

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 31 December 2023

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-3

Opening Hymn: 405 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

Confession of Sin

O great and everlasting God, Who dwells in unapproachable light, Who searches and knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart; We confess that we have not loved You with all our heart, nor with all our soul, nor with all our mind, nor with all our strength; Nor our neighbors as ourselves. We have loved what we ought not to have loved; We have coveted what is not ours; We have not been content with Your provisions for us. We have complained in our hearts about our family, about our friends, about our health, about our occupations, about Your church, and about our trials. We have sought our security in those things which perish, rather than in You, the Everlasting God. Chasten, cleanse, and forgive us, through Jesus Christ, who is able for all time to save us who approach You through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Luke 1:76-79

Psalm of Preparation: 135 O Praise the Lord! His Praise Proclaim!

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 27:1-14

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 13:44-46

Sermon: *Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price*

Psalm of Response: 446 Be Thou My Vision

Confession of Faith: Ten Commandments

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 324 Thou Who Wast Rich beyond All Splendor

PM Worship

93 The LORD Reigns over All

325 All Glory, Laud, and Honor

265 In Christ Alone

OT Reading - Nahum 1:1-8

NT Reading - 2 Peter 3:1-13

Sermon: *The Lord's Good Jealousy*

Adult Sunday School: Heidelberg Catechism – Lord's Day 25

Q. It is by faith alone

that we share in Christ and all his benefits:

where then does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit works it in our hearts

by the preaching of the holy gospel,

and confirms it

by the use of the holy sacraments.

Q. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals.
They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,
and seal that promise.
And this is God's gospel promise:
he grants us forgiveness of sins and eternal life
by grace
because of Christ's one sacrifice
accomplished on the cross.

**Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then
intended to focus our faith
on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross
as the only ground of our salvation?**

A. Yes indeed!
The Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel
and confirms by the holy sacraments
that our entire salvation
rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (12/25) Read and discuss Matthew 13:44-46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (ESV)

Grant Osborne writes:

The kingdom is hidden in this world, known only to those who belong to it. Yet it is the most precious, valuable reality this world has. Therefore, the two parables of 13:44-46 present a four-stage scenario: seek, discover, surrender, and purchase. In this sense these parables sum up not just Ch 13 but the entire gospel thus far. Christ has brought with Him the consummated kingdom that the OT was waiting for, but neither the world as a whole nor the Jewish people have recognized or accepted it. Yet it is the fulfilled promise of God and the sum of everything humankind has wanted. In light of this, there is only one possible reaction, the radical surrender of one's whole life in order to have it. It is the greatest prize this world will ever see, but to have it one must throw off all worldly values.

Read or sing Hymn 405 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

Tuesday (12/26) Read and discuss John 1:14-18

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (ESV)

John tells us that “The Word became flesh and he pitched His tent (i.e. Tabernacled) amongst us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” What exactly is “glory.” The Old Testament word for glory carries the idea of weightiness or great significance. This weightiness can make other things fade into insignificance by comparison. We sing this truth when we sing:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And **the things of earth will grow strangely dim,**
In the light of His glory and grace.

That is what the weightiness of glory does to us. I trust that you have all had experiences like that. As you contemplate the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ – other matters that once seemed so urgent or significant suddenly seem far less so. But is that all there is to “glory”? Is that what John meant when he wrote: “We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”? If we didn’t know anything about the life of Jesus, we might imagine that the revelation of God’s glory in the Messiah would be something like what Isaiah saw in the Temple when the LORD called him to be a prophet. Isaiah writes:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; **the whole earth is full of his glory!**”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Isn't that what you think about when you think of the Glory of God? Yet, apart from the brief exception of the *Mount of Transfiguration*, which only three Disciples witnessed, this is NOT how Jesus revealed the Father's glory. Instead, Jesus reveals God as being meek and lowly of heart. He chose to be born in a manger. He worked in a carpenter's shop as a boy. It was said of Jesus: "A bruised reed He would not break and a smoldering wick He would not put out." The paradox is that Jesus displayed God's glory by displaying strength and weightiness through humility and even what appeared to be weakness. Jesus, Himself, will speak of the Son of Man being lifted up – that is exalted – on the cross. The cross, which superficially looked like a display of weakness, was actually a great demonstration of the glory of God – as the Son of God trampled Satan, sin, and death under foot. The glory that Christ reveals in the *Gospel of John* is the glory of God's grace and truth – and the fullest manifestation of that glory comes at the cross.

Read or sing Psalm 135 O Praise the Lord! His Praise Proclaim!

Wednesday (12/27) Read and discuss Psalm 27:1-14

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,

and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."
Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!
For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the LORD will take me in.

Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD! (ESV)

Gerald Wilson writes:

The stronghold of my life. How do we find a rock solid place of confidence when all else is swirling about us? It is this ability to stand confidently that sets the faithful apart and gives testimony to the presence of God in our lives. Where or to whom do you go when life seems too much to handle? Perhaps to your spouse or a close friend, a trusted minister, your parents? For the psalmist, God is the stronghold of his life – the secure place when all else fails.

