The Advent Reflections were written by Rev. George F. Borghardt, the pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in McHenry, Illinois.

The Christmas Reflections were written by Rev. Mark Buetow, the associate pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in McHenry, Illinois.

2016 Reflections Editorial Staff:

Rev. Aaron Fenker (Media Executive)
Mrs. Katie Hill (Editor)
Mrs. Kay Maiwald (Copy Editor)
Mrs. Minte Irmer (Copy Editor)
Mr. René Castillero (Audio Editor)

© 2016 Higher Things, Inc.
The First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2016

Today’s Reading: St. Matthew 21:1-9
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 1:1-28; 1 Peter 1:1-12

“And the crowds going before Him and following him cried out saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!’” (Matthew 21:9)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. He’s coming! The Lord is coming: to you, for you, as one of you, to save you. Jesus is coming! That’s the Advent season!

Advent looks a lot like Christmas. The world thinks Advent is Christmas. The world celebrates so much Advent as Christmas that by the time they get to Christmas Day, they are all Christmas-ed out!

But Advent isn’t Christmas! Advent is an entire season of its own, just to prepare you for Christmas. It’s a penitential season of violet repentance. So turn from your sins. Knock down the mountains of pride and sin in your life with the Lord’s words. Fill the valleys—the low points of your life—with forgiveness. Get ready! Prepare! The Lord is coming!

Today, the Lord rides into Jerusalem on the royal donkey. The kings of the world rode around on horses and chariots. That was a sign of their power and strength! But Israel’s King rode humbly on a donkey. The Lord alone was the Son of David’s strength! So, Jesus is the King entering into David’s city on David’s ride.

And as the King advented into His city, His people sang, “Save us, Son of David. Save us to the highest!” He will! He will save them, not with force of horses or chariots, but on the Cross!

Jesus is riding into Jerusalem where He will suffer and die to save His people from their sins. He is the Son of David. He is the Christ. He is the One who will rescue His people, not just for a little while or from their earthly calamities, but from their sins for all time.

He has saved you, too—in the water, in the Word, in the bread and the wine. His gifts are the means by which He comes, by which He advents to you. And as He saves you, you sing, too! “Blessed is He, Blessed is He, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!”

He is coming! The Lord is coming: to you, for you, as one of you, to save you. You have so much to repent of, and so much forgiveness to receive, that you’ll need a whole season to make yourself ready for His coming! That’s Advent! He’s coming to you. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Monday of the First Week of Advent
November 28, 2016

Today’s Reading: Jeremiah 23:5-8
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 2:1-22; 1 Peter 1:13-25

“In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”
(Jeremiah 23:6)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You were saved by Jesus’ death on the Cross. You are saved in the waters of Holy Baptism, in the forgiveness of sins proclaimed in the Gospel, and in the Body and Blood of Jesus. You will be saved on the Last Day when the Lord comes again in glory.

The Lord was your righteousness. Salvation is a past-tense reality for you, won for you with the holy life and the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. Jesus did in your place everything that is required of you by the Law of God. Every debt you owe and punishment you deserve, He took upon Himself on the Cross.

The Lord is your righteousness. Salvation is a present-tense reality for you. You are saved. You are forgiven. You are a child of God. You are holy and blameless before God. Everything that Jesus did for you on Good Friday is true for you, right now, in the delivery of His gifts. You even have eternal life right now!

The Lord will be your righteousness. Salvation is also a future-tense reality for you. As surely as Jesus lived for you, died for you on Good Friday, and rose again for you on Easter morning, you have nothing to fear from the Lord. On the Last Day, you will stand before God absolved—completely holy and every sin totally forgiven.

This is for your Advent comfort! All that is true that Jesus did for you, is also true of you right now, and will be true for you on the Last Day. You don’t have to worry that, somehow, God’s promises are going to run out of gas on you or that you will fall away, or that you will be responsible for your sins when Jesus comes again. Jesus has handled everything for you—past present, and future. It’s all answered by His death and resurrection and is delivered to you in His gifts.

Today, right now, you live in the reality of Jesus’ Advent. Confess your sins! Come clean to God for the times when you have lived as if His death on Good Friday isn’t true for you. Then, be forgiven in His gifts! This is the Christian life. This is how you live in the now and not-yet of Jesus’ salvation for you: confessing your sins and being forgiven! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
A Simple Form for Reflection

Adapted from Luther’s Small Catechism

As soon as you get out of bed in the morning or before bed, you should bless yourself with the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

“In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Pray the Psalm for the week.
The Holy Gospel is then read.
Read the Reflection for the Day.
Pray the Apostle’s Creed

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the creed and pray the Lord’s Prayer. If you wish, you may then pray this little prayer as well:

In the Morning:

“I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger, and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

In the Evening:

“I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

After that, with joy go about your work and perhaps say the Ten Commandments or sing a hymn. At night, go to sleep immediately with joy.

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

November 29, 2016

Today’s Reading: Romans 13:8-14
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-25; 1 Peter 2:1-12

“The night is far gone and the day is near. And so let us take off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:12)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The thing that shocked me most about living in the north was that the sun went down so early. Where I was raised, the seasons didn’t really affect the time of sunset. But here in Illinois, the closer you get to Christmas, the earlier it gets dark in the evening!

Not so with Jesus! The closer you get to Christmas, the more His light shines! The Lord Jesus is coming. It’s going to happen. He is nearer today than He was yesterday. He’s closer than when you first believed. Today is the day of salvation, and that means the whole world is lit up!

And since the Son is coming, it’s time to put away all the clothing of the night. All the works of darkness need to get thrown into the hamper! No more living for yourself and scratching your itches. Wash, in your baptism, all your pushing others down to make yourself look better.

You have put on the Lord Jesus Christ. You are baptized. You are clothed with Christ. When God the Father looks at you, He sees only the holiness of Christ washed over you, put onto you, draped around you in the water of the font. You are in the light of the Son of God!

You aren’t in the darkness any more. You have no reason to be enslaved to the filth from your past. Your sins can no longer define who you are. They may have, yesterday, when the sun went down... but not today!

So, Advent your sins today! Repent of them. Confess them. Be forgiven of them and prepare the way of the Lord with clean, white, baptized garments!

In Christ, you aren’t an unbeliever, a misuser of God’s name, or a despiser of His Word. Who you are has been defined by Him Whose clothes you are wearing. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He is holy, so you are holy. He is the Light of the world, so you are a light to the world around you.

But what if you fall into those sins again? What if you fail? Then, Advent your sins again! Wash, rinse, and repeat, confessing your dirty laundry and being forgiven and freed from them.

The closer we get to Christmas, the more His light shines on you. Jesus is coming. Your salvation is near. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
St. Andrew, Apostle
November 30, 2016

Today's Reading: St. John 1:35-42a

"On the next day, John was standing with two of His disciples and seeing Jesus walk by said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:35-36)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is the Lamb of God. "Lamb of God" is violet, Lenten language. It takes us to Holy Week, when Jesus is the spotless Passover Lamb, the Lamb slain at twilight for the sin of the people. "Lamb of God" also points us to the black of Good Friday when He is the sacrifice that saves His people from their sins.

Everything about your faith and your salvation depends upon Good Friday. Repent of ever thinking otherwise! There is no saving Advent without a Good Friday Lent. And Lent does no good for us without Advent preparing Jesus’ coming in His gifts. For what is won on Good Friday is delivered to you in the Lord’s Words.

In His gifts—the Gospel and baptism—Jesus comes to us, He advents to you. His words deliver the Spirit and the Spirit “works faith where and when He pleases in those who hear the Gospel,” (Augsburg Confession, Article V).

Andrew was the first-called. He heard the Baptist proclaim Jesus as the Lamb of God. So he went and followed Jesus. He was the first, but soon there were more! He ran with John to tell Peter, Andrew’s little brother, that they have found the Christ. But they didn’t find Jesus. The Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world, found them. He came to them. He delivered His words to them. Jesus’ words to come and follow Him deliver the very faith to believe Him to Andrew and John.

Hearing—that’s the way of faith! Faith flows from the Word. It comes from it. It is delivered by it. The words faithed Andrew and He believed. The words of the Gospel faith you, too, and you believe that Jesus died and rose again for you.

But today isn’t Advent violet, it’s blood red. The first-called Apostle was martyred for the Lamb of God. There is a tradition that says that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross. That’s why the symbol for Andrew is “St. Andrew’s Cross”—an X-shaped Cross.

