

## **Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 29 December 2024**

### **AM Worship**

Call to Worship: Psalm 98:1-3

Opening Hymn: 388 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

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: Psalm 103:1-3

Hymn of Preparation: 282 I Great Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 62:1-12

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 24:1-14

Sermon Title: *The Beginning of the End*

Psalm of Response: 96 Sing to the Lord, Sing His Praise

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Psalm: 91B Who with God Most High Finds Shelter

### **PM Worship**

288 We Come, O Christ, to You

93 The LORD Reigns over All

90A Lord, You Have Been Our Dwelling Place

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 57 (Sermon Text)

New Covenant Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Sermon Title: *God, My Glory!*

### **Extended Time of Fellowship – No Sunday School**

### **Suggested Preparations**

**Monday** (12/23) Read and discuss Matthew 24:1-14

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in

my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

The disciples ask two questions, only the first of which connects with what Jesus has been saying to them. Following naturally on Jesus' emphatic predication that not one stone will be left upon another in the temple precincts, the disciples initially ask, "When will these things be?" Then, however, they immediately follow with a second question that brings to the fore something about which Jesus has not been speaking at all: "What [will be] the sign of our Parousia [coming/presence] and of the consummation of the age?" The term "Parousia" occurs for the first time here in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus has several times, however, already taught them about "the consummation of the age." It is the disciples themselves who somehow have thought that the two questions go together, namely, the destruction of the temple and the consummation of the age. They do not, in fact, go together – at least not in terms of when they will happen. This conclusion is supported by [another] observation.

When Jesus responds, He begins with "keep watching, lest someone deceive you." Jesus responds this way because the disciples have just shown themselves to be deceived. In fact, the first unity in Jesus' teaching directs the disciples not to be confused by the regular tumults and convulsions in Judea and the wider world around them. The disciples are not to be deceived into thinking that these troubles mean that the consummation of the age will happen soon.

When examined carefully, the disciples' approach and two-part question actually anticipates the two-part structure of the Eschatological Discourse and its message. Jesus will now teach the disciples about the events leading up to the destruction of the temple and the city, then about the consummation of the age and about the importance of not confusing the two.

Read or sing Hymn 388 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

**Tuesday (12/24) Read and discuss Luke 2:1–20**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (ESV)

Arthur Just writes:

The census is more important than it might appear. Luke does not include information about the census to portray his knowledge of Roman or Judean history, but to give historical reasons for Joseph going from Galilee to Bethlehem (about eighty-five to ninety miles by foot). By describing this movement from Galilee to Bethlehem, Luke shows both that OT prophecy is fulfilled [Micah 5:2] and that is the Davidic lineage of Joseph that is the reason for the trip. The hearer has been prepared for this announcement of Jesus’ Davidic roots and for the careful movement to David’s ancestral home of Bethlehem. David has already figured prominently in the infancy narrative. This is the birth of the Davidic king, and the kingdom promised in 2 Samuel 7 is now coming into existence with the birth of the Prince of Peace. Moreover, the association with the census of Caesar Augustus suggests that this descendent of David, with His royal bloodlines, is the

Prince of all peoples, a universal King. *The theme that dominates Luke-Acts is that salvation through Jesus is for everyone.*

After the birth of Jesus is announced, the narrative moves smoothly to the angels' announcement to shepherds. This second, middle scene is the high point of Luke's infancy narrative. Again, Luke uses a simple frame to introduce the shepherds and the angels, with an angel coming with the glory of the LORD that strikes great fear in the shepherds. The focus in this section is not on the shepherds but on the message of the angels. The frame sets up the two momentous statements by the angels. The first statement by the angel contains three theologically laden statements. First, the angel preaches the Gospel of great eschatological joy for "all the people." God intends the birth of Jesus to be pure Gospel for all humanity. There is no greater source of joy than the incarnation of God's Son for the purpose of our salvation. This announcement is preceded by the imperative "Do not fear." For the faithful, the birth of the Christ brings an end to all fear. Unfortunately, some will choose to reject God's kingdom, and they will receive the news of Jesus' birth with fear (e.g., Herod). Thus, Jesus' birth portends both Law and Gospel: the child will cause the fall of some, the resurrection of others (Lk 2:34), though God's will is for it to be received as Gospel joy.

