

Higher Things
Reflections



Higher Things
DARE TO BE LUTHERAN

Advent and Christmas
Nov. 30, 2014—Jan. 5, 2015

2014-2015 Reflections Advent and Christmas

This season's Reflections were written by Rev. George F. Borghardt, the senior pastor at Zion Evangelical Church in McHenry, Illinois. He also serves as the president of Higher Things.

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*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*

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NOTES:

The First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2014

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 6:1-7:9; 1 Peter 2:13-25

*“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your king comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a pack animal.’”
(Matthew 21:5)*

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Here He comes! The King comes! God Himself comes to you. He comes to sinners. He even comes to you and me!

It's unthinkable! It's just crazy. This is not how religion works. Everyone knows we come to God and then He responds to us. We do, then He does. We pray, He gives us the answer we want...maybe.

Your God does the opposite. He comes to you. He advents to you—humble, lowly, riding on a donkey. He's headed to His coronation on the Cross on Good Friday to save you. He lives the life you should live. He dies the death you deserve before God.

He rises from the dead. You've been raised with Him in the waters of Holy Baptism. You are alive now for the sake of others—to love them, pick them up, bring them along, and bring joy to their day with the love that came to you in the water and Word.

The season of Advent is all about our Lord's coming to you. He's coming in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. He's coming today in our Gospel, riding a donkey like King David. He's coming again in glory to judge both the living and dead. He has come to us in the Word, Holy Baptism, and in His Supper.

So, repent of your sins! Prepare for the Lord's coming by putting them away for good. The King is coming to you to save you! Make ready. Get cleaned up.

Better, yet, let Jesus clean you up. His forgiveness, His love, His mercy for you, is the adventing that carries you through the Advent season. His Cross is your preparation. His resurrection is your salvation.

Today, He comes on the donkey! God comes to Jerusalem, for all—even to you, to me, for all. It's unthinkable! But, His coming is true! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Stir up your power, O Lord, and come to rescue us from the threatening perils of our sins, and save us by Your promised deliverance; for You now live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” (Collect for the First Sunday in Advent)

Monday of the First Week of Advent

December 1, 2014

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 23:5-8

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

“The Days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when they will no longer say, “As the LORD lives who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the house of Israel out of the north land and out of all the lands where He had banished them.” (Jeremiah 23:7-8)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. You were saved by Jesus' holy life and bitter sufferings and death. You are saved right now in the waters of your Baptism. On the Last Day, when the Lord Jesus returns in the glory, you will be saved.

Salvation isn't something that only happened to you in the past. Salvation isn't only something that will happen to you on the Last Day. Your salvation is also a present-tense reality for you.

Jeremiah tells the children of Israel this Gospel. You were slaves in Egypt. The Lord saved you. He brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Past tense. He did it. You believe that He did it.

The Lord will save you again. The day is coming when God is going to gather you up from all the judgment that He has put on you. He's going to rescue you. It'll be in the future, but it's a present-tense reality for you. You are saved, right now, today!

Don't fear! The Lord is not going to leave it up to you either. You'd mess it up. No, Judah will be saved. Israel will finally live in safety. For the Lord Himself is our righteousness. Christ is our righteousness. He's our salvation. He's our safe dwelling. He brings us good pasture.

So, repent of your sins. Turn from your evil ways. Stop believing that you can fix your relationship with God by what you do and don't do. Quit misusing His Name. Keep the Sabbath day holy. Honor Mom and Dad. Stop hating. Put the porn away and stop messing around where you shouldn't be messing around. Don't take what isn't yours. Get out of other people's business; don't covet what belongs to them. Change!

For you were saved by Jesus' death on the Cross. His salvation is made yours in the Word, water, and His Body and Blood. These present-tense gifts deliver the past and future salvation that is in Jesus alone.

Jesus is the best way to prepare in Advent. For when the Last Day advents, you will see that you have been saved all along. You were saved. You are saved in Christ. You will be saved on the Last Day. For Christ is your righteousness—yesterday, today, and forever. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

NOTES:

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

December 2, 2014

Today's Reading: Romans 14:8-14

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

"For if we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. And so if we live or if we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8)

In the name of Jesus. Amen. You are death-proof—not death-resistant up to a few years. Not death-retardant unless you step into the sunlight or get struck by silver.

You are immortal. You can't die—not really, not forever. You are baptized into Christ. You wear grace. You are clothed with forgiveness, shielded by the righteousness of Christ. No wrath of God will touch you. No accusation from Satan will stick to you. They will slide right off you like water off a duck's back because they've already been absolved by Jesus.

It cannot be overstated. It can't be undone. It can't be tweaked by what you do or don't do. It can't be weakened by you in any way because it rests on Jesus alone. You will live forever in Christ. You will not see the second death. You were dead. You now live in Christ.

Christ has made death like hitting the snooze in the morning. You are tired and go to sleep, but in just a little bit you will be awakened. Christ Himself will wake you up at the resurrection. You will rise with Christ to reign with Him for all eternity.

Your loved ones will rise, too. Your friends will be awakened by Jesus. Your neighbors, your fellow church members, all who have been baptized with Christ, who believe in the One who went through death and hell for them, will rise from the dead in Christ on the Last Day with you.

Make things ready for the Lord's coming on the Last Day by putting away judging others. Everyone's sins died with Christ. Everyone will die and everyone will be judged by God. Who wants to judge others when God will judge them on the Last Day? Not you. Not in Christ. So, let's put that with the coal we don't want in our stocking.

You died, too, when Christ died on the Cross. Your life is as sure as the resurrection of Christ delivered to you in the waters of the baptismal font. You will live as long as Christ is alive. He won't ever die again. And you can't die either.

For if you live, you live to the Lord Christ. If you die, you die to the Lord Christ. So whether your heart putters another few years or shuts down today, you are the Lord's own special possession, snatched from the fires of hell by grace alone, received by faith alone.

You are death-proof in Christ. You are immortal. Your neighbor in Christ is, too. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

December 3, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 9:8-10:11; 1 Peter 5:1-14

“I believe that God has made me and all creatures.” (Small Catechism, The Creed, First Article)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The world may appear much, much, older. It may seem like it came from a big bang. All life may seem similar and like one species came from another. That’s the way the universe appears to be.

But into this world was born a Man. He said that God created us—male and female. He said that there is a Father in Heaven who feeds the birds of the air and lavishly clothes the lilies of the field. He ate, drank, healed the sick, and raised the dead. He claimed to be the very Son of God.

He told us the Gospel. This God, the only God there is, loves us by sending His Son into our flesh to buy us back from our sins by dying. He promised that in His resurrection from the dead on the third day, we’d be forgiven.

We knew we were flawed, but not this flawed. We knew we did things wrong, but not that we had “sins.” We thought we could get by on our own. So, we took this Man, and we executed Him, nailing Him to a tree. Then, we did with Him what you do with the dead. We buried Him.

After three days, He rose again from the dead just as He said He would. Things can’t just happen. We must be more than just animals. There has to be more to this life than eating, drinking, and making more of our species. For if Jesus lives, if He rose from the dead, everything that He said must be true.

We have a Father in Heaven who loves us. He gave us our bodies, our souls, our eyes, our ears, and all our members. He gave us minds to think with and our senses to observe His creation. He tends and cares for us, too! He gives us our clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals and all we have! We win the lottery every day, as He gives us all that we need to support this body and life.