Andrew teaches us that there really is a bit of Lent in Advent. Everything that he preached, and even how He died, points us to Lent. The Cross alone is the center of our faith— even in Advent. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Saturday After Epiphany
January 7, 2017

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 1:1-14,22-28; Romans 1:1-17

My mercy I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall stand firm with him. (Psalm 89:28 from the Introit for Epiphany 1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. Jesus shows up at the Jordan river to fulfill all righteousness by being baptized with the sinners—not because He is a sinner but because He is taking the sins of the world upon Himself. When Jesus is baptized and the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son!" He is showing that His covenant, His promise, stands firm.

God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a child born of a woman to crush the serpent’s head. The Lord promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would become a great nation. The Lord promised the Israelites who left Egypt that they would be His holy people. Over and over and over, God made promises.

And when Jesus stands in the Jordan river, God the Father announces that all those promises are being kept. In His Son. The Son who takes on our sins and goes to the wilderness to battle the devil. The Son who carries our burdens to Calvary and dies for our iniquities there. The Son who on the third day rose again to throw down the power of death and the grave.

The mercy of God is kept for Jesus. In fact, the mercy of God is in Jesus, and with all who are in Him. The mercy of God is kept for you in the waters of your baptism, in the Absolution proclaimed by your pastor, and in the Body and Blood of the One who is the fulfillment of all God’s promises.

Tomorrow, in the Divine Service, we hear again of Jesus, the One in whom all God’s promises come true. Not just true in general, but true for you, His holy and redeemed people. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Father’s word, the Spirit’s flight Anointed Christ in glorious sight As God’s own choice, from Adam’s fall To save the world and free us all. (To Jordan’s River Came Our Lord, LSB 405:5)
Epiphany
January 6, 2017

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” (Matthew 2:5-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Notice that the star didn’t guide the wise men straight to Jesus. It brought them to where they would hear the Scriptures. There, in the Word, they learned that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. When they went to Bethlehem the star rested over the house where Jesus was. This is still how our Lord does it. He reveals Himself in His Word. His preachers point out where He is. The Word reveals that the Son of God is born in Bethlehem. From the Scriptures we learn that Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose. From the preaching of the Gospel we hear that this all happened to save us. At the baptismal font, from the altar, and from the pulpit, the “star” of your pastor points to Christ. “There He is!” In the water. The Word. The Body and Blood. The Lord doesn’t leave anyone—Jew or Gentile—in uncertainty as to where He is.

Epiphany is not only a reminder that Christ is for all people, it’s also a confession that He’s in a particular place—His Word—for all people. Jesus is made known to these magi from the east because the promise He fulfills is for all nations.

It’s possible that wise men had heard the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) from men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When the Israelites lived in exile in Babylon and under the Persian kings, the Word of God was there. In what seemed like horrible circumstances, the Lord was preserving His people, to keep His promises and bring about salvation not just for the descendants of Abraham but for all people. So those “nations,” the Gentiles, show up in Bethlehem, and they, too, fall before Jesus to worship Him, who came to die and rise for them, too. And for the whole world! Happy Epiphany! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, who by the leading of a star made manifest Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know You now by faith, may after this life joyfully behold Your glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Epiphany)

Thursday of the First Week of Advent
December 1, 2016

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

“The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:14 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: To Bishops, Pastors and Preachers)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Small Catechism’s “Table of Duties” lays out what you owe your pastor: your ears.

St. Paul says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Faith clings to the Word put into our ears. Faith flows from the Word—preached and read. Faith lives and grows from it. It grasps hold of it. It trusts the word of God in the water. It believes that the absolution spoken by the Pastor isn’t his own words but the Lord’s forgiveness. Faith trusts Jesus’ promise that in the Sacrament of the Altar the Lord gives to us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink for the forgiveness of our sins.

The world would have you believe that you don’t need the external Word. It whispers to you that you should trust your feelings, your thoughts, and the things you do, to hold up before God—as if all of these things weren’t completely tainted by sin. Live this way, and you will be doomed. Apart from the Word, faith has nothing to cling to. It starves and dies and so do you. No Word, no faith!

Advent is the time to flee from such false talk and run to the external Word of the Gospel. (This is the point where you should thank God for your pastor.) Your pastor preaches the Word to you. He teaches it to you. He proclaims the whole council of God to you. He calls you out of your despising of God’s Word and delivers Jesus to you in the Word, the water, and the Lord’s Body and Blood.

“Therefore, the ears alone are the organ of a Christian,” says Dr. Luther (LW 29:224). That’s why you owe them to your pastor. Listen to the Word he preaches. Receive the Sacrament he distributes to you. Be in Bible Class and Sunday school so he can teach you. That's what would make your pastor happiest. Let Jesus feed your ears! For the ear is organ of faith, for faith comes by hearing. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Friday of the First Week of Advent  
December 2, 2016

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

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

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. No one getts me. No one understands what’s going on in my world. It’s the same bad stuff, only on another day. All I ever notice is the hurt and pain that my actions cause. Those who know me know how much I deserve to be on the naughty list. Just think what would happen if they knew how dark I really am!

It’s so cold in the dark. It’s so lonely even when we’re surrounded by people. It’s hard to try to stay bright, when the darkness surrounds you, isn’t it? And then, that feeling of failure when we get dark just makes everything around us darker, doesn’t it?

Into our dark universe God sends a promise: Light is coming. Not a fake light, not a “chin-up, tough it out, and it’ll get better” light. No, those lights aren’t lights at all. They are just various degrees of darkness.

No, His Light, God’s light, is coming in the most unlikely place. “Unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given.” Given as a gift—underserved and unmerited. The God who loves us without worthiness in us gives us the Light of the world. He gives us a child!

He is born “to us”! That’s for you and me! All that is said about Him is said about Him for you and me. The Son of God will be born to lift us out of our sins, out of our darkness and death, into the Light!

And everything that is anything in this life is placed upon His shoulders. Your sins, your darkness, your naughtiness He takes it upon Himself and it all dies with Him. That’s why His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

You don’t have to make sure you shine for others this season. You don’t have to put on a smile to light people up when you are really dying inside. For the Light that lights up your world doesn’t come from inside of you. No, Christ is your Light. He doesn’t just enter the darkness of your life. He shines through you to the whole world.

The days may still seem dark. But, to you and for you is coming the Light on Christmas. His light is washed over you. It’s forgiven into you, it’s put right onto your tongue in the Body and Blood of Jesus. For you, to save you, from the darkness that surrounds you, a Child will be born. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twelfth Day of Christmas  
January 5, 2017

Today’s Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19


If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. (1 Peter 4:14)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sad, but true, the world doesn’t really like the name of Jesus. We see it somewhat superficially in the battle to “keep Christ in Christmas.” (Just look around. Christmas ended twelve days ago for the world while the Church keeps celebrating). But if the world hates the name of Christ, then it will hate you who bear His name.

It’s strange to think that the Christmas season, which began with the announcement of “peace on earth” ends with the assurance that our reproach and suffering are to His glory. But there you go. You bear the name of Jesus. You’ll suffer.

But remember what that Name means! “Yahweh saves!” There is no reproach or hatred or mockery or suffering that you could suffer from which Jesus does not deliver you. His death. His resurrection. His baptizing you. His putting His Word in your ears. His giving you His Body and Blood to eat and drink. All of that is the glory of God at work in you while the world blasphemes and mocks.

As much as we want Christmas to be a time of “peace” and “joy,” those things aren’t given by God the way the world thinks of them. Remember, the true peace and joy are a quiet conscience before the Lord and the good news that your sins no longer condemn you but are forgiven.

As the Christmas season draws to a close, we give thanks for the birth of our Lord in the flesh. He comes to take away any reproach we would have before the Father and to make us God’s dearly beloved children. That is a true gift that the world doesn’t understand but can never take away. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

Thou Christian heart, Whoe’er thou art, Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move thee! For God’s own Child, In mercy mild, Joins thee to Him; how greatly God must love thee! (O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is, LSB 372:4)
Let all together praise Our God Before His glorious throne; Today He opens heav'n again To give us His own Son, to give us His own Son. (Let All Together Praise Our God, LSB 389:1)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and your mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1–3 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: To Parents and Children)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus! Amen. If only parents and children got along! If only your parents didn’t drive you crazy and if you didn’t make them shake their heads in frustration! But they do. We do. Parents and kids have been butting heads ever since there have been parents and kids!