Second, the angel announces the reason for the Good News and the great joy. The hearer already knows that this news is, but it was so modestly described in 2:7. The angels now bespeak the reality of what is now already a historical fact. It is as if heaven must confirm for the creation that the Creator has come as creature. "Today," in this country, a Savior, the Messiah, Yahweh, the King is born in King David's birth city of Bethlehem. From David, that shepherd boy, who shepherded his people as king and to whom was given the promise of an everlasting kingdom, a new Shepherd has come to shepherd His people Israel. "This is the heart of Luke's message: that Yahweh Himself, the Good Shepherd, comes to seek out His sheep.

Read or sing Hymn 282 I Great Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

**Wednesday** (12/25) Read and discuss Isaiah 62

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.  
The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,

and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,  
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,  
and your land Married;  
for the LORD delights in you,  
and your land shall be married.  
For as a young man marries a young woman,  
so shall your sons marry you,  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.

On your walls, O Jerusalem,  
I have set watchmen;  
all the day and all the night  
they shall never be silent.  
You who put the LORD in remembrance,  
take no rest,  
and give him no rest  
until he establishes Jerusalem  
and makes it a praise in the earth.  
The LORD has sworn by his right hand  
and by his mighty arm:  
“I will not again give your grain  
to be food for your enemies,  
and foreigners shall not drink your wine  
for which you have labored;  
but those who garner it shall eat it  
and praise the LORD,  
and those who gather it shall drink it  
in the courts of my sanctuary.”

Go through, go through the gates;  
prepare the way for the people;  
build up, build up the highway;  
clear it of stones;  
lift up a signal over the peoples.  
Behold, the LORD has proclaimed  
to the end of the earth:  
Say to the daughter of Zion,  
“Behold, your salvation comes;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.”  
And they shall be called The Holy People,  
The Redeemed of the LORD;  
and you shall be called Sought Out,  
A City Not Forsaken. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

Zion is described as a widow and a slave, abandoned by friends, with no resting place, suffering bitterly, bereft of her children, mocked by her enemies, unclean, despised, rejected, weeping, without a comforter, deceived, groaning, and fainting. And this is just from Lamentations 1! Who wants to invest in a person like this? What man in his right mind would want to reconnect with this woman?

Yahweh, for one, is willing. That is the message of Isaiah 62. And what do we say? “He had better get some better relationship advice, or His heart will be broken, again!” Then we gasp, “I sure wouldn’t invest myself in someone like Zion. Get lost! My heart could get broken, *again*! And so it goes. It is our nature to play it safe. We don’t make risky investments. We don’t roll the dice and bet on the slow horse. And we certainly don’t pursue a love that has deeply wounded us.

When called upon to reinvest in a failing marriage, we protest, “I’ll remain aloof, disconnected, and uninvolved. I’ll make him/her pay.” When asked to nurture and care for our children, we may say under our breath, “I can’t afford to spend that kind of time with them.” When encouraged to reach out to unbelieving neighbors, employees, and friends, we write off the opportunity: “I’m not investing my energy in those people!”

Oh, we might lay down a nickel here and dime there, just to look good. But when called upon to spend large amounts of sweat and blood, we conveniently choose safer investments that guarantee large dividends of personal promotion and pleasure.

Let’s be honest. It is our sinful nature to nickel-and-dime our way through life while rarely making substantial investments in other people. “Besides,” we say to ourselves, “just look at what happens to people who make risky ventures. Remember the pastor who put so much time into trying to move people forward in evangelism, only to watch his plan go up in flames? Then there were those parents who sank so much of themselves into their wayward daughter, only to watch her slam the door right in their face. And then there’s that guy I know who is spending so much time at church that his social life is a disaster!”

What about Yahweh? He pursues His wayward wife. For her sake, He persists. He appoints watchmen, prophets and pastors, to intercede for her, to woo her back. He gazes upon her beauty (Is 62:3) and calls her new names. Yahweh promise a feast of victory and even invites Zion into paradise restored. Incredible!