He does this while He guards us from all the things in the universe that He created good, that could possibly harm us. For this, we thank and praise Him, serve Him, and obey (that is, cherish) His Words.

For the Spirit has made known to us the death and the resurrection of the Son of God. We know, we believe, that God the Father made the cosmos—the whole thing. There’s not something in this universe—there is no universe—apart from your Father in Heaven. For the gift is not only that God made the universe, but also that He made the universe for us. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Twelfth Day of Christmas

January 5, 2015

Today’s Reading: Genesis 46:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 65:8-25; Luke 3:1-20

“And He said to him, ‘I am God, your God. Don’t be afraid to go down to Egypt. I will bring you out of the land of Egypt, for I will make you a great nation.’” (Genesis 46:3)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God dropped the greatest Christmas gift that He could for Jacob: His Name. I am God, your God. I will go down with you. I will do what I promised. I will make you a great nation. It will happen. You can bank on it.

Jacob didn’t have much. His whole family with him only numbered seventy people. He had borrowed wagons. They weren’t much of a nation. They weren’t even a town. They were just a handful of people!

But Jacob had God, His Name, His promise, His Word. God would be faithful. He would be true to His Name. He would be with Jacob in Egypt. With God there, it would work out for good for Him. It just had to, because God is faithful to His promises.

God was faithful to Israel, to Jacob, just as He had been to his fathers. He took Jacob to Egypt. His son, Joseph, closed his eyes there, too. Jacob rested from his labor. The children of Israel grew into a mighty nation in Egypt. God blessed them.

Even when there was a Pharaoh in Egypt who didn’t remember Joseph anymore, God blessed them. From slavery, He saved them. They were freed from their chains and they sacked their captors. He brought them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He made good on His promise.

Yes, Israel became a mighty nation, but that wasn’t the true fulfillment of the promise to Jacob. The promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was fulfilled in the child born of Mary. Jesus is the fulfillment. He is the great nation. Those who believe in Him are all children of Israel.

For Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Jacob. His holy life and bitter sufferings and death free us from our slavery to sin and death. He brings us out of the hell due us into the land flowing with milk and honey. He has made us His people, children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in His suffering and death.

And when things get bad, God’s promises are still delivered to us in the Word, in our Baptism, in His Supper, so they don’t suddenly stop being true. He is faithful. He is merciful. He will bring us through just like He before. For we are children of Israel by faith in Christ. And so, God has given the greatest gift that He could give to you: His Name. I am God, your God. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Sunday after Christmas

January 4, 2015

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 64:15-65:2; Luke 2:41-52

“And He went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’’ (Matthew 2:23)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Today is a good day to receive the gift of Christmas music! Yes, Christmas! Everyone needs a little bit of ‘‘Feliz Navidad’’ today. How could we put away the Christmas music with a day of Christmas still left?

We’re still hearing about Baby Jesus in Church! He’s ‘‘Jingle-Bell Rocking’’ away from that awful, awful, man King Herod to Egypt. It’s not Lent yet! It’s still ‘‘The Most Wonderful Time of the Year.’’ It’s not even Epiphany yet! So Jesus can’t die. Nope, sorry, Herod. You lose.

Jesus fulfills the Old Testament as He jingles all the way to Egypt. He is Israel. He goes into Egypt to save God’s people. He comes out of Egypt as the children of Israel did—‘‘...out of Egypt I have called my Son.’’ Then later, Baby Jesus ends up in Nazareth where He will grow up. Lent will begin with Him all grown up and going into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He’ll do a ‘‘forty’’ out there, just like Israel did!

All of the Old Testament points to Jesus. His Birth is prophesied. His flight to Egypt was planned. His return and life in Nazareth was foretold. All that He did and all that He preached was the fulfillment and completion of what the prophets prophesied.

And it all leads to the Cross. Jesus is headed, not only for Lent but also, more specifically, for Holy Week. He’s going to ‘‘Go Tell It on The Mountain’’ called Calvary. There, on the Cross, He will fulfill everything for all time—the Law, Prophets, and even the Psalms. Everything!

Jesus died. He rose. He lives. You live in Him. That Gospel saves you. It was promised in the Old Testament. It was fulfilled in the New. Faith receives all that Jesus fulfilled in the water, Word, and Body and Blood. You are forgiven.

There is still one more day of Christmas left! So, ‘‘Joy to the World’’ it up. Jam out to a little bit of ‘‘Silver Bells!’’ Your neighbor could use you humming a little ‘‘O Holy Night’’ as you sing about how Jesus was in the manger before heading to the Cross. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

‘‘Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you; Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The babe, the son of Mary!’’ (What Child Is This LSB 370:2)

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

December 4, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 10:12-27, 33-34; 2 Peter 1:1-21

‘‘For these being present and growing in you make you not useless and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.’’ (2 Peter 1:8)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. St. Peter gives you what you need to prepare for the Lord’s Advent: Work on love. Warm up with a little virtue, stretch out with some knowledge, train your self-control, learn a bit of godliness, add a pinch of brotherly love, and then let it Jesus-ify itself into full-blown love for others. Let Jesus cook love in your life and you’ll be ready for His coming at Christmas.

Adding these things to your faith won’t save you. Receiving Jesus’ Calvary-won salvation by faith alone saves. With faith flows good stuff—like excellence of character, assurance that you are forgiven, abstaining from excess, receiving Jesus in His gifts, caring for others, and dying for them like Jesus died for you.

But when you look at your life, you don’t do these things, do you? In fact, the whole list probably makes you feel uncomfortable. It does that for me! It’s like a long list of all the things I haven’t been doing!

Advent is a good time to repent of your sins. Turn from them. Do better. If not for yourself, do it for others. God doesn’t need you to add virtue to your faith...but you, and those around you, need you to. You could also use a bit of knowledge about your salvation. Come to Sunday School. Spend time in Bible class. It’s good for your soul! The people around you could also use you having some self-control and a bit of godliness.

And love? Brotherly love and care for others? Who doesn’t need that? And all of it working towards and driven by, the love that Jesus has for you. His love went through death and hell to save you.

You have been forgiven, you have been saved, in the death and resurrection of Christ. You have been baptized. You bear the name of God. You have an inheritance that is imperishable. You have been given life.

Why would you live like you haven’t been forgiven? You know and believe that you are free from your sins. You can see the love of God in Christ Jesus for you in the Word and Sacraments. You are forgiven—freed to add a bit of character—and to that character add a bit of the fear of the Lord, and to that fear a bit of chastity and sober-mindedness, and to your chastity and sober mind a bit of godly piety, and to that piety a bit of brotherly love, and to that love some self-sacrifice for others. It certainly can’t hurt you. It can only help you prepare for the Lord’s coming. After all, you’ve been baptized. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Friday of the First Week of Advent

December 5, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 11:1-12:6; 2 Peter 2:1-22

“You will say in that day: O LORD, I will give thanks to you for though you were angry with me, your anger turned from me and you comforted me.”
(Isaiah 12:1)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Every day, every minute, every second, we live the way we want to live, do what we want to do, and be the way we want to be. We make up our religion as we go. We choose the words we like and don't like, the sins we think should be sins, and the actions we think would make God happy or angry. What's most convenient is that that the sins that are sins in our world are generally things other people struggle with. In our religion, we'll be just fine. God is going to love us because, well, we are us.

All the while, we are brash and arrogant and go about our lives despising God. We are bad, but not really bad. What we do can't be all that sinful. If it was, we'd have gotten caught! So it must not be sinful if we don't get caught. But we know it's a sin. It's just that God isn't around, (or so we like to think) to really stop us!