Jesus, we recall, grew up obedient to Mary and Joseph. We can say it this way: When it comes to the Fourth Commandment, Jesus kept it. But His keeping it doesn’t make Him that annoying goody-goody kid. It makes Him your Savior. That’s the way Jesus works. Every bit of the Law that He keeps, gets put on your account, your record. Every bit of the Law you break, that is laid on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God.

When it comes down to it, parent-child relationships aren’t going to get better because parents and kids stop driving each other crazy. Rather, they’ll survive through the forgiveness of sins each receives from Jesus and then gives to the other.

Parents: Jesus died for your mistakes and failures as mothers and fathers. He forgives you. Your baptism says that your failings as a parent will never count against you but against Him on Calvary. Living in the glad confidence of that forgiveness, you can learn to forgive your children and ask their forgiveness when you sin against them.

And children, likewise. Every bit of dishonor toward your parents has been laid on Jesus and is forgiven you. Therefore learn to forgive your parents their faults and to ask forgiveness when you sin against them.

Then both, parents and children, rejoice to go the Lord’s house together, receiving His forgiveness and living joyfully in that blessed gift. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.


Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and your mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1–3 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: To Parents and Children)
Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is no promise that life will get better for you today. From what Jesus says, it sounds like it will get worse. But take comfort! Jesus’ promises when He comes, your Redemption will draw near.

And since it is true that things will look up on the Last Day, that makes today a day to look up in faith, too. The same Jesus who fed you His Body and Blood today in church will come again on the Last Day to save you. Look up, soon, your salvation is coming soon. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
The Ninth Day of Christmas

January 2, 2017

Today's Reading: Genesis 46:1-7

So He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. (Genesis 46:3)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. One of things we should notice about Jesus’ life is that He does things that Israel did in the Old Testament. Jacob (whose name was Israel later on) took his family and moved to Egypt. When Jesus was little, Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to avoid King Herod’s trying to kill Jesus. Later, the Lord sent Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Later on, the angel told Mary and Joseph to return home. God called His Son out of Egypt.

God made promises to Abraham. Also to Isaac. Also to Jacob. The fulfillment of those promises is Jesus. In doing a sort of “reliving” of Israel’s life, Jesus shows that He is the fulfillment of those promises. Those promises are about Him.

But He takes it farther. Where Israel kept turning away from the Lord, Jesus steadfastly set His face to do His Father’s will, to go the way of suffering and death for sinners. To be under the Law and redeem those under the Law. He is, in essence, the perfect “Israel.”

And you are now part of that “great nation” which the Lord promised to Jacob. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not just those who are related by blood. Rather, through faith in Jesus Christ, through our baptism into Him, we are all part of God’s family. Through faith, we are all descendants of Abraham and that means heirs with him and all of God’s people. We are heirs of all of God’s good gifts and promises. Forgiveness, life, salvation, a place with God—all these things are yours, too, for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus is born to save the world. He does this by being all that the Lord promises for all the people to whom He promised it. And to all people. Jesus is the proof that God always keeps His promises. And those promises are yours because you are included in that great nation of His. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

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 359:2)

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

December 5, 2016

Today’s Reading: Malachi 4:1-6

“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.” (Malachi 4:2)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. So which Last Day are you going to get? Will the Last Day be burning hot like an oven for you? Or will the Sun of Righteousness rise up with healing in His wings for you? Will you burn up with all the evildoers? Or will you jump out of all your suffering and pain like a calf hops out of the stall, finally free?

The answer to the question depends upon whether the Last Day is about Jesus or about you. This is a Law and Gospel, sin and grace, faith and works kind of question. Do you stand before God by what you do and don’t do, or do you stand before Him by Jesus alone — that is, by faith alone?

If you go about your life working your way to God, by earning His favor, trying to make deals with God, then you’ll find yourself in unquenchable fire on the Last Day. God’s Law never lies: What you have done is evil. You have lived for yourself even when you tried to live for God. You will never deserve for God to cut you a break. You can’t earn His love. In fact, He hates what you have done. You deserve nothing but punishment, and you are going to get it. The dark, terrible, loneliness of the grave and hell. The Last Day for you will be nothing but Law Day.

What you need, what I need, is for the Sun of Righteousness to appear! We need Jesus to come. Only God Himself can save us from what He should do to us! We need God to live out His Law and give us the credit for it. We need God to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserve.

Jesus comes born of the Virgin, born under God’s Law, to redeem us from God’s law that we might be children of God (Galatians 4:4). You are saved, not by what you have and haven’t done but by the God who sent His Son to die for you.

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent
December 6, 2016

Today's Reading: Romans 15:4-13

“And again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even the One who rises up to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope.’” (Romans 15:12)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Who are God’s people? Is He just for the Jews? That question caused much division in the early church!

The Jews were God’s people of the Old Testament. They were children of blood and promise—born of Abraham by blood, and blood-marked in circumcision. To them God gave His Law, written on stone tablets.

The Gentiles were not God’s people. Another name for “Gentile” was “sinner.” They followed different gods. They ate what they wanted, lived for themselves, and didn’t have or know God’s Law. They just couldn’t and shouldn’t be God’s people. How could God ever love them?

Advent is the time to repent of what we think, see, and know, and to cling to the Word of Jesus. The answer to who is a child of God, who God is for, can’t be found by looking inside ourselves. We’re filled with sin! To find out who are God’s people, we need to look outside ourselves: we need to look at Jesus.

For what might have seemed a whisper in the Old Testament spoken by the Prophets became a shout when Jesus advented. God is for all in the Christ. He doesn’t distinguish between persons. He doesn’t deal with people by who their family is. He doesn’t treat sinners as they merit, nor does He harbor anger forever. He sets our sins upon His Son.

Jesus was born, lived, preached, was seized by the chief priests and teachers of the Law, beaten, mocked, condemned falsely, suffered, and was crucified not just for some people, or even good people, but for all. Then, on the third day, the Son of David, Jesse’s root, does just what Isaiah promised: He rises up out of the grave to rule the Gentiles.

It’s not just that if God is only for certain people, we are lost. It’s that if God is for everyone because of something about them, we are all lost. We all sin and we all fall short of being able to earn God’s favor.

Who are God’s people? Here’s our Advent hope: Jesus. In Him, all the things that are “us” and “them” don’t matter. In Him, God is for Jews, Gentiles, guys, and girls. He is for sinners in the suffering and death of Jesus. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Circumcision and Name of Jesus
January 1, 2017

Today’s Reading: Luke 2:21

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. (Luke 2:21)

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Jesus.” That’s Greek for “Joshua.” And “Joshua” is Hebrew for “Yahweh saves.” Because Jesus will save His people from their sins. And He will do it by shedding His blood. And here is first blood! The first blood shed, when Jesus is circumcised.

The circumcision of Jesus is a double reminder. First, it’s a reminder that Jesus keeps the Law for you. Every last commandment. Every last thought, word, and deed of Jesus will be pure and perfect in line with the Law. And that counts for you. It is the promise that this little child will grow up living your life that you should have, but have not.

It’s also a reminder that He will die your death. He will suffer the price for breaking the commandments. For violating the Law. Your sins will be laid on Him. Your sin will be counted as His. And it will draw blood. Today with a knife. Later with a crown of thorns, scourge, and nails. This One will die your death to set you free from the wrath and judgement of God.

All that is what His name means. Yahweh saves. That’s what Jesus does. His name isn’t “Yahweh judges” or “Yahweh condemns” or “Yahweh lets you get away with anything.” It’s Yahweh saves—by bleeding for you. From the moment the angel told Mary and Joseph that this child would be called “Jesus” to the moment they gave Him that Name when He was circumcised—that Name says it all: He saves. That’s what He does.

Eight days after He is born, the Lord sheds His blood for you. Circumcision was the sign of God’s promise that the Savior would one day be born. Now, carried out on the Savior Himself, circumcision is the sign that God’s promises are kept and that Yahweh saves His people. Joshua, Jesus. His Name. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

He undertakes a great exchange, Puts on our human frame, And in return gives us His realm, His glory, and His name, His glory, and His name. (Let All Together Praise Our God, LSB 389:4)
Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus
December 31, 2016


Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12:40)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. So predictable. Every year. The countdown. The ball drops in Times Square. We have it down to the second. Happy New Year! And again in a year. And again. As if it will never change. But some day, some time, Jesus will come again. Are you ready? What if He were to interrupt the countdown tonight and appear in the sky like the lightning flashing from east to west? Would you be ready?

