faith, the answer is the same: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became Man for you. He was born to be your Savior. He lived and died and rose again that you would be cleansed from your sins and raised from death to life.

John would eventually die a martyr’s death in prison, but he was well-prepared to die in faith because he had been strengthened by the Gospel he heard from his disciples. By the power of God’s Word, you too will be strengthened in your faith, through times of joy and sadness, in strength and weakness, in death unto eternal life.

O God, give us ears to hear the inspired testimony of the prophets and apostles, who bear witness to Your Son, that we would be strengthened and preserved in the one true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

Monday of Advent 3

Isaiah 11:1-5

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:1–2, ESV)

Isaiah foretold that the Christ would come from the line of Jesse, the father of the great King David. But the reign of Christ would not be a restoration of the kingdom of Judah, which was long gone by the time his prophecy was fulfilled. No, He would be a new and greater David, who would rule with perfect righteousness and faithfulness. He would do so without fail because the Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him.

In the fullness of time, this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Because He is God, the Holy Spirit is and remains His eternally. He is of one substance with the Holy Spirit, as He is with the Father. But from the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, He is now true God and true Man perfectly united in one Person. Therefore, the entire fullness of the Spirit has given to Him without measure according to the flesh.

As true Man Jesus knows all things and can do all things. As true Man He possesses all knowledge and all power. As true Man He is seated at the right hand of God’s majesty and power. The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord rests upon Jesus Christ according to His human nature, without limits.

As Isaiah foretold, Christ our Lord uses His almighty power and perfect knowledge for our good. He reigns over us all with perfect equity. He helps the lowly and punishes the wicked. He gives us every good and perfect gift, even His Holy Spirit to be our Helper, to bring us safely to our heavenly home.

Lord Jesus Christ, rule over us by Your wisdom and might, that we dwell securely as Your people here on earth and there in heaven. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 3

Romans 1:1-7

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Romans 1:1–4, ESV)

The Gospel, the Good News of our salvation, was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was born, lived, died, and rose again. But that’s not when it came into existence. That’s not even when it was first made known. Indeed, from the first sin in the Garden of Eden God promised a Savior who would deliver us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Throughout the ages, to the patriarchs and kings, through the prophets and priests, God continued to speak and reveal His glorious Gospel to mankind.

Through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures God promised that the Savior would be the Son of David according to the flesh, and He was: Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, of the line of Judah, a Shoot from the stump of Jesse, as Isaiah foretold. Through the prophets in the holy Scriptures God also promised that the Savior would be the Son of God, and He was: the Holy Spirit indisputably designated that Jesus is true God by His resurrection from the dead.

All this was made known to God’s people of old not through their own efforts or wisdom but through the Word of God alone. Still today it is through the Word alone that Jesus Christ our Lord is made known to us. For this reason, Paul and the other apostles were set apart to proclaim the Gospel of God among all the nations. Through the preaching of the Word, we are called to be saints and possess the grace and peace that comes from the Triune God alone.

Heavenly Father, grant that Your Gospel may be proclaimed here and among all the nations, that many would know Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 3

Luke 4:16-30

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17–21, ESV)

The Apostle John writes that Jesus “came to His own,” (1:11a) that is, to the Jews. After all, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, from the line of Jesse, and it was the Jews who “were entrusted with the oracles of God.” (Romans 3:2) They had received the revelation of God in their own language throughout the centuries. They had the promise that God would raise up one of their own brothers to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

When Jesus came in the flesh, the Scripture was finally fulfilled. As God had promised, His Son had come to His own. But, as John continues, “His own people did not receive Him.” (1:11b) In Nazareth, His hometown, Jesus spoke gracious words to His people, and they rejected Him out of jealousy and skepticism. “Is not this Joseph’s son?” they asked, and they wanted Him to perform miracles to prove His divine claims. When He did not, they attempted to kill Him, but He passed through their midst and went away.

We who are baptized are God’s people now. Christ comes to us, His own people, today in the Means of Grace. May we receive Him as He comes in His Word and Sacraments, not in self-righteousness and self-centeredness but in repentance and faith, and so be set free and live in our Lord’s favor.

O Christ, come to us, Your humble people, in grace and mercy, forgiving our sins and bestowing on us life and salvation. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 3

Psalm 89:1-8

“You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.” Selah” (Psalm 89:3–4, ESV)

The Lord spoke to David through the prophet Nathan, promising, *“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”* (2 Samuel 7:12-14a)

The opening verses of Psalm 89 are a meditation on God’s promise that this kingdom, promised to David, would be eternal: “I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever...I will make known Your faithfulness to all generations...Steadfast love will be built up forever...I will establish Your offspring forever and build Your throne for all generations.”