But God sees all. He knows all. To say that He doesn't get mad is just foolishness. We know His anger burns against us. If we are callous to His law in our hearts, we could at least reason that if God is at all like us, we'd be furious at us. We get all in a tizzy when someone flames us on Twitter! Do you really think we wouldn't get furious if someone did to us what we do to God?

But God is not like us. He doesn't stay angry. He doesn't leave us “dead to Him.” Instead, He turns His anger away from us and directs it completely on His Son. Instead of punishing us for what we have done, He sends His Son into our world. Jesus bears the consequences for our indifference, our wanting to be our own god, our hate, our living our way. He suffers and dies.

You have been raised in the resurrection of Christ. You have been forgiven. God's anger relents from you. It has been absorbed by Jesus. Outside Christ, there is God's burning wrath for the sins we deserve. But, in Jesus, there is no wrath of God. In Christ, there is only God's peace.

So be prepared in Christ for the Lord's coming this Advent. Remember your Baptism, where you were placed into Christ. Receive the Word, where you hear your sins are forgiven. Be fed by the very Body and Blood of Jesus. We deserve for God to be mad at us. He was, but Jesus has taken that all that anger away. We are now at peace with God in Christ Jesus. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Tenth Day of Christmas

January 3, 2015

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 63:1-14; Luke 2:21-40

“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” (Psalm 8:2 from the Introit for Christmas 2)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Take a second today and marvel at the gift of the Lord's utter backwardness. He is completely the opposite of everything else in the world. He is totally other-worldly that way.

The Father set His mind to saving His creation. He would have Himself a people: He would be their God. They would be His people. But His people don't want to be His people. They reject Him. We reject Him. We would be our own gods. We know better. We can be better gods than He would be. After all, we know best how to love ourselves and do good for us better than He does.

The Lord gives gifts to the Patriarchs. He makes promises. He will save us through them. We reject them. He sends His prophets to preach repentance. They call us out of our sins. We reject them. We persecute them. We beat them. We kill them.

Does He destroy us? He should! He should treat us like the Philistines and Egyptians. We should be drowned under the Red Sea and slaughtered by the thousands.

But instead the Father sends us a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes to lay in a borrowed food trough—a baby who can't even defend Himself against us. He proclaims His strength through an Infant who cannot even speak!

Force comes against the Baby, too. We beat Him up. We crown Him with thorns. We whip Him almost to death then pound nails into His hands and feet and lift Him up above the earth until He dies.

Then, victory! Life comes from death. It's backward! Completely unexpected! God saves His people. God has Himself a people, not by force of arms, but by the defeat and death of His Son.

And what's more backwards? What's more opposite of what we could ever figure out? You are His child! I am, too! His people aren't holy people or geniuses. They are common people like you and me. That's how God is. He's completely backwards! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1)

The Ninth Day of Christmas

January 2, 2015

Today's Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 62:1-12; Luke 2:1-20

"But when the fullness of time came, God sent out His Son, born out of a woman, born under the Law, so that we would be redeemed out of the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Lord has good timing. He has perfect timing. What the Lord does, He does at the right time. When He acts, it's always at a perfect time. He's always got the right time to be doing His God thing. That's today's Christmas gift: The Lord's God-timing.

Is it the right time because He's doing it? Or does He just pick the right time to do it? He's the only One who knows! His timing is all gift for us from a gift-giving God that always works out all time to save us.

At just the right time, God acted. He sent His Son. He set everything in the universe to prepare to save us. He even lined up a big old star in the heavens! He worked out all things for all time to bring forth His Son.

He was born of woman just like you and me. What a miracle! He was born under the Law like you and me, too. But, He was born to buy us out of the Law so that we would be adopted as God's sons.

Through Baptism, we are God's children! We had been enemies of God. We were against Him and everything about Him. We wanted to be our own gods. And we still live as if we hate God! We are given to repent of that while He still gives us time!

But at the font, you were adopted! In Christ, you are a son of God, too—boy sons and girl sons! You are in the family of God. Jesus is your brother. What belongs to the Father now belongs to you through the Son! Heaven is yours. The universe is your playground. All things are possible for you now.

And time? You have God's timing now. You have all the moments that He gives you in this life to love and care for others. There simply isn't enough time to care for and love others in this life! But He, Himself, will hold the sun still in the sky so that you can finish doing the good for others that He would have you do.

He can do that, after all. He's God. He's got all the time in world. You will soon, too. You will! Soon, there will be no rushing to care for others. You will wake up and stand before the Lamb, who was born at just right time to be sacrificed for you and for the sin of the whole world. Time won't matter then as you share eternally in the marriage feast in His kingdom that will have no end. That will come on His time, His perfect God-timing. For that is what God does! He does perfect timing! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday of the First Week of Advent

December 6, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 14:1-23; 2 Peter 3:1-18

"Daughter of Zion, behold, surely your salvation is coming. The Lord will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and you shall have gladness of heart." (Isaiah 20:29, 30; 62:11 from the Introit for Advent 2)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Smiling is contagious. One person gets the grins, and it's not long before everyone else is grinning. Silliness brings more silliness. Joy begets more joy.

God is smiling. He really is! He's got a case of the grins that won't go away. No amount of sin can take it away. No failure on your part will mess it up. He's grinning from ear to ear.

Jesus is the joy of the Father. God's smiling countenance rests on His Son, who took upon Himself all that is us, so that we might be all that God could ever want us to be. Christ's suffering and death saves us. It gives the Father unending joy!

Now, this doesn't mean that everyone has to be joyful all the time. There's a time for joy and a time for mourning. But all of it is used by our Father in Heaven—even the most terrible sadness—to save us and those around us.

The Lord felt it all. He endured it all. He weeps with us when we weep. He hurts when we hurt. He knows. He knows how it hurts. He knows the suffering and sadness you feel. He endured it on the Cross. He suffered it all—the pain, the loss, the loneliness, the tears.

All that we have to be sad about died with Him. That's why life doesn't always have to be sad! Your faith doesn't have to be sad and stoic all the time either! There's a time for seriousness, but God is not impressed by us being solemn for Him. God needs our seriousness as much as God needs our putting on a fake smile and being someone or something that we aren't. That doesn't help anyone!

In the Word, the water and the Body and the Blood, you'll find the gladness of the heart of God Himself. For the Father would have us always receive His smiling countenance, His mercy, and His forgiveness in Christ.

Smiles are contagious. Prepare for the Lord's coming by thinking about the smiling face of the Father today. His Jesus smile may make you smile, too—even in the midst of sadness. His smile on you might lift up your neighbor, too. Wouldn't that just be an added smiling bonus! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2014

Today's Reading: Luke 21:25-36

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 24:1-13; 1 John 1:1-2:14

"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Luke 21:27)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Prepare. Get ready. Pack your bags. The Lord is coming. You will see Him.

The Son of God comes next time on the clouds of heaven. He is God Himself in the flesh with all the power and glory. God is going to visit His people. He's going to come!

Before He comes, there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. The earth will be filled with distress as the nations marvel at the roaring seas and the waves. The earth is just falling apart: global climate change, hurricanes, a warm earth, a cold one, wars, rumors of wars, diseases, Ebola, and ISIS. Some People are fainting from the stress of what they think is coming on the world. The very heavens themselves are shaking!

And at the point when you can't take it anymore, when you feel like the very heavens and the earth are passing away, look up! Get ready. Watch. God Himself will come in the clouds of heaven.