You already are ready! He’s made you ready. He made you ready for His return the moment the water and Word were splashed upon you at the font. He makes you ready and prepared every time you eat and drink His Body and Blood and every time your pastor declares your sins forgiven.

And that’s because Jesus has told us that He is coming back. He made you ready at Calvary when He shed His blood to blot out your sin. He made you ready when He prepared you for death by dying on the cross. He made you ready when He made possible your resurrection by His own rising from the dead.

New Year’s Eve is sort of funny. It’s a great, big party for something we know is going to happen. Yet when we gather in the Divine Service, we are celebrating and anticipating something without knowing when it will occur. Yet we are ready because Jesus has told us that He is coming back.

The first time He showed up was unexpected. The shepherds heard about it and later the wise men. When He comes again, the world will still not be ready. But you are ready. Jesus Himself has prepared you. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear; Arise, O Sun so longed for, O'er this benighted sphere. With hearts and hands uplifted, We plead, O Lord, to see The day of earth's redemption That sets Your people free! (Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers, LSB 515:4)

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent
December 7, 2016


“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: What Hearers Owe Their Pastors)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Your pastor is your pastor because Your Lord Jesus sent Him to be your pastor. God could have sent you any number of pastors from all over the world. But God, in His wisdom or maybe because of His sense of humor, sent you the one you have.

God never promised perfect pastors. Yours isn’t perfect. His family isn’t perfect either. Just like you, a pastor has good days and bad days. He has sins that he knows about and is working out in confession. He has sins that He doesn’t know about that you may have to endure.

His faults are not why He was called to be your pastor. He was apostled (sent) by the Lord Jesus to advent you. Everything that He does, everything that He says, is to point you to Jesus, the Coming One. He’s in your life to knock down the mountains of sins in your world with the Lord’s words and to fill the valleys of darkness with Jesus’ forgiveness.

You don’t have to call him “Pastor.” You can call him whatever you want. But when you are tough spot, “George” can’t save you. However, “Pastor” is going to speak in the place of Christ and open heaven for you with three little words: “I forgive you.” So you might consider respecting him and calling by what he wants to be called.

Your pastor’s whole job is to point you to Jesus in order to save you. When you stray, he’s the shepherd who is going to toss you back into the sheep pen kicking and screaming. When you get lost, God will send him to find you. That’s why he’s been called to be your pastor.

You don’t have to like your pastor. But you are given to respect him. That means you give up your sins. Repent of them. Hear the Lord’s Word of forgiveness from your pastor’s mouth. Then, take and eat the Body and drink the Blood of Christ.

Remember, it’s not an accident that your pastor is your pastor. He’s a gift from God. Be a gift to him, and receive the Lord’s gifts in peace with God and those around you. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Thursday of the Second Week of Advent
December 8, 2016

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

“And the world is passing away along with its desires but the one doing the will of God remains forever.” (1 John 3:17)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The world is coming to an end. That seems scary. But this is for your comfort: The end of the world is for your good.

The Last Day is victory day for you. It’s the end-of-your-sadness Day. It’ll be the last time you cry because God will Himself wipe the tears from your eyes. You know that sin you fell into today, the one you can’t seem to beat? Soon, it’s not even going to tempt you anymore. Your sins are going to fade away. The hurt that you feel, the pain of loneliness, the shame… it, too, will pass away in the glory of the return of the Son of God—going up smoke with the rest of the world.

All that will remain for you is the One who went through death and hell to save you—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His death is your Last Day. All the bad, all the evil, all the awful of the Last Day falls upon Him. He takes it upon Himself. He dies.

Easter is your Last Day in Jesus. Holy Baptism is His coming to you. Holy Absolution is how He’s going to deal with you. Take, eat; take, drink His Body and Blood and live forever and ever and ever! Amen.

The Last Day is such good news for you that it spills over into right now! For the Last Day isn’t some far off event for you. By faith, the Lord’s advent is right now to you in the His gifts. This world, with all its pain and suffering, is already passing away for you in Jesus. The one who does the will of God; that is, the one who believes that Jesus died and rose again for them, will endure forever.

His good and gracious will is to save you. His desire is to have you as His child. Everything that He does, everything that He works in Christ, is to accomplish His salvation in you. Even the Last Day is going to happen for your good and salvation.

Since the time is short, live in the reality of His Last Day salvation. Bury your sins in the waters of your baptism. Give them up for Advent and don’t pick them up again on Christmas. Die to them. Your life is in Christ, who is coming soon. Live and be forgiven for all time.

The world is coming an end soon and everything that ever worried you or hurt you is coming to an end with it. That’s not scary. It’s for your good. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Sixth Day of Christmas
December 30, 2016

Today’s Reading: Galatians 4:1-7

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

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the fullness of time. When Roman roads connected the world. When travel was relatively safe. When the Word of God has spread far and wide through the Jews who had traveled with it. When it was just the right time for the Lord to keep the promise He had made to Adam and Eve and the generations thereafter.

God sent forth His Son, born under the Law to a faithful Jewish mother, a daughter of Israel, married to a man of Israel. Circumcised the eighth day, sacrifices offered at His presentation in the temple. Jesus, born to be bound under the Law and Commandments, to keep and follow them perfectly.

He came to redeem those who were under the Law because we haven’t kept the Commandments. Because we don’t love God and love our neighbor. Jesus came to redeem—to buy us back—not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, and then by rising from the dead the third day.

And He did this that we might receive the adoption as sons. What He did in redeeming us, He gives to us in the waters of Holy Baptism, in which we are born from above. New birth. A new creation. Now, God is our Father. Jesus, our brother. We are a part of the Lord’s family and people—not orphans but His precious and holy ones, for whom His Son came into this world.

There’s a lot in those few words of St. Paul. Fullness of time. God’s Son. Redeeming. Adopting. It’s a beautiful summary of salvation on this, the sixth day of our celebration of our Lord’s birth. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

Hail, the heav’n born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all! He brings, Ris’n with healing in His wings. Mild He lays His glory by. Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!” (Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, LSB 380:3)
The Fifth Day of Christmas
December 29, 2016


Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: To Wives)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Modern sensibilities don’t like that word “submit,” especially applied to wives. As if the wife is supposed to just do whatever the husband says all the time and let him boss her around. But that would be a bad and distorted idea of “submit” that doesn’t include the phrase St. Paul actually used: “As to the Lord.” What does that mean? Well, how does the Church submit to Christ? Very simply, she lets Him do the work of saving her. He gives His life into death and then washes her to make her spotless and blameless.

A wife should expect that of her husband: to overlook and forgive her sins; to be the one person in the whole world who will forgive her and love her unconditionally like Jesus does. Considering that, the idea of a wife submitting to her husband really goes against the world after all but not in the way we think. Rather, it calls husbands to love their wives in a way that the world doesn’t recognize in its selfishness.

Even though it’s Christmas time and we think of Jesus’ time as a baby, this Baby will grow up to be the heavenly Bridegroom. His first sign will be at a wedding. And the blood and water that flow from His side on Calvary remind us of the creation of Eve from the rib (the side) of Adam. As the church, the Bride of Christ, we look to Jesus to care for us, to love us, to forgive us, and cleanse us and make us spotless in God’s sight.

Baptism and the Supper of Jesus remind us that Christ’s Bride, the Church, wears the robe of His spotless righteousness and there is an eternal wedding feast waiting for us. The love of a wife for her husband in an earthly marriage is a beautiful picture and reminder of this reality which Christ brought about when He came into this world. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heav’n He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died. (The Church’s One Foundation, LSB 644:1)

Friday of the Second Week of Advent
December 9, 2016


“And y’al know that He epiphanied [appeared] in order to take away sins and there is no sin in Him.” (1 John 3:5-writer’s special translation)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You aren’t a sinner. You never sin—ever. You aren’t a failure. You don’t go too far. You don’t fail far enough when it comes to God. Everything you do is not wrong. In fact, you can do no wrong before God. You aren’t getting better, you are completely perfect. You are one hundred percent a saint. This isn’t hyperbole! This isn’t my deceiving you with flowery words or trying to make you think positively. This is who you are: in Christ, you have no sins.

He’s taken your sins away. St. John says that is why Jesus came. In Him, you aren’t a sinner. In Christ, not only do you have no sins. You can’t sin. In Jesus, you never fail. In the suffering and death of Christ, God calls you His child. In His resurrection, you are forgiven before God.