But the Kingdom of Judah would not last forever; the throne of David in Jerusalem would not endure for all generations. The kings and the people alike forsook God’s law, violated His statutes, and did not keep His commandments. For their transgressions God punished them, sending them into exile.

Nevertheless, God did not remove His steadfast love from them. Though Judah was faithless, God remained faithful. He did not violate His covenant or alter the word that went forth from His lips. For, as He willed from the beginning, He established His Son on the everlasting throne. As the true King of the Jews, He bore the iniquities of His people and suffered for them, that by His stripes they would be healed. He did this not only for the Jews but for the Gentiles also—for the whole world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For this, the heavens and the earth praise God’s wonders! Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and amen.

O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as You are, O Lord, with Your faithfulness all around You? We will sing of Your steadfast love forever. Amen.

Friday of Advent 3

Romans 15:8-13

“And again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:12–13, ESV)

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) Christ indeed came to the Jews (the circumcised) first to confirm the promises of God to the patriarchs. In His own words, He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. From this people He called His apostles, who were then sent first to Jerusalem and all Judea to preach the Gospel. All of this was done in fulfillment of the prophecies of old.

But the Gospel was not meant to be confined to the Jews. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes—also to the Greek. This too is in fulfillment of the promises of God, prophecies written by David and Moses and Isaiah and many others. Thus, Christ our Lord sent the apostles to the end of the earth, to proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation and make disciples of all nations.

For this reason, Christ, who was called “a shoot from the stump of Jesse” in Isaiah 11 is also called “the root of Jesse” in that same chapter. Jesus, who according to the flesh is the Son of David, has become the root from which the Holy Christian Church has sprung forth, filled with believers from all tribes and peoples and languages.

Whether Jew or Gentile, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, and such faith fills us with joy and peace. We have joy, because our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake, and peace, because we are united as one Body in one Spirit.

We praise You, O God, that You have called us to be members of Your Holy Christian Church through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 3

Isaiah 11:6-10

“They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:9–10, ESV)

Isaiah prophecies the coming of the Messiah, who would rule perfectly in the Spirit of the Lord with righteousness and faithfulness. He then prophecies the outcome of the Messiah’s righteous reign: the restoration of creation as God intended it in Genesis 1. Predator and prey would dwell together in peace, man (even little children) would exercise dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth, every beast of the earth would receive every green plant for food, and even the weakest and most defenseless children would have nothing to fear from once-deadly creatures.

This prophecy certainly calls to mind the new creation, which will come into being when Jesus Christ returns in glory to judge both the living and the dead. In the new heaven and the new earth, God *“will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* (Revelation 21:4)

But we should not forget that the angels sang, “Peace on earth among those with whom God is pleased,” when Jesus was born in time. (Luke 2:14) In time Jesus promises, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27) This means that the prophecies of Isaiah about the righteous reign of the Messiah are even now fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, His atoning death on the cross, and the proclamation of the Gospel.

As the Good News of Jesus Christ has gone out to all nations, even now the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, even now of Him the nations inquire, and even now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, since we have been justified by faith.

O God, grant us the peace that comes from the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

John 1:19-28

“John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,”
(John 1:26, ESV)

One you do not know. What a gut-wrenching thought! You are a priest and study the Scriptures constantly. You strive to be strict and faithful to God’s Word, which is why you belong to the sect of the Pharisees. It is your job to recognize the Messiah. You have been waiting for Him. You have longed for Him your entire life. But you are mistaken. You have erred. The Baptist isn’t the Messiah, even though you thought that he was. Not only have you made an error in judgment, but you are also still making that error. The Messiah is there. He stands at the shores of Jordan. But you don’t recognize Him. You don’t know Him. You have missed the One you are waiting for. All your study and all your work has come to nothing. This is terrifying.

We must ask ourselves: do we know Jesus? We know that He stands among us today through His Word and sacraments. But do we know Him? Or are we like the church in Laodicea, where Jesus stands outside and knocks, saying: *“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked* (Revelation 3:17)?”

What does it mean to know Jesus? To know Christ is to know His benefits. Christ is a saving remedy. What good is the mere history of the Bible if you do not trust that Christ took on flesh and suffered and died for the forgiveness of your sins? The Pharisees and priests did not know Jesus because they didn’t want His benefits. Why did they need John’s baptism? They were holy, or at least they thought they were. This is why they didn’t know Jesus. But we know Jesus. We know that we need His benefits. We hear His Word. We receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is how we know Jesus, Who stands among us today.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You stand among us today through Your Word. Enlighten our hearts so that we might know You, that is, that we might recognize and receive Your benefits. Amen.