He's not coming to judge you. He could. He probably should. You'd do well to repent as if He were coming to condemn you. That might actually help you serve those around you. Seriously, you should do better.

But when Jesus comes, that's your redemption drawing near! Your salvation is near! Eternal life is near—it's in the water dripping down your forehead, it's in the absolution in your ears, it's in your mouth in His Body and Blood given for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Near and here! Today! On the Last Day, Jesus will come again and you will be saved on that day because you are saved now. He will come and you will be redeemed, because you are redeemed now. What's true of you on the Last Day is already true of you right now, today, in His gifts. You are forgiven. You have eternal life. You are God's child.

So prepare. Get ready. Pack your bags. The Lord is coming. You will see Him. Your redemption draws near. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son that by His coming we may be given to serve You with cleansed minds; 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 the Second Sunday in Advent)

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

January 1, 2015

Today's Reading: Luke 2:21

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 1:57-80

"And at the end of eight days, after He was circumcised, He was called the named Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb." (St. Luke 2:21)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Mourn your sins today. Repent of them. Make them part of your past. Begin the new year by receiving the Christmas gift of Baby Jesus' blood.

The Virgin's Son shed His blood for you today. He took upon Himself the Law. He was circumcised on the eighth day to fulfill the Law. He was marked as a child of God. He was cut. He kept the testament of Abraham. He bled in your place.

God doesn't dismiss His Law. He doesn't abolish it. If He did, we'd still have to worry about the Law coming back and accusing us. No, God did far better: He fulfilled the Law in Christ.

Jesus obeyed every Law, perfectly. He fulfilled every precept and ordinance. And He counts what He does as if you are the one who did it. He shows His love for you by doing what He did for you.

What good news! If Jesus fulfilled the Law in your place, then you have no need to justify yourself before God by what you do! He's already done everything you could do, and more! Can you be better than Jesus? Can you be more perfect? You don't have to be! His being good and perfect counts for you.

But that's only half the good news! He also leaves no condemnation for you to endure. He, Himself, suffered the punishment for the Law that you have not kept. Every sin, every transgression, every bit of guilt of the whole world was put upon Jesus.

To save you, Jesus kept the Law that He commands of you and freed you from having to keep His commandments. He put Himself under the Law to rescue you from being under the Law. He suffered the punishment for your sins on the Cross. God has no punishment left in His tank for you, because Jesus is born to save you, to do His Name, to be the Lord who saves. The name given to the Baby means, "The Lord saves." He is born to save you from your sins.

Mourn your sins. Repent of them. Today, Jesus begins His keeping of the Law for you. He suffered for your sins even as a Baby. He was born to keep the Law and shed His blood for you. Then, rejoice! Take and eat His Body and Blood. Be forgiven, for Jesus has done His Name for you again and saved you! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus

December 31, 2014

Today's Reading: Luke 12:35-40

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 60:1-22; Luke 1:39-56

"You also be prepared, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you don't expect." (St. Luke 12:40)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. We're seven days into Christmas and there is still no room for Jesus in our world.

Jesus is a stranger here. He's not wanted. Oh, we'd like Him to be around, but we'd also like Him not to be when it's inconvenient. There's just not enough room for Him.

He is coming again soon. I know, He's been saying that for nearly two thousand years and He's still not here. But it's not been that long for Him at all. A thousand years for Jesus is like a day. When He does return, He's going to break into the world. He's going to come in like a thief in the night. You don't know when. Only the Father knows. If we did, we'd be prepared for Him. His unexpectedness is our Christmas gift for today.

If we knew when Jesus would be coming back, we'd take His return for granted. We'd wait until the absolute last minute on the Last Day to repent and change our behavior. We'd live for ourselves until the last possible moment. Wait, that's how we live already!

But the Lord isn't trying to scare you into good behavior. You should live better and do the right things. The commandments guide you on how to do that. Changing your behavior isn't going to save you.

Prepare for the Lord's return by confessing your sins and receiving His forgiveness. Repent of what you've done this year and how you have lived. Confess to God that you have sinned. You have lived as if He doesn't matter and you matter most. You don't deserve His mercy. You don't deserve His forgiveness.

Receive the forgiveness of sins achieved by Jesus on the Cross and delivered to you in the Word today. Be cleansed in your Baptism. Be absolved in His Absolution. Be fed by His Body and Blood.

That's how you prepare for the Lord to sneak into your world like a thief in the night! You watch in confession of your sins! You stay awake by repenting of your sins and receiving forgiveness.

You are ready for Jesus' coming by faith. You are prepared by His Cross. You'll be as awake as someone who has just been raised from the dead. In Christ, you are alive in Christ. Your lamps are burning with His Word. You're clothed with Holy Baptism. You are ready for His Feast.

He is coming to you this year. Believe it. He's going to make room for Himself in your world this coming year. Be ready in His repentance and forgiveness. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

December 8, 2014

Today's Reading: Malachi 4:1-6

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

"And you shall crush the wicked for they will be the dust under the soles of your feet, on the day when I do, says the Lord of Hosts." (Malachi 4:3)

In the Name of Jesus. Christ earned salvation for you by living the life you should live before God. He suffered and died for the life that you don't live before God. He rose again for your forgiveness on Easter morning. He is seated at the very right hand of God for you. He will come again in glory to snatch you out of this world of sin to be with Him forever.

It never gets old. You can't hear that Gospel enough. If it does start to seem a little stale, you need to be prepared for the Lord's coming by hearing it again.

The Gospel never gets old for Jesus. He never tires of remembering all that He did for you. He obeyed all that His Father commanded. Each law, He kept for you. He then brought you out of your slavery to your sins. He passovered you out of Egypt with His Blood.

His Cross is the end of death. It is the beginning of everlasting life for you. There never will be any hell for you. That's only for Satan. There is no judgment for you. That's for the world. Your sinful flesh will never do you in, for it was crucified with Christ. You no longer live! You live in Him, in the waters of your Baptism.

No one will harm you. No one will defeat you. You might fall behind, sin may tackle you, but the game has already been won by Jesus. You might feel like you're about to lose when your heart stops beating. But Jesus says you will win. As surely as He lives, you will, too.

There's an overtime that goes on for eternity. There's an afterlife that started at the baptismal font and goes on for as long as your Lord Jesus lives. For every last enemy, every last entity that would harm you, were defeated when the Lamb of God gave His life for you.

The devil, the world, your sinful flesh have all been crushed for you in the death and resurrection of the Son of God. You are baptized. You are absolved. You have been fed the very Body and Blood of Jesus. When Jesus comes, you'll see for yourself that what He said about your enemies is true, you will see all your enemies are dust under the soles of your feet.

Christ earned your salvation. He won it. He lived as you should live. He died the death you deserve. He rose again. You have been saved. You are saved. You will be saved. He's coming to show you. That Gospel never gets old. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

December 9, 2014

Today's Reading: Romans 15:4-13

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 26:1-19; 1 John 3:1-24

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you will be over and above in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit."
(Romans 15:13)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God is a God of hope. He hoped that in Abraham, not just His people would be saved but that all nations would be saved. He saw, He hoped that there would be no tribe, no tongue, no people, no son of Adam, that wouldn't be saved through His offspring, Abraham.

God is a God of Hope. His people were enslaved in Egypt. They cried out to Him to save them. He answered and brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He drowned Pharaoh and His armies while His people were singing on dry ground.