But when you look at yourself outside of Christ, you see nothing but your sins, your failures before God and others. The Law is right about you: when you do things that are unrighteous, that makes you unrighteous. That makes you unrighteous daily and much! You are one hundred percent a sinner outside of Christ!

So which is true of you? Are you completely and totally a sinner or are you completely and totally a saint? Both are true at the same time in this life! This is the war within you: Jesus is working out your salvation through contrition and repentance and the devil is dragging you back to your sins like a dog returns to His vomit. Daily, you struggle with your sins in this life. Daily, you repent and drown them.

In yourself, you are nothing but a sinner. All you do is sin. All you do is deserve condemnation. All you do is earn hell by your actions. But outside you, in Christ, in your baptism, in the Gospel’s Absolution, in the Body and Blood of Jesus, you are born of God. You don’t sin. You can’t sin. You are only forgiven.

This is your Advent life: repentance and faith. You repent of living for you. You repent of ever taking comfort in yourself or your improvement or your lack of improvement. Repent of you and believe that because of Jesus what God says about you is true: You are forgiven. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Saturday of the Second Week of Advent
December 10, 2016


"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again will I say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."
(Philippians 4:4-5 from the Introit for Advent 3)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s almost time to light the rose candle in your Advent wreath! Tomorrow is Gaudete Sunday, “Rejoice” Sunday! That comes from the Introit, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

Don’t just rejoice sometimes or on happy days like Gaudete. No, Paul says “rejoice always!” Every day, every hour, every minute, and every second be joyful before God. Your God has come to save you. With Him there is forgiveness, therefore He is feared!

What about bad days? Doesn’t Jesus know that some days make you feel like you just got kicked in the stomach? Some days are so bad that we know we will never forget them. Doesn’t Jesus know this?

He does! He knows the worst day in all of creation: Good Friday. That day, He suffered for all things that would make our days “un-rejoicable”. That day, He died for all the sins of all the world. That day, God died to save His people from their sins, to save you from your sins.

Paul doesn’t tell you to just “be happy always” but to “rejoice in the Lord always.” Everything flows from the “in the Lord.” You can be hurt. You can be sad. You can have a bad day. Your joy and certainty and rejoicing don’t rest on how your day is going. Even Good Friday was a bad day for Jesus! But it was still “Good Friday” because on Easter morning He rose from the dead for your forgiveness.

Advent proclaims this Gospel to you. No matter what else is true today, His advent is the most true thing! He is coming. He will save you! In His Good Friday and Easter, He has conquered everything that can make you sad, or hurt, or cry, or moan and groan in this life. All that hurts you stayed in His tomb. You rose again with Jesus in Holy Baptism.

Rejoice in the Lord’s salvation! Your joy was achieved on the Cross when Jesus won your salvation. It is delivered in the here and now and in the Word, water, and His Body and Blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. It will be true on the Last Day when you see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven to save you.

Light the rose candle in your Advent wreath tomorrow! It’s Gaudete Sunday, “Rejoice” Sunday! From the Introit, “Rejoice in the Lord always!” The Lord is near. Your salvation is here! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs
December 28, 2016

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

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem… (Matthew 2:16)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Well, so far since Christmas we’ve heard about St. Stephen who was stoned to death, St. John who had been exiled, and now the children of Bethlehem being slaughtered by wicked King Herod. Maybe it’s good to be reminded that no one who is a child of God escapes the world’s hatred. The devil and the world don’t care that children die as long as they can try to kill Jesus. But they can’t!

These little children of Bethlehem remind us that God’s salvation in Christ comes to us in a world filled with suffering and death. But it is also a reminder that God works everything out for our good. Yes, even these little ones die under the eye of the Father, who preserves the life of His only-begotten Son for now, but who will give Him up into death later on.

Some might accuse God of being cruel for allowing such a thing to happen. However, it’s not God’s cruelty but that of evil men who hate the Lord and His Son. Jesus didn’t come to shove King Herod over and take his throne. He came to establish the Kingdom of God—a kingdom established in grace, mercy, and the forgiveness of sins.

In the end, it is the death of Jesus that redeems these little ones. It is His resurrection that ensures they will live again and forever. Into Christ’s wounds we cast all our sufferings and cares, trusting that in Him, we will be saved from all that is horrible and evil in this world. Let the world do what it may, Jesus will make all things new when He comes again in glory.

And He already has begun to make all things new. Starting with the new you of your baptism. His Body and Blood and Word deliver His forgiveness and promise of everlasting life. We, too, will join those little ones in death and live with them forever with Jesus. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All praise for infant martyrs, Whom Your mysterious love Called early from their warfare To share Your home above. O Rachel, cease your weeping; They rest from earthly cares! Lord, grant us crowns as brilliant And faith as sure as theirs.
(By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 517:9)
St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
December 27, 2016

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

Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:23)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Another festival day in the Christmas season. This day we remember St. John, the Evangelist, who wrote that the Word was in the beginning and that “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14). John was the longest living Apostle and Evangelist (Gospel writer). While the New Testament was being written, you could always check with John as to whether something was true or not. John proclaimed Christ, the Word-made-flesh and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

A great gift of the preaching of the Gospel in the Christian Church is that the death and resurrection of Jesus are confirmed by eyewitnesses. John was one of those. He was there when Jesus was nailed to the cross on Calvary. He was there to see Jesus’ side pierced with a spear. He was there to see the empty tomb and Jesus alive on the third day.

It is John who teaches us that the Word-made-flesh saves us by His blood and water. John records Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus that we are born “from above” by water and the Spirit.” He relays Jesus’ words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. It is John who presents Jesus to us as the Bridegroom who makes water into wine. As the Lord who provides for His people bread. Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. John tells us that Jesus sent His apostles into the world to forgive sins. Everything about John’s witness as an Apostle and Evangelist points us to Jesus who saves us from sin, death, and the devil.

As we continue to rejoice in the birth of Jesus, celebrating the festival of St. John reminds us that the big deal of Christmas is that Jesus came in the flesh to shed His blood and save us. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

For Your beloved disciple Exiled to Patmos’ shore, And for his faithful record, We praise You evermore. Praise for the mystic vision Through Him to us revealed; May we, in patience waiting, With Your elect be sealed. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 517:8)

The Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2016

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:2-10
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 28:14-29; 1 John 5:1-21

“And when John heard in chains about the works of the Christ, he sent through his disciples and said, ‘Are you the One who is Coming or should we wait for another?’” (Matthew 11:2-3)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You are really trying. You go to church. Maybe you attend Sunday School. You are even reading a daily Higher Things Reflection! But you look at your life, and you can’t catch a break!

Jesus called John the Baptist “the greatest prophet born of woman.” Can you get a better character reference than that? John did what he was given to do by God. He preached repentance and forgiveness. And what did it get him? He was rotting in prison, waiting for King Herod to kill him! Wouldn’t you ask, “Are you really the Coming One, Jesus? The One who will save us from our sins?”

It’s easy to believe that God is good when the sun is shining and the day is beautiful. It’s much more difficult to do so when the sky starts to cloud up. It’s nearly impossible when it starts to rain down sadness. Doubt and despair creep in. Why isn’t God fixing this?

All of this unbelief has its root in the false idea that you have to earn God’s help by doing something like going to church, changing for the better—as if God only acts if you give him a good reason to do so.

Repent of those thoughts and look to where the Baptist points you! In the midst of despair, fix your ears on Jesus. Hear what He says. Watch what He does. “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up” (Matthew 11:5). Best of all, Jesus preaches the good news of forgiveness of sins to you.

In good times, your sins are forgiven. In happy times, Christ died for you. In sad times, Christ rose for you. When you’re tossed into prison for believing that Jesus is the Coming One who has saved you from your sins, you are baptized. When your heart is running out of beats and you are about to fall asleep, you have been fed the Body and Blood of Jesus and have eternal life.

You see, Jesus is the Coming One! He’s the One who was born, who did all that He did, who was betrayed into the hands of sinners, who suffered and died—all to save you. He rose, and is coming again for you. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Monday of the Third Week of Advent
December 12, 2016

Today’s Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:1-14; Jude 1-25

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

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The world thinks that religion is about guilt. It’s about feeling bad about yourself and finding some emotional crutch to get through the bad feelings. The more religion, the more you beat yourself down, the more you feel terrible about yourself, the better the religion!