Read or sing Psalm 96 Sing to the Lord, Sing His Praise

**Thursday (12/26) Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 4:7-18**

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

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

Colin Kruse writes:

Clay jars were found in virtually every home in the Ancient Middle East. They were inexpensive and easily broken. Unlike metal vessels (which could be repaired) or glass ones (which could be melted down and the material reused), once broken, clay jars had to be discarded. They were thus cheap and of little intrinsic value. Paul may have had in mind the small earthenware oil-lamps sold cheaply in the market-places. If so, 'the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ' would be the earthenware lamps from whom the light was made to shine in the world. Perhaps aware of criticisms that if he claimed to participate in such a glorious ministry, how come his life was marked by weakness and suffering, Paul explains, *we have this treasure in jars of clay*.

The contrast between the treasure and the *jars of clay* which contain it is intended *to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us*. In 1:9 Paul testified that the affliction he experienced in Asia taught him 'not to rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead,' and in 3:5 he acknowledges that 'our competence comes from God.' In similar vein here, the frailty of the messengers shows that the all surpassing power comes from God and is not inherent in his envoys. What this means is teased out in the following verses.

**Friday (12/27) Read and discuss Psalm 57**

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,  
for in you my soul takes refuge;  
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,  
till the storms of destruction pass by.  
I cry out to God Most High,  
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.  
He will send from heaven and save me;  
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah  
God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness!

My soul is in the midst of lions;  
I lie down amid fiery beasts—  
the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows,  
whose tongues are sharp swords.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!  
Let your glory be over all the earth!

They set a net for my steps;  
my soul was bowed down.  
They dug a pit in my way,  
but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah  
My heart is steadfast, O God,  
my heart is steadfast!  
I will sing and make melody!  
Awake, my glory!  
Awake, O harp and lyre!  
I will awake the dawn!  
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;  
I will sing praises to you among the nations.  
For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!  
Let your glory be over all the earth! (ESV)

Tim Keller writes:

David is surrounded by danger, as if standing in the midst of roaring beasts. He cries for help but suddenly simply praises God, “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.” Deeper than disaster, danger, and distress is the desire for God to be glorified. If that can be accomplished by saving us from our circumstances, then praise God! If it is better accomplished by our circumstances remaining unchanged while we continue to show our confidence in God before the watching world, praise God as well. Either way, God fulfills His purpose for you as you delight to honor Him.



How do we handle times of great danger, when we are surrounded by predatory forces? David continues to sing praise to God's glory, right in the deep darkness, with a fierce, joyful buoyancy. He sees God's greatness in the skies and heavens. There's light and high beauty forever beyond the reach of any evil shadows in this world. This is not mere stoic defiance ("I won't let it get me down") but theological hope. The universe is an endless ocean of God's joy and glory. We are caught temporarily in a little drop of sadness here on earth. But eventually it will be removed. Regardless of what happens immediately to believers, eventually it will be all right.

Read or sing Psalm 91B Who with God Most High Finds Shelter

**Saturday** (12/28) Read and discuss Matthew 24:1-14

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

The true Messiah promises that false messiahs will arise and claim to be "the Messiah" or perhaps "Jesus the Messiah" Himself. Because Jesus is teaching here about what is "normal" in a broken world during the entire period of history that will finally reach its goal at His Parousia, there is no need to think that there were *many* in the first century who claimed to be Jesus Himself. History has provided enough time for that to have happened. The true sad reality is that such figures, when they do arise, will succeed in deceiving others and even destroying these people's faith in the real Messiah.

Though the reign of God has begun in Jesus and will reach its climax in His death and resurrection, still the world will remain broken until the day when the wedding feast is fully consummated. The ravages caused by human sin and hatred are not the only indicators of brokenness; famines and earthquakes remind Jesus' disciples that things are not as they will be. In the divine plan, these things are "necessary" in the sense that creation and humanity simply have not yet been put right; until the world is fully restored, these troubles must happen.

Not once but twice, **Jesus denies that these troubles have any chronological significance as historical markers that would enable us to time the End** (emphasis added). As bad as they may get, when they happen, it is not the End – "not yet." Such things show that humanity and the creation are moving toward a new age and a new life, as when a woman is moving toward bearing a new life into the world. But the events irrefutably signify only one thing: "a *beginning* of birth pangs." Jesus' teaching reaches out from the Mount of Olives and, in a way, includes the entire course of human history that continues to our own day. Whether you are standing with Jesus in the first century or reading this commentary in the twenty-first century, the message is the same. Do not overinterpret the difficulties of this present age. Do not be deceived.

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