God is a God of Hope. He gave King David to shepherd His people. He promised that a son of David would always reign over Israel. His people turned from Him and were exiled out of the land He gave them.

God is a God of Hope. The Father sent His Son to fulfill all His promises. A shoot sprang up from the dead stump of King David's line! Jesus comes! Jesus is the hope, the root, behind David's royal line.

God is a God of Hope. Jesus does His Father's and His Law for you. He suffers the hopeless punishment of death in your place. All the sin of all the world for all time is put upon Jesus on Good Friday. He endures it all. It kills Him.

God is a God of Hope. He raises His Son from the dead and you with Him to a life full of hope. You are baptized into a life without tears, without pain, without suffering, without sickness, and without death—a life with God and all those who died in the certain hope of the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

God is a God of Hope. You have hope today, right now, this very moment, by faith. God will save you when Jesus comes. God has saved you now in His gifts. You will have life. You have life now in Christ. For Jesus is your hope, your God of Hope.

"O Lord, let Your ears be attentive to the voice of our cry, for there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared. By Your unfailing love deliver us from all our sin that our hope may be in You and in Your full redemption; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." (Collect for Deliverance and Hope, LSB)

The Sixth Day of Christmas

December 30, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 58:1-59:3, 14-21; Luke 1:26-38

"I believe that Jesus Christ...is my Lord, who has redeemed me, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil not with gold and silver but with His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death." (Small Catechism, The Creed, Second Article)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Now there's a gift that saves you! Jesus is your Lord! He is your Savior!

"Jesus is my Lord" doesn't mean He is your master. It doesn't mean that Jesus is your boss. It doesn't mean that Jesus is "the Man" over you—that you need submit to Him to be saved. That's salvation by the Law, by works, by what you do and don't do. If you really want Jesus to be that kind of Lord for you, you had better submit to Him perfectly or you will not be saved. Repent of ever thinking that again!

The whole of the Old Testament is actually about Jesus being Lord. Jesus is Yahweh. He's the "I AM." He was in the Garden of Eden walking and talking with Adam. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He saved Abraham by faith alone. He stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. He wrestled with Jacob all night. Jesus was the God in, with, and under the burning bush. He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He was the pillar of fire and cloud. He was the God on the mountain who gave the Law through Moses. Jesus is the LORD.

The God of the Old Testament took on your flesh to save you! He bought His people back, He rescued you from your slavery to sin, with His holy life and His bitter sufferings and death. He, Himself, kept the Law for His creation. He, Himself, suffered the punishment for your sin.

"Jesus is my Lord" means you believe and confess that Jesus died on the cross for all your sins and was raised for your forgiveness. It means that you know that you have been washed in the blood and water flowing from His side. It means that He did what He did for you. It's all gift. It's all grace received by faith alone.

He did all this so that He would be your God and you would be His people. He didn't want to be your Master. He did what He did to be your Savior.

You are His own precious possession. He is your God. He has washed you, Worded you, Bodied and Blooded you. You get to be on the receiving end of what He did for you. That's faith! That's the present of Jesus being your Lord. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Fifth Day of Christmas

December 29, 2014

Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 55:1-13; Luke 1:1-25

"Now let your servant depart, Lord, in peace according to your Word because my eyes have seen your salvation." (St. Luke 2:29-30)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen! The Lord gives today to pious Simeon the one gift that He was waiting for: death.

Simeon knew that the whole of the Old Testament pointed to the consummation of Israel. He had longed for Jesus before he even knew Him. He trusted that the Lord would send the Christ to save His people.

He also knew, by means of the Spirit, that he would not die until he personally saw the Lord's Christ. So He waited and waited in the temple. God would send His Christ. He would fulfill His promises.

So when Baby Jesus showed up in the temple, Simeon scooped up the Lord and began to sing. He sang a prayer, a prayer to fall asleep! "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace. Your Word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared in the sight of every people."

God was finally doing all that He had promised to do. He was saving Israel. He would redeem His people through the child born of Mary. Simeon's eyes had seen the glory of God. God would not only save Israel in this Child, He would save all people.

Jesus alone saves. Every person who is ever saved, ever forgiven, ever sacrificed for, ever received mercy, was saved, was forgiven in the sacrifice of Jesus. People weren't saved before Christ by what they did and didn't do and then saved after Christ by grace alone, received by faith alone. No, every person on whom God has had mercy, He has had mercy on in Christ.

What is left to do after you hold in your arms the salvation of all men? What is there left to do after you see the Lord's Christ? What do you do after you receive Jesus?

You know the answer. You do it every week. You sing. You sing Simeon's song, too. After you receive Jesus, you have the holiness of Jesus. It's in your body. You have the holiness of Jesus. You are ready for anything, even death. You can depart in peace.

Simeon was kept awake to receive the Christmas gift that would save all mankind. Jesus saved Him. He has saved you. You are forgiven. You have peace with God. Jesus makes even death itself a Christmas gift for you, and Simeon. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

December 10, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 26:20-27:13; 1 John 4:1-21

"He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of it today." (Small Catechism The Creed, First Article)

In the name of Jesus. Amen. You have a Father, and you know that you have a Father because of Jesus' advent. The Holy Spirit has made you alive with Christ in the waters of your Baptism. He has filled your ears with forgiveness in the Word. He has fed you the very Body and Blood of the One through whom all things happened and apart from whom nothing happened that has happened. You believe in the death and resurrection of Christ.

You have a Father who is in Heaven. You have a Creator. He made you. He created you. He gave you your parents. He gave you your family. You aren't just the genetic combination of your mom and dad. You are more than that. You are God's creation.

He knew you in the womb. You weren't just a fetus to Him. He knew who you were when you were just a few cells old and He knows who you will be tomorrow. He's given you all that you are and made you all that you are. He's always taking care of you—even when He seems like He's not.

You aren't an accident. You aren't a collection of molecules that randomly happened. You aren't just a cosmic lottery win. Nor are you the natural selection of one species over another. You didn't evolve from something else' mutation and death.

He made your hands. He made your feet. He made the parts of you that you think are great. He even made the parts of you that don't seem to work that well.

He, Himself, redeemed you. Jesus advented. The God who created you sent His Son into human flesh on Christmas to live as you are required to live before the God who made you, and to die the punishment that God's righteousness would require when you weren't.

Be prepared today for Christmas by trusting in the coming of the Christ Child. The universe may appear to have come about a different way. Everything may appear to have come from a "big bang." It looks as if it did. But you know that there was a Creator who created all things, ordered all things, made all things out of nothing. You know He made you, and you believe He made the universe, because of Christ's advent. You have a Father in heaven because of the death and the resurrection of the One born of Mary. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

December 11, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 28:14-29; 1 John 5:1-21

“We know that all having been born out of God do not sin, but the one begotten of the Father keeps himself and the evil one does not touch Him.” (1 John 5:18)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. There is no sin in you in Christ. You don't have a single sin, not a one, not a bit of sin. In Christ, you aren't a sinner—not a little bit, not at all. There's not even a pinch of sin in you in Christ.

Oh, you still sin, don't you? That's not you sinning—not the you that's in Christ. Your Old Adam sins. All he knows how to do is to trespass and then try to save you from punishment by getting you to do something. In fact, you, all by yourself, only and always are sinning—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. You sin on Christmas! You even sin in your sleep!

But you have been born from above in the waters of your Baptism. You are washed. You are sanctified. You are holied in Christ. All your sins were washed into the font.