But that’s not Christianity! Your Father in Heaven doesn’t enjoy smashing anyone with His Law. He preaches the Law to you because wants to save you! His Law needs to kill you of all the religion that you hold dear—all the deals you try to make with Him, all the false comforts you trust in, and all your living for yourself you do. You need to die to all of that in order that you might rise to new life in Him.

Your Heavenly Father doesn’t leave you in the guilt and shame of your sins. He comforts your troubled conscience! He rescues you from your guilt! He frees you from the sadness and shame of this world. He doesn’t just have comfort for you. He has double comfort! “Comfort! Comfort!” These are not just empty words! Backing up His double comfort word is His Good Friday and Easter work! He sent His Son who lived the life you should live before God’s Law. His Son died the death you should die. Good Friday is your Good Friday because of Jesus, and that makes Easter your resurrection, too!

You are the comforted. God, Himself, is the Comforter. You are washed in His comfort. You are warded with it. It fills your ears and your life. You are bodied and blooded of His Son. You receive His double comfort in His gifts—that’s faith.

Jesus gives comfort in all situations. Because of Jesus, everything will always be okay in the end. It has to be. The expressions that are supposed to give us comfort take on new meaning.

Your faith and religion are centered on Christ for you. It’s not about your feeling guilty or working harder to get better. Repent of that false religion. Trust that Christ, Himself, has taken on the guilt of your sins. God now has only forgiveness for you, only eternal life—achieved by Jesus on the Cross, and delivered to you in His gifts. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

St. Stephen, Martyr
December 26, 2016

Today’s Reading: Acts 6:8-7:2, 51-60
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 49:22-26; 50:4-51:8,12-16; Matthew 1:18-25

“However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? (Acts 7:48-49)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Merry Christmas indeed! Not for St. Stephen. Stoned to death by the religious leaders who hated what he preached. What was the accusation? That Stephen preached, for one thing, that Jesus was going to destroy the temple. So Stephen preaches Jesus, the true temple, the genuine tabernacle in which God dwells. For Jesus is, after all, the “Word become flesh who tabernacled among us” (John 1:14).

Jesus didn’t come to destroy the temple but to fulfill that for which it was a picture: God, right there among His people. That’s Jesus. God-in-the-flesh. That’s what Stephen preached. But for those hard-hearted men that was not good news. It didn’t mean peace with God. It meant threatening their self-righteousness and self-concocted religion. And in their rage they murdered Stephen.

It doesn’t seem like a very Christmasy story. It’s only the day after the holiday! But it is a reminder that those who believe and trust in Jesus will be hated by the world. For the world doesn’t want a Savior and doesn’t think it needs one and will try to silence anyone who says otherwise.

And so St. Stephen gives his life as a martyr, that is, a “witness” to Jesus. He proclaims Christ. He dies for that confession of faith. St. Stephen, on the heels of our Christmas celebration, is a sober reminder of why it was that Jesus came into this world in the first place: to save sinners. All sinners. Even the sinners who killed St. Stephen! Even the sinners who killed Jesus! And by water and Word and Body and Blood, the people of God have the witness of Jesus in every generation. That witness is that no matter what happens, the God who has come in the flesh has redeemed and saved you. Merry Christmas in the Name + of Jesus! Amen.

Praise for the first of martyrs Who saw You ready stand To help in time of torment, To plead at God’s right hand. Like You, our suffering Savior, His enemies he blessed, With “Lord, receive my spirit,” His faith, by death confessed. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 517:7)
The Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas Day
December 25, 2016

Today's Reading: Luke 2:1-20
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 49:1-18; Matthew 1:1-17

Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” (Luke 2:10)

Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Son of God is born. The Savior has arrived. The first sermons preached by this angel to shepherds is all about Good News. Not much Good News back then. Romans running everything. A new tax. Not much Good News now. Terrorism. The economy. War and disease and illness all around. But here is Good News. The Savior is born. And He's for all people. For shepherds. For Israelites. For you. The Good News, and “peace on earth” that come at Christmas don’t come because we get a nice white Christmas with soft glowing lights and some Burl Ives carols in playing the background. It comes because the One who makes all things new has been born. Jesus, “Yahweh saves” because He comes to save His people. The “peace on earth” doesn’t arrive because everybody stops fighting but because the One who is born has come to bring an end to the enmity we have with God. God is no longer against you because of your sins. He can’t be. For this Child that is born is born to take your sins and die for them on Calvary and rise the third day.

People can envision a big, bad, mean God who shows up and brings His fire and brimstone to kill bad people. But that’s not what the angel preaches. No, this Savior is born to save sinners. To rescue them from sin and death. To defeat the devil. To pay for your sins by dying and rising for you.

And, in a world that is full of what doesn’t appear to be much peace, the proof of our peace with God is the birth of Jesus. And it’s given in your new birth in the waters of baptism. It’s given to you in the flesh and blood of the One who Himself was laid in a feed trough when He was born.

Good News! There is peace with God. He’s not your enemy. He loves and forgives you. That is why Jesus was born this day for you. Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

“To you this night is born a child of Mary, chosen virgin mild; This little child of lowly birth Shall be the joy of all the earth.” (From Heaven Above to Earth I Come, LSB 358:2)

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent
December 13, 2016

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:15-30:14; Revelation 1:1-20

“For I am conscious of nothing against myself, but in this I am not justified. It is the Lord who judges me.” (1 Corinthians 4:4)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Don’t trust anything in you, dear child of God. Don’t put your faith in yourself. Don’t trust yourself. Don’t judge your works as naughty or nice. In fact, don’t even judge them at all! And don’t believe that not judging yourself or not putting your faith in yourself is going to save you. You are not justified before God by anything that is…you.

To be justified here means, “to be declared forgiven or righteous before God.” That justification is a gift from God to you! It doesn’t come because you do or don’t do something, but solely by what Christ did for you on the Cross. So salvation, heaven, eternal life, and how God loves you can’t depend upon you! It rests on Jesus alone!

I can’t emphasize this enough! Nothing in or about YOU saves you. Only Jesus saves! Even understanding the Gospel doesn’t save you. Only Jesus saves! Believing right doesn’t save. Jesus saves. Not sinning doesn’t save you, but sinning does damn you. Here it is again: Only Jesus saves.

And if you looked at any of the above and said, “Well, but I…” Repent. Stop trying to trust in something you! You are saved by Jesus alone. You are justified before God by Jesus alone. Even your believing this Gospel news is a gift from God!

Does this Gospel sound too sweet? You bet it is! Do you think this is hyperbole? It can’t be! God’s salvation in Christ is so hyperbolic that not even I can overstate it! It all rests on Jesus! All your sins have been answered for by Him. All your dying has been died for and death itself has been left for dead in the grave.

But what if I sin? Answer: Stop making it all about you! God will repent you. What if I don’t want to do works? Repent. You can’t help but do good works in Christ! Good trees bear good fruit. The Good-Friday-Jesus does good works for others through you! These works don’t save you though. They are really just for loving your neighbor.

Don’t trust anything you. Trust Jesus. He will save you. He already has judged you forgiven. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent
December 14, 2016

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

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior." (1 Timothy 2:1-3 from the Small Catechism, Table of Duties: Of Civil Government and Citizens)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen, Jesus just isn’t partly your Savior. He’s not just your Lord on Sunday morning, and then the rest of the week He’s on the fence about you. You don’t have a separate churchy life and a state life.

The Lord is good to you in the suffering and death of Jesus when you pray for Him to be. He’s also good to you when you don’t. He’s got your back when the sky is clear and the sun is shining or when it’s dark and rainy and no one wants to go outside.

When it comes to your government, Jesus doesn’t just stop giving gifts to you! The same Lord who died for you on the Cross gives the authorities in your life to you as another gift. They are given to protect you from evil in the world and to be the curb that contains sin.

The Lord gives you your leaders. They wouldn’t be the authorities in your life if He hadn’t put them there. In our country, we elect the leaders we want. That’s how He gifts us with them. So, the president is your president whether you like the person or not. Your governor is your governor even if you didn’t support him. Your mayor is your mayor even if you don’t know his name. Each office is filled by God for your good and protection, and for you to live a peaceful life of submission under their God-given authority.

What if they aren’t faithful leaders? What if they are unChristian people or do unChristian things? If they ask you to do something against God’s Law, you must respectfully obey God rather than men. And since we vote on who our leaders are in a constitutional republic, you should vote against them in the next election.