Monday of Advent 4

Isaiah 19:18-25

“Whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:25, ESV)

Egypt is a place of slavery, sin, and evil. They oppressed the Israelite people for centuries. They murdered the baby boys in the Nile. They worshiped bestial gods. Assyria was worse. Nineveh is called the bloody city by the prophet Nahum. The capital was filled with lies and plunder. In Isaiah 10, God speaks woe over Assyria, which became boastful and arrogant. Both kingdoms are empires of darkness. They are filled with idols, sin, and wickedness.

And yet, we see in the prophecy of Isaiah the conversion of these two evil empires to the true faith. God will bless Egypt and they will be called His people. Assyria, once the arrogant axe of God’s judgment, will be God’s *“workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).”* Israel will stand alongside these other formerly heathen nations. They shall be one, connected by a mighty highway. They shall especially be one in faith. This is a blessing in all the earth.

This prophecy shows us that the Gentiles shall enter the kingdom of heaven, especially in the New Testament age. We have here a splendid example of the spread of the true religion under the merciful direction of God, especially in Messianic times. No longer will the temple and the altar be confined to Mount Zion. Instead, *“there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border (v. 19).”* God will smite them through the Law. He will also heal them through the Gospel. They shall convert, turn, and be saved. Their prayers shall be as precious in God’s eyes as Israel’s prayer.

Christ came into the world to save sinners. He came to save the monstrous dragon called Egypt. He came to save the bloody nation of Assyria. God’s grace in Christ is given to all. No sin prohibits these nations from believing in Christ, our Lord.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You promised through Isaiah that Egypt and Assyria would become Christian. Call all unworthy sinners to repentance, that they may be Your people, Your workmanship, and Your inheritance. Amen.

Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Eve

Matthew 1:18-25

“But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).” (Matthew 1:20–23, ESV)

We confess that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. This doctrine is the truth of Scripture and essential for our salvation. If Jesus were conceived and born in the natural manner, as every other man has been conceived and born from the time of Adam and Eve, then He would be a sinner like the rest. We would then be lost and condemned forever, for no sinful man can redeem his brother.

But the Christ Child conceived in Mary’s womb was from the Holy Spirit, and therefore He is called holy—the Son of God. He is truly without sin, both original and actual. He fulfilled the Law of God, down to every iota and dot. He did so for us poor sinners who are conceived and born in sin, who have sin passed down to us from our parents from generation to generation.

Furthermore, as the Lamb of God, without the blemish of sin, our Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins in His death on the cross. “*He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:5)

All this is summed up in the name *Jesus*, the name given to Him by God through the angel Gabriel. He is called *Jesus* because He has saved us from our sins and dwells with us forever.

Glory to You, O Lord, for You dwell with us as our Savior, our Lord and God and our Brother according to the flesh. Amen.

Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day

John 1:1-14

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” (John 1:6–9, ESV)

John the Baptist was not the Light. Neither was Isaiah, nor Jeremiah, Micah, Malachi, Nathan, Moses, Jacob, or any of the other prophets and patriarchs of old. They were men no different from any other, except that they were sent by God to carry out a specific purpose: to bear witness to the Light. They were not to testify to any work of their own, or even necessarily to do any great work of their own. Instead, these men, called by God throughout their centuries, carried out their divine task by preaching and writing about the Light.

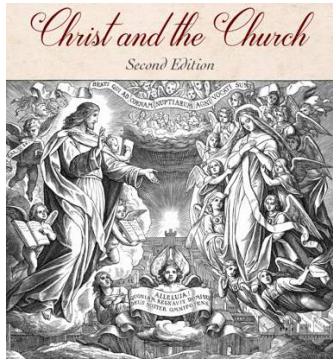
Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. He came into the world, becoming flesh and dwelling among us to give life and light to all mankind. He shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend Him. In fact, it cannot comprehend him. We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him. Only by means of the witnesses who testified to the Light is Christ made known to us. Only through the Word of God do we receive Jesus by faith. For this reason, God sent men like John to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

The true Light still gives light to everyone, and therefore God still sends men to bear witness to the Light by preaching the Gospel. Without the Gospel we remain in darkness and in the shadow of death. But through the Gospel the Holy Spirit creates and sustains saving faith in our hearts to receive Jesus and believe in His name. By His grace upon grace, we have been given the right to become children of God.

Thank You, heavenly Father, for those who have borne witness to Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

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