The Spirit Himself testifies this in the Word. You tap-danced out of God's courtroom, absolved. His Word changed your reality. You were guilty as sin—literally. You were proclaimed innocent by the Father through the death of His Son. You are free.

You are fed the very Body and Blood of the only-begotten of the Father. Christ's Body, His Blood, proclaim you to be a child of God. The Blood from the side of Christ in your mouth calls it for God. You are forgiven.

So, which are you? Are you utterly a sinner or are you perfectly holy? You, all by yourself, are one hundred percent, totally, a sinner. But, you aren't all by yourself any more, are you? You are in Christ, you are born of God, you are a child of God.

In Christ, in your Baptism, in the Word, in the Blood of Christ, you have no sin. You are as free from your sins as Jesus is free from sin. You are as true as Christ is true. You are clothed with Christ. You are forgiven.

Prepare for Jesus' advent today by drowning your Old Adam in the water, Spirit, and Blood of Christ. Bury him. Kill him. Repent of your sins. Turn from them. Change.

Then, receive Jesus' coming to you in the water, Spirit, and Blood. You are forgiven. You are a child of God. You have been snatched out of the world of the evil one by the Cross of Jesus. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

December 28, 2014

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-18

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 52:13-54:10; Matthew 2:13-23

“Get up, take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and be there until I tell you for Herod is about to search the Child to kill Him.” (Matthew 2:13)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Herod was an awful, awful, man. The Magi had gone to King Herod and announced that the One, the King of the Jews, had been born in Bethlehem. Herod would share his throne with no one. This Christ Child had to die.

Herod didn't know the Baby King's name, so he ordered every child in the city to be slaughtered who matched the age that he had figured out during his conversation with the Magi. He didn't stop there! He made sure that every baby in the surrounding area was killed, too. He was truly an awful, awful man.

These Holy Innocents were the first martyrs to die for the Lord. They weren't holy in and of themselves. Jesus made them innocent. He makes them holy with His sacrifice on Good Friday. They gave their lives so Jesus could grow up and save you and me from our sins.

God took all the evil that befell the babies of Bethlehem and used it to save the world. That's how the Lord beats evil! He takes all the evil and He uses it to work out His plan of salvation for us. He turns everything on its head. He makes all that awful, awful men do in this world and He uses even those works to redeem His creation. He beats the devil so handily that even the devil ends up fulfilling the promises of the Christ saving us.

We should pause today and contemplate the blood-red suffering of those babies. They were killed for Jesus' sake. Believing in Jesus will bring nothing in this world but suffering to us. Maybe even death.

But don't despair! The Lord will save you just like He saved the Holy Innocents. He'll take all things that awful, awful men do to you and make it right. He did it on Good Friday where the sign proclaimed to the world what Herod couldn't take away from Him: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. All evil for all time died with Jesus.

One day, you'll see them. You'll see these little ones with crowns that probably don't fit in front of the throne. They saved Jesus. He saved them and us, too. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Ah, what availed King Herod's wrath? He could not stop the Savior's path. Alone, while others murdered lay, In safety Christ is borne away.” (Sweet Flowerets of the Martyr Band, LSB 969, 3)

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

December 27, 2014

Today's Reading: John 21:20-25

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 51:17-52:12; Matthew 2:1-12

"This is the disciple that bears witness concerning these things and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. What a gift! What a wonderful Christmas gift! We have the testimony of St. John, the Apostle! Merry Christmas!

St. John preached and wrote what He saw. Now, he didn't write down everything that He saw. That would fill the world with books! What John wrote in His Gospel was written so that you and I might believe that Jesus is the Christ and, by believing, have life in His Name.

All that Jesus did and said does us no good unless it all is delivered to us. We can't travel back in time. We don't have to, because God delivers to us what He wants us to know about Jesus' life, works, suffering, death, and resurrection in the New Testament.

God doesn't chisel His Word on stone tablets—not anymore, at least. That's not how He rolls, in the days since His Son took on our flesh. He is one of us in every way. God uses words! He uses pen and ink.

Gloriously, God doesn't use just prophets to deliver His Word to you, He uses eyewitnesses. St. John actually saw Jesus heal the sick and raise Lazarus from the dead. He heard Jesus preach and teach. He received from Jesus' words. He saw Jesus betrayed into the hands of sinners. He saw Him beaten and bruised. He saw Him crucified. Then, after three days, St. John saw Jesus alive. He wrote what the Spirit gave Him to write.

You believe, I believe, we all believe that Jesus died and rose again because of testimony of the Apostles. The Apostles saw what Jesus did. We have their words in the New Testament. The Spirit takes their words in the Scriptures and creates faith where and when He pleases in those who hear this Good News.

Our faith is founded on God's Word. It's founded on the inspired, eyewitness testimony of the holy Apostles, like St. John, who saw all Jesus said and did for us. What a gift! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"Merciful Lord, cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed in the doctrine of Your blessed apostle and evangelist John, may come to the light of everlasting life; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." (Collect for St. John, Apostle and Evangelist)

Friday of the Second Week of Advent

December 12, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:1-14; Jude 1-25

"And the Lord said, 'Because this people draws near to me with their mouth and honors me with their lips, but their hearts stay away from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment taught by men...'" (Isaiah 29:13)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God calls you to repent this Advent season. He means your whole life, every last part, should be one of repentance. Change your actions, honor Him with your lips, fill your mouth with His words, and draw near to Him.

The Lord wants the whole of you! He doesn't accept partial repentance. His people don't get credit for trying. Close only counts in horse shoes, hand grenades, and thermonuclear weapons. Not with God. Close with God only lands you in hell.

He doesn't stop there. He doesn't just want you to be good, He wants you to be good for goodness' sake. He wants you to be perfect for perfection's sake! He wants you to change with your whole heart. He wants you to fear Him, love Him, and trust in Him for good above all things. Anything less and He'll execute His judgment on you.

God doesn't care that it is impossible. He demands what is right from you. He knows you can't do it. There's no handicap, no head start, no second place. He expects the holiness that He has to be your holiness, too. If you can't do it, He'll damn you.

So, to save you, God Himself acts. He works repentance in you. He preaches to you. He enlivens you. He is merciful. He repents you.

That's right, you can't repent on your own! Repentance isn't a part you and part God thing. No, God repents you. He does it. He kills you. He humbles you. He levels you. Then, He makes you alive in Christ. He raises you—all of you from the dead in the waters of your Baptism. He gives you a new heart: a new contrite *and* repentant heart.

Christian repentance isn't just that you turn from your sins. You certainly need to turn from your sins. But there's more! Believe that you have a Savior who has freed you from your sins. Believe that Jesus has already rescued you on the Cross, even you, from what you have and haven't done.

Salvation is by grace alone. Repentance is by grace alone. Salvation comes from God. Repentance comes from God, too. It was achieved by Jesus on the Cross. It is repented on you at the font, in the Word, and in bread and wine.

Repent this Advent season of what you do. It's what God does for you that saves you. He repents you. He gives you His Spirit. He works faith. He saves you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

December 13, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 29:15-30:14; Revelation 1:1-20

“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)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. *Gaudete!* Rejoice! That’s a double imperative: Rejoice. Again, I say rejoice! And don’t just rejoice for a little bit, or for a longer while, but rejoice in the Lord always! Rejoice every day, every hour, every minute, every second.

But cancer isn’t ever happy. Loneliness isn’t joyful, for those things we aren’t joyful. When evil is before us, it’s nearly impossible to smile. And death? Who can smile at death?