This is why you are given to pray for your leaders! Pray for your president and all those in authority. They are sinners! Pray that they may be faithful and that God would use them to give you a peaceful and quiet life lived in your baptism. Jesus has given you every good gift in your life. He has given you salvation. He’s also the Lord and giver of each leader in your life. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas Eve
December 24, 2016

Today’s Reading: 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)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Blessed is He! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! God is coming! For behold, the Virgin conceives and bears a Son! God is with us!

God has changed everything! You don’t find God way up beyond the sky. You don’t have to look up to find Him at all! Tonight, you will find God wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger!

But in these last few hours of Advent, there’s still some more repenting to do. It takes God Himself to redeem you from your sins. You are in such a fallen state, you are so lost that you can’t save yourself. God has to come down from heaven to take on your flesh and buy you back from sin and hell. Consider that this night, with holy fear, and repent of your sins while there is time.

Then, rejoice! For Immanuel, God Himself, is forever with you. No sin separates you from God anymore. No transgression drives Him away from you—not since Christmas! In the darkest places of your life, in the loneliest hole of your existence, He comes to save you. He takes on your flesh to redeem your flesh. He takes on your humanity to sanctify your humanity. You are God’s child now.

There’s no more excusing your sins by saying, “I’m only human” now. Not since Jesus is born—as if being human is a bad thing! No, Jesus is a human man. So being a human is a good thing, too! What He has taken on, He has redeemed! He has made being human a good thing again!

The Virgin is with child! God Himself is born this night for you! Now, everything is possible for you! Nothing separates you from God anymore. Nothing separates you from those around you anymore either! Everything is covered with holy white tonight! The forgiveness of sins covers everything! That’s the best white Christmas there is!

God is so close this night that He is in your mouth! He takes His Body, born of Mary, and His Blood, shed on the cross, and He gives it to you in His Supper tonight. Christmas, after all, is the Mass of Christ! Receiving Him in the Supper is the best way to celebrate His birth!

Blessed is He! Blessed is He who comes! God is coming! He is here! Jesus is here! For behold, the Virgin conceive and bears a Son! Merry Christmas! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 23, 2016

Today's Reading: St. Luke 1:39-56
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 43:25-44:20; Revelation 11:1-19

“And why is it [given] to me that the Mother of My Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s the day before Christmas Eve. We are so close to the Lord’s coming that we are given by the Lord to hear about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Elizabeth knows who St. Mary is! Do you?

Elizabeth calls Mary the “Mother of my Lord.” Mary is the Lord’s Mother, God’s Mother! In the early Church, she’s called the Theotokos, the “God Bearer.” The Lord God Himself is cooking her womb. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is kicking inside her! The God of the burning bush, the One who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, the pillar of fire and cloud is in the flesh and blood of the Baby that she will give birth to on Christmas morning!

Elizabeth knows that the only God who saves His people is the one in the Virgin’s womb. The Lord of heaven and earth is in front of her, just inside St. Mary! Not the Father, not the Spirit, but the Son of God who has taken on our flesh to save His people from their sins!

St. John doesn’t miss it either! He’s in Elizabeth’s womb. And even as a tiny unborn baby, he still does his John-the-Baptist job and leaps in the womb when he hears Mary’s greeting to Elizabeth. Even the unborn John knows that all of our salvation, all our hope, all of eternal life is just a few feet from him in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.

This is so important! To understand who Jesus is, you have to get Mary right! Mary isn’t just the mother of Christ. That’s only half right! She’s the Mother of God Himself. God is born tomorrow to save us from our sins! It takes God to save us so He’s coming soon to do just that!

And none of this is said to magnify Mary, but only the One in her womb. She points us to Jesus with her song, too: “My soul makes big the Lord!” Everything about salvation — yours, mine, and even Mary’s, rests on Her soon-to-be-born Son.

We are so close! Get the angels ready! Cue up the chorus! Jesus is coming tomorrow night! But today, we get to learn a little about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Theotokos. She is the Mother of God. In her womb is God Himself for you! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent
December 15, 2016


“Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire;” (Isaiah 30:27)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God comes. He comes with all His might and power. He burns with anger and smoke. It’s scary. It’s downright terrifying.

Your Lord Jesus comes to save you. He advents to beat back your enemies. He sifts nations with a sieve of destruction in order to bring you out of all that might harm you. He is your Savior.

When you think of God coming, His advent, perhaps you think that He is coming to get you. He’s like a thief in the night who will catch you at the worst possible time. The Last Day seems scary. You are horrified and frightened.

What if He catches you right in the middle of committing your worst sin? Having run so far in the faith, will being caught in your sins mean you go to hell?

But Jesus is coming. So, repent! Stop your sins! Don’t just stop some of them. Stop all of them! Stop worrying about being caught because you will be caught. All you do on your own is sin, so you will always be caught. If you think that gives you permission to sin because you’re going to anyway, repent of that thought, too! Only someone in slavery to their sins would think that they have permission to sin!

God’s not coming to punish you. He’s coming to rescue you from the slavery of having to do your sins. He’s coming to free you from the guilt and the shame and the beating yourself up because you want to stop and fail. He’s coming with forgiveness and eternal life!

In the manger, He came to take upon Himself all that you are. He lived all that is required of you. He died for all that you have done. He rose from the dead to make you a child of God. He will come again with glory to rescue you from your enemies: the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh.

You don’t have to wait until the Last Day for Him to save you. He’s coming in His gifts to you today: in the waters of Holy Baptism, in the word of forgiveness that you read and hear, and this Sunday in His Body and Blood given for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins. In His gifts, God comes to you not in fire or thunder or anger, but in His means: Word, water, bread, and wine. Blessed is He who comes in the Name + of the Lord! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.
Friday of the Third Week of Advent  
December 16, 2016

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

“After this, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which had spoken like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Come up here and I will show you what must happen after this.’” (Revelation 4:1)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You don’t go to heaven. Heaven comes to you in Jesus Christ. You don’t earn heaven. Heaven is given to you in the Father’s sending of His Son. You don’t even open the door to heaven by how much you believe or do. Heaven’s door is blown open for you on Good Friday. It can never close on you.

For the longest time I worried about making it to heaven. I despared about whether I would keep believing or have enough faith until the end—as if I had to open heaven for myself. I dreaded the thought of standing before God and having every deep, dark, thing that I had ever done exposed for all to see how sinful I truly am.

This is salvation by works. It can have grace or faith talk in it. It can even have Jesusy-talk, too. But if you and I are earning heaven in any way that is up to us, it’s still works. If we have to worry about making it, getting there, or opening the door for Jesus, we are still outside.

He speaks. His Word invites us, enlivens us, and gives us heaven. Eternal life is only earned by Jesus’ faithfulness and by His suffering and death. Your forgiven life begins now in Christ and lives as long as Jesus lives. He lives forever. You will live forever in Him.

I know you think that God might not want you in heaven, or that He will close the door on you. Repent of that today! God didn’t create heaven for you to make it there. Heaven isn’t even the big deal for God. Jesus crucified for you—that’s the big deal to God. Saving you is what He does! The Lamb of God has been slain for you. That’s heaven!

You are a child of God! Heaven wouldn’t be heaven for the Father without you there. That’s why the Son of God went through Good Friday for you! God sent His Son so that you would have life in His Name.

Stop worrying about heaven. Jesus is coming, in the manger headed for the Cross, in the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead, and in His gifts today to you. Receive His coming, receive His heaven in the water, Word, bread and wine. For in Jesus, Heaven and eternal life are already yours! They will be yours on the Last Day. But, in Christ, heaven is already yours now. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

St. Thomas, Apostle  
December 21, 2016

Today’s Reading: St. John 20:24-29


“And then He said to Thomas, ‘Take your finger here and see my hands and put your finger here and thrust it into my side. Be not unbelieving but believe.’” (John 20:27)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Thomas’ name means “twin.” We might consider this a bit today. Some people call him Doubting Thomas. But that’s not who He is. It’s worse than that! He’s Unbelieving Thomas. You see, Thomas didn’t just think that maybe Jesus didn’t rise after all. He outright didn’t believe it. He rejected Jesus’ resurrection. Mary Magdalene and the Apostles told him they had seen Jesus alive. But, for Thomas, their testimony wasn’t enough. He needed, what he knew about death and life, just didn’t add up with they said.

We should consider Thomas’ unbelief with holy fear, dear friends! We know it all too well. Whenever we doubt God’s Word, hedge it, or adjust it to fit what we already know or think, we are pulling a Thomas! When we tweak God’s word to say what we feel God should really be like, we are unbelieving Thomas’ twin!