Too often human relationships fail – because they are human. Many of us have felt betrayed or abandoned by friends, spouses, and even parents. ... When we place our hopes and reliance on fallible human beings, we are bound to experience failure. When all our human resources are so unreliable, where do we turn for unshakeable support?

According to our Psalmist, Yahweh is the one reliable support – the one who accepts us even “though my father and mother forsake me” (27:10). There is no more crushing experience than for a child to be abandoned by his or her parents. Orphan children – even those adopted by loving and caring families – are often obsessed to know why their birth mother “abandoned” them. ... Many abandoned children who have been unable to answer the questions of their birth and loss of parental love have found in God a loving parent who does not forsake them.

Sing or Read Hymn 446 Be Thou My Vision

Thursday (12/28) Read and discuss 2 Peter 3:1-13

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13] But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. – 2 Peter 3:1-13 (ESV)

Denial is not only a river that runs through Egypt – it is one of the most popular ways by which people deal with unpleasant realities. Those who refuse to turn from their rebellion against God naturally seek to deny the severe consequences of their continued rebellion. So they mock the followers of Christ: “You Christians talk of Jesus coming again, but since the creation of the world everything keeps going along exactly as it always has.” Note well that this is deliberate ignorance on the part of unbelievers. According to verse 5 they are suppressing the twin truths that God created the world by His word and once destroyed it

in the days of Noah by a universal flood. As believers, we can also rejoice in additional truths about Christ's Second Coming. First, the reason for the apparent delay in His return is simply a revelation of Christ's patience and longsuffering. The day of salvation is not yet in the past. We can still pray and witness for the sake of the salvation of loved ones and strangers alike. Secondly, we do not need to look away from the Day of Judgment. Clothed in Christ's righteousness, "we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Friday (12/29) Read and discuss Nahum 1:1-8

An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
the LORD is avenging and wrathful;
the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries
and keeps wrath for his enemies.
The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.
His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.
He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers;
Bashan and Carmel wither;
the bloom of Lebanon withers.
The mountains quake before him;
the hills melt;
the earth heaves before him,
the world and all who dwell in it.

Who can stand before his indignation?
Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.
The LORD is good,
a stronghold in the day of trouble;
he knows those who take refuge in him.
But with an overflowing flood
he will make a complete end of the adversaries,
and will pursue his enemies into darkness. (ESV)

Nahum presents an oracle of doom against Assyria in the 7th century B.C. while Assyria was still the great super-power of the Ancient Near East.

An obvious question for us to ask, is how an oracle of doom against a pagan super-power which was given 27 centuries ago can be relevant to us today.

Tremper Longman suggests:

The key to the problem is in the opening hymn (today's passage), which presents the Divine Warrior whose appearance causes the cosmos to quake. This Warrior destroys his enemies and effects the salvation of his people. We must keep in mind that the message of Nahum is not concretely applied to Assyria and Judah until later in the book. The psalm occurs at the beginning of the book presents a picture of God applicable for all times – He is the Warrior who judges evil.

As we will see, LORD willing, next week – the LORD pouring out His wrath upon His enemies is intimately connected to the good news of the gospel. Put simply, **the destruction of God's enemies ... is the salvation of His people**. This is made explicit in verse 15:

Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him
 who brings good news,
 who publishes peace!
Keep your feasts, O Judah;
 fulfill your vows,
for never again shall the worthless pass through you;
 he is utterly cut off. (ESV)

Read or sing Hymn 324 Thou Who Wast Rich beyond All Splendor

Saturday (12/30) Read and discuss Matthew 13:44-46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (ESV)

R.T. France writes:

Buried treasure is the stuff of popular stories (a more colorful equivalent of winning the lottery today), but in the ancient world a more realistic possibility than it is today, even with the help of a metal detector. Before banking was generally established, to hide wealth in the form of coins, metals, or jewels in a jar or box in the ground was a recognized way of securing it, especially in times of crisis; the famous Copper Scroll from Qumran Cave 3 lists the locations of huge caches of precious metals and other buried treasure (perhaps hidden in anticipation of the Roman invasion, but perhaps fictitious?). For a more realistic example in the gospel see 25:25, where a talent of gold (equivalent to some twenty years of daily wages) would have been a “treasure” worth finding. Presumably in this

story the current owner of the field, to whom the treasure would legally belong, was unaware of it; perhaps it had belonged to a previous owner, now dead. The finder (presumably a worker employed by the landowner) therefore hides the treasure again until he has legal ownership of the field, so that the treasure becomes his. The man's action is dictated by pure self-interest, as is that of the person who opts for the kingdom of heaven. The "sacrifice" of all that is sold is no hardship; it is done out of "delight," not out of a sense of obligation. Once the kingdom of heaven is truly understood, nothing else can compare with it in value.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.