Jesus does. He alone can. He took it upon Himself. Christ advented into this world to make death a joke for you. He was born to save you from everything that could possibly make you sad. He took upon Himself all your hurts and suffering. Death and sadness died with Him.

You rejoice “in the Lord.” You are rejoiced in Him. Rejoicing doesn’t start with you. It’s not focused upon external circumstances. There is a gladness that not even death can steal away: The Lord is near. Jesus is your smiling. He is your gladness in good times. He is your grinchy smile in sad times. For you know something else that the devil can’t beat: When Jesus comes in glory with the angels on the clouds of heaven, He Himself will wipe away your tears. Take that Satan! You’ve already lost! L-O-L.

Prepare for our Lord’s coming today by smiling in your Baptism. Laugh in the forgiveness of your sins. Wink at death tomorrow as you eat the living Body and Blood of the One crucified for you on the Cross.

Put on a smile from down in your heart and ride the giggles all day long. Rejoice when things are amazing! Rejoice when they aren’t. Be glad when you are the king of the universe and be all smiles when it seems that no one likes you and everyone hates you and you’re eating worms. Rejoice when you are at the top of the world, and rejoice when they tell you that you have cancer.

For the Lord has already made things better. He has already made everything right, by faith. You will see it for yourself soon. You will! He promises. It was won on the Cross for you. It’s yours in His gifts. *Gaudete* in Jesus always! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Rejoice, rejoice, believers, And let your lights appear; The evening is advancing, And darker night is near. The Bridegroom is arising And soon is drawing nigh. Up, pray and watch and wrestle; At midnight comes the cry.” (Rejoice, Rejoice Believers, LSB 515:1)

St. Stephen, Martyr

December 26, 2014

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

“And they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at Him and they cast him out of the city and stoned him...” (Acts 6:56-57)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. This is how life is for those who bear the name of the One born of Mary: Pastor Stephen was dragged before the religious leaders. He had preached that Jesus died and rose again for them. They stirred up the people against him. They accused him. He didn’t defend himself. They rushed at him and cast him out of the city like he was a demon. Then, they martyred him.

Christmas is not really about presents, or trees, or even families getting together. The Twelve days of Christmas are all about the reality of the birth of Christ for the world: God’s people suffer and they die.

It’s not just that things don’t go your way. They don’t. Sometimes it seems that nothing goes your way. You lose your job. You fail that big test. You get sick. Your friends betray you. Your loved ones get sick. The doctor says it’s cancer. Isn’t life supposed be better for believers? If we live the right way, shouldn’t things go well for us?

No one lived better than Jesus...and we crucified Him. We should expect nothing less. They will mock our faith and might even cover their ears when we speak. If we are truly blessed, they will kill us.

Seriously! Death is the worst that can happen to you. And that’s not actually so bad. You’ve already been through the important death at the baptismal font. You’ve died with Christ in Baptism. You have also been raised with Christ. You can’t die forever. It’ll be like a long nap. He will wake you up, Himself.

Merry Christmas! God has this present for you today: suffering. Receive it as a gift. Things don’t have to work out here on earth for you. God might make that happen. He doesn’t have to. If He does, He does it to save you. If He doesn’t, He doesn’t because He’s saved you. Jesus rose. You are alive with Christ. Nothing will do you in, not forever. For Jesus will raise you from the dead. Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Heavenly Father, in the midst of our sufferings for the sake of Christ grant us grace to follow the example of the first martyr, Stephen, that we also may look to the One who suffered and was crucified on our behalf and pray for those who do us wrong; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” (Collect for St. Stephen’s Day)

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Day

December 25, 2014

Today's Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 49:1-18; Matthew 1:1-17

“And she gave birth to her first born Son and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a food trough because there was not a place for Him in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Christ has come! Merry Christmas! You can't say it enough. Merry Christmas! You can't receive it enough! Merry Christmas! We must be saved! He's come!

God has saved all men by becoming Man. It's such a miracle that the Church has dropped a knee every time it has been said in the Creed for fifteen hundred years: He became Man. Merry Christmas!

It can't even be fathomed. It's so merry! God has taken on your flesh. He is *incarnate*. That's literally, “in the meat.” Jesus is God in our meat—our flesh.

That's God Himself in that manger! God is so close to you, so just like you, that Mary held Him in her arms. God has hands and feet and legs and fingers and a nose and eyes and hair. He has lips. He gets cold. He has eyelashes. He eats. He sleeps. Merry Christmas!

You don't make Christmas merry. Left to ourselves, we'd un-merry it, because Jesus isn't really wanted or desired in our lives. We have no room for Him to fit Him into our world. We are too preoccupied with ourselves. We need to repent of our self-centeredness. We really do. It should fill us with holy fear. Jesus did this—became Man to save us—despite us.

Yet, no room, no problem! A manger, a food trough, will do. How strange! God Himself, God incarnate, in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. He comes to us in spite of it all to bring “Joy to the World.”

It's not some story. It's not a myth. Christmas has a lot of myths, but this isn't one of them. God personally entered into our time and space in the days of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinus was governor of Syria. He locked Himself in our world and history to change our world and redeem our history. That should make you merry, too.

The Lord has come to save you! Baby Jesus is born to die. He's born to go through Epiphany with the Wise Man, through the fasting of Lent, to Holy Week, Good Friday and the Cross. He is born to suffer and die for your sins. He is born to Easter for your forgiveness. Merry Christmas!

Christ has come! Merry Christmas! You can't say it enough. Merry Christmas! You can't receive it enough! Merry Christmas! We must be saved! He's come! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2014

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

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

“Are you the Coming One or shall we wait for another?” (St. Matthew 11:3)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. John the Baptist's whole job was to preach and baptize people. He was the advance preacher sent in by God to make the ground nice and level for Jesus to come. His job was to mark and prepare Jesus' territory. The Lord is near!

The greatest prophet born of woman was now the dinner party entertainment for King Herod. He would die on the whim of the King's daughter. This wasn't the way life was supposed to be! Surely, the Christ had a better plan for him than this!

But, even as he doubted, even as he questioned God's plan, the Baptist still directed us to Christ. He sent his students to Jesus, the coming One. He took his questions and put them on Jesus.

Jesus directs John to what He does: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the Gospel is preached to the poor. That's what John the Baptist teaches you today! You are saved by what Christ did and is doing for us. Look at what Jesus does! That will save you!

You don't need to fix your doubts about God by yourself. You aren't on your own—ever. You don't have to look further than the One who came to you in the water, Word, bread, and wine.

The right place for doubts is on Jesus—especially if they are about Jesus. Unbelief died at the font. Loneliness and fear run away from your pastor's absolution. And the surest place for your questions and doubts about God's love is the Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ. Take, eat. Take, drink. Have your faith strengthened in His Body and Blood.

Be prepared for the Lord's advent by receiving Jesus for your doubt and sins today. Christ is for sinners who doubt. He saves the lonely. He rescues the ones who question Him.

He saved the Baptist from prison. He's going to save you and me from our doubts, too. In fact, by faith, your doubts are already on the run this Advent season. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Lord, we implore You, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You now live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” (Collect for Gaudete Sunday)

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

December 15, 2014

Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 30:27-31:9; Revelation 3:1-22

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." (Isaiah 40:1)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God isn't a fan of condemning people. That's not how He rolls. Anyone who thinks God likes to damn people couldn't have God more wrong.

God didn't create people and rescue them from sin and death in order to throw them to hell. He didn't even create hell for people! He made hell for the devil and His angels.