The good news is that Jesus doesn’t wait for Thomas to get his act together in order to save him. No! Jesus advents to Thomas in order to save him. What joy for Thomas! For us, too! Jesus doesn’t wait for us to get everything right and then say, “Now, I will be their God!” No, He comes to us in His Word. He washes our sins away. He enlivens us to faith. He puts the words in our mouths to confess our sins, and then He absolves us of them. He gives us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink for the remission of all our sins!

St. Thomas’ Day is a great Advent day because of the way Jesus saves Thomas. He shows Thomas His hands and His side—the proof that He really did die and rise again. But, more than that, in His wounds our salvation was won! In His side was how our salvation was delivered in the water and the blood—in Holy Baptism and Communion!

To make ready for His coming, repent of your Twin-ness. Turn from what you think and feel about Jesus and receive the preaching of the Apostles alone in the Scriptures—God’s Word alone.

God comes to you today, not in a locked room, but through His gifts of the Word and Sacraments. They lift you out of your unbelief and despair. They deliver to you Jesus’ Cross-won forgiveness. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 20, 2016

Today's Reading: Philippians 4:4-7
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:18-41:10; Revelation 8:1-13

“And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus…” (Philippians 4:7)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s the most lonely time of the year. ‘Tis the season to lose your cool. Peace on the earth and good will toward everyone but me. Bah humbug! In this time when there’s supposed to be “peace on earth and good will toward men,” what do you do when there isn’t?

Jesus is coming. In Him, and in Him alone, is peace. He is the peace that passes all understanding. He is the peace that we can’t lose or mess up. He is the peace that lasts for all time, even through death itself.

If it’s left to you, the season would stay Grinchy. You can’t pull up your stockings and be good for goodness sake. It just doesn’t work! All it takes is someone to be super naughty toward us, and whatever peace we are trying to jingle-bell up is going to come crashing down on us. If you try to have a holly, jolly Advent, you’ll only be as happy as you can muster up being happy. And that won’t last long!

But, if Jesus is your peace, if He is your joy, if He is your Advent, then it’ll be as peaceful and joyful as Jesus is peaceful and joyful. For the peace of God which fills this season flows directly from the Lord’s coming! His advent is going to save you and me from our sins. His holy life and His bitter sufferings and death are going to make us right with God. His resurrection delivered to us in baptism makes for the most Merry Advent of all! Forgiveness of all your sins brings joy and peace which not only surpasses understanding, but also doesn’t ever end!

So don’t drag all these bags of sin-filled-coal around! Repent of them! Change! Stop fighting and tearing others up! Leave it all behind! Be freed from it. Give up the despair that God doesn’t or couldn’t love you. You aren’t alone—not really. You are the baptized. You are forgiven. Forgetting that He is always with you in His gifts will only bring you down! That is why the best way to get His peace this year is to be repented of your sins! Peace comes from forgiveness! So repent and be forgiven.

Peace. He gives it to you. His Word, His baptism, and His Supper deliver His peace. You are on the receiving end of His peace this season. His peace which flows from His pierced-side will deck the halls of your life with joy that will last unto life everlasting! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent
December 17, 2016

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

“Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down the Righteous One; Let the earth open her womb, and bring forth Salvation.” (Isaiah 45:8 from the Introit for Advent 4)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is coming in just a week! Salvation is coming with Him! It’s raining forgiveness from above! Everything is being baptismally splashed with the mercy of God—puddles and puddles of God’s love for you in the suffering and death of Jesus.

The earth is going to open her womb. Salvation is going to come forth! Unto us is going to be born a Savior. The Virgin will conceive and bear a Son. His Name will be Jesus because He will save us from our sins. Even His name rains down salvation upon you!

God is coming. He’s not coming to damn you. His advent isn’t to judge you. No, God is coming to save you! In the manger, Jesus comes to save you. He takes on your flesh to live the life that you should live before God and to die the punishment for your sins.

The heavens declare the glory of God’s coming! God rejoices to save you. He wants to have you as His child. All that He does, all that Jesus says, every healing, every miracle is to save you. That is His love for you in Christ Jesus!

If everything He does is to save you—and it is—then His second coming is to save you, too! His coming on the clouds of heaven on the Last Day is to rescue you from all that hurts you. He comes to finally free you from the sin that enslaves you, the pain that won’t go away, and the suffering that just won’t stop. Because in Him, it does end. He wipes away all your tears on the Last Day.

This is why Advent is so joyful! Jesus is coming for our good. And as you prepare for His coming, God clears up all the things that would prevent Him from being a good God to you. You are turned from your sins. You are repented of your unbelief. He rescues you from all that would damn you. He frees you for more receiving of His coming.

It’s starting to cloud up! God is about to rain down salvation from the heavens on you! He is coming! He’s coming on Christmas to be born of the Virgin to die on the Cross to save you. He’s coming again in glory to rescue you from all the evils and pain around you and to take you to live forever. He’s coming in the Word today to splash your life full of His forgiveness and eternal life. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2016

Today's Reading: St. John 1:19-28
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 34:1-2,8-35:10; Revelation 6:1-17

“And 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?’” (John 1:22)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In a world where everyone is thinking, talking, and pushing themselves forward, St. John the Baptist must have looked just...strange. Here is a guy who doesn’t talk about himself. That’s not why he’s here. That’s not why God sent him.

St. John is a voice. He’s a preacher whose sermon is Christ is coming. He is coming to save. Make straight His paths! Knock down the arrogance and the pride in your life. Fill in the valleys of your world with the forgiveness of sins. Repent!

To the waters of the Jordan River, sinners came confessing their sins. But there was more than just confessing. In the water, they received forgiveness, which would be won by the One whose sandals John wasn’t worthy to stoop down and untie.

Every word John spoke, everything he did, every person he baptized, every Law he preached, was pointing the world to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. It was never about John or who John was or how great he was, or even why he did what he did. St. John’s work was always about Christ coming to save you and me!

Your life isn’t about you, either. Mine isn’t about me. But we’re self-centered and want to make everything about us. We want to push ourselves forward and others down. We believe people do things against us and do them deliberately to be hurtful. We see everything as focused on us. We’re our own favorite subject, favorite person, favorite winner.

This is a good thing to repent of this Advent season! Take a page out of St. John’s preaching: It’s not about you. It’s about Jesus for you, and for others through you. After all, your life, my life, isn’t all about us! We’re here to help others, to forgive them, to love them as God has loved us in Christ. ’Tis the season to build others up, to make them the center of our universe and, most of all, to forgive them!

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is coming to forgive! He’s coming to save—not only you and me but our neighbors, too! Make yourself ready in the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus on the Cross and delivered to you and me for the sake of those around us. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent
December 19, 2016

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-19
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God had spoken to Moses. He put His Word in his mouth. He sent Moses to save His people. God performed miracles and plagues through him. He parted the Red Sea and cast all of Pharaoh’s army and chariots into it. God saved His people through Moses.

God’s people in Jesus’ time wanted another Moses. They wanted a warrior to free them from the Romans’ oppression. They wanted someone from God to rescue them from their slavery. But they were so clueless that they didn’t even know what they truly needed to be saved from! The Romans weren’t their biggest problem! Sin was.

We think we know what needs to be fixed the most by God today for us. We don’t have enough money. People don’t understand us. We feel alone. We’ve lost the person we loved. We can’t do what we want to do or feel we need to do in this life. Try as we can, we just can’t fix them.

But these, too, aren’t our biggest problems. They are simply the symptoms of our true problem: sin. Sin keeps us from being content with what’s going on around us. It kills our joy. It stops us from appreciating all the gifts that God has given us.

Jesus comes into our world to save us from our world. He is the prophet like Moses. He is crucified because He doesn’t measure up to the Savior we think we really need. But, in His death, He is the only Savior we will ever need! Jesus hasn’t promised to fix that thing that you think He needs to fix the way you think He needs to fix it. That’s not why He came! He came to fix your problem with God! He advented to bring God and sinners together.

In His baptism, in the forgiveness of your sins, in His Body and Blood, you will find the peace to deal with all the other problems in your world—peace that isn’t in things working out, but in the eternal life won for you by Jesus’ holy life and bitter sufferings and death. That life will put everything else in perspective. It will give you comfort in your loneliness, peace in your poverty, and mercy in your guilt. For no matter what else happens, you are a child of God in Jesus. You are forgiven. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.