God wants to have for Himself a people. He wants to love and have mercy. He likes to forgive sins. He wants to bring peace to people. He longs to give comfort to His people and then comfort them some more. He would shower them with grace and bless them.

God wants to have for Himself a people. He wants to love and have mercy. He likes to forgive sins. He wants to bring peace to people. He longs to give comfort to His people and then comfort them some more. He would shower them with grace and bless them.

We resist Him. We would be our own God. We want to believe what we want to believe, and do what we want to do. We don't want anything—especially God—telling us how to live or what to do. We think we should be able to determine for ourselves what we think and feel is right, and we'll believe in the god who agrees with us. Besides, it's not like we're that bad. It's not like we do anything damnable!

To save you, God does something alien to His nature: He speaks a condemning word. Like a farmer tills the ground and breaks up the clods of dirt, so our God pulverizes our lives with His Law. He condemns us. He tells us about the perfect holiness that He requires. His Law accuses us. He judges us rightly.

The mountains in which we trust He lays low with His righteous Law. He fills in the valleys of our trespasses with His Words. His Words kill us. They literally kill us.

Then, with His same Word, God raises us from the dead. He delivers to us the life of His Son, who lived His life for us, died for us, and rose for us. He washes our sins away. He feeds us Jesus' Body and Blood.

God has Himself a people! He has you and He has me! The glory of the Lord is revealed in you being His child in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Prepare for the Lord's coming today by dying to your sins. Bury them. Stop doing them. Let the mountains of your sinfulness be leveled with His Law. Fill the valleys of your life with His Commandments.

Don't stop there! Receive His forgiveness. For God wants to save you. He wants to have mercy. This is His proper work. This is the sort of God He is. You are that people in Son. He is your God. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve

December 24, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 44:21-45:13, 20-25; Revelation 12:1-17

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of His Father before all eternity and also true Man, is my Lord..." (Small Catechism, The Creed, Second Article)

Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God can't be born. He certainly can't die. Everyone knows this! God is eternal and immortal. Yet, your God was born today and died on Good Friday.

Jesus is true God. He is fully God. There is not a bit of Him that isn't God. When you have Jesus, you have God. You don't have some of God, part of God, a third of God. No, you have all of God.

Jesus is true Man. He is completely man. There's not a bit of Him that isn't man. He's just like you in every way—except He's without sin. He eats, drinks, sleeps, even uses the potty. He's just like you to save you!

So on Christmas, Mary is *Theotokos*, the mother of God. God is born of the Virgin. Baby God is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lies in a manger. God is going, "Goo-goo," and, "Ga-ga." The Magi knelt before the God-child, Jesus, and worshipped him on Epiphany.

And then, God was betrayed into the hands of sinners on Good Friday. God suffered under Pontius Pilate. God was smitten, stricken, and afflicted. God had nails driven into His hands and feet. God suffocated on the Cross. God died.

The Father and Spirit weren't born. The Son was born on Christmas. The Father and the Spirit didn't die. The Son of God died. Part of God wasn't born. All of God was born on Christmas. Part of God didn't die. God died—all of Him, on Good Friday.

How can God be a man? How can Jesus be both God and Man? He simply is God and Man in one Christ. He is fully God begotten of His Father from all eternity. He is fully man, born of the Virgin Mary.

Have a Merry Christmas tonight by throwing out your definitions of God. Marvel tonight at the wonder of what Jesus is: God and Man. Learn about who God is and what God is about and how God is from Jesus alone. All that Jesus does and says, He does and says to save you.

Merry Christmas! God Himself saves you. God takes on your flesh and is born of the Virgin Mary. God is born this night. The same Jesus grows up to die for you. But God doesn't stay dead; He rises from the dead on Easter morning for you.

God isn't supposed to be born. He isn't supposed to die. But this is what Jesus did to save you. That's what Merry Christmas means! Merry Christmas! In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

December 23, 2014

Today's Reading: **Philippians 4:4-7**

Daily Lectionary: **Isaiah 43:25-44:20; Revelation 11:1-19**

"Don't be anxious about anything, but in all things by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving make known your prayers to God." (Philippians 4:6)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. It can't be that easy. The Apostle looks in the face of all our anxiety and worry and says, "Don't be anxious about anything." Seriously? What's he thinking? Do you know what I have to do? Do you know the pressures on me? Do you understand what people expect of me this Christmas? I just go and go and go. It never stops and there's never a day off. There are just deadlines and people depending on me. I have to worry. This is serious business!

So we worry. We doubt. We believe we have to do this all on our own. We need to do it for ourselves. And don't we think, just a little bit, that our worrying is somehow noble? It's how we show we care!

But it's not noble. It's not good. We worry because we don't believe that we have a God in heaven who can get done what we feel He needs to do for us. He's not good enough, He's not God enough, to take care of us. So we have to make up for it on our own. Thus, we worry.

Calvary. That's where worrying dies. It is all crucified with Christ on the Cross with your Lord Jesus. Everything you could possibly be anxious about, everything there is to worry about, all ended when Jesus breathed His last on Good Friday.

Jesus' resurrection is your resurrection. You have eternal life in Him. You have salvation already. Win or lose, victory or defeat, success or failure, all is a gift from Him. He's working it out for your good.

You have a Father in Heaven. He knows what you need even before you ask Him. He loves you Calvary and Easter much. He's got this. He's on the matter. He won't fail—never has, not once, ever.

Be prepared for Christmas by being worry-free. Do what you can do, the best you can while you bring every last worry in your prayers and petitions to God. Thank Him as you do all these things, knowing that He's going to do far more for you than you could ever ask.

God will do good for you. You might not see it as good initially. All you need to do is remember the Lord's coming on Christmas. He took on your flesh to save you. He must love you. He must be working it out for you. It really must be that easy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in this Christ Jesus unto life everlasting." (Philippians 4:7)

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

December 16, 2014

Today's Reading: **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

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

"Therefore do not judge before the time, before the Lord comes, who will light up all the things hidden in darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart. Then, each will receive his praise from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5)

In the Name of Jesus. The Lamb of God has taken your sins and the sins of the whole world upon Himself. He has taken God's white-hot judgment upon Himself. God's wrath died with Him.

Through Baptism, God is your Dad now—YOUR Dad. This isn't some Santa-like myth. No, it's the real deal! As surely as Jesus has been raised from the dead, you will hear your Father say on the Last Day, "Two thumbs up! Great job! Here's a gold star and a pat on the back. Well done! I've never seen anyone do that as well as you did it right there."

Now heaven for you is a no-judgment zone. It is a place of no more tears and life everlasting. Everything is just right, just perfect, just Jesus-y. How could it not be? Jesus is perfect and you are perfect in Him.

That's why St. Paul says that he doesn't even judge himself. How could He? Jesus was judged for Him. Why would he judge anyone—including himself—if Jesus has taken all judgment upon Himself. We are all forgiven in the Cross of Jesus.

Wait a second there! That sounds like people could just do anything and still go to heaven. Why would anyone do good without the fear of hell? Doesn't that cheapen God's grace by inviting people to indulge their sinful flesh?

You mean, would they live like you do every day? We should do better, we should act better because we are saved. We know the Law of God. We know what God requires of us. Yet, we still ignore God's Law. What's worse? We pass judgment on other people about how they despise God's grace...while we sit there despising God's grace. We have no business judging anyone! Unless, of course, we want to be judged by Jesus.

Repent of your sins and be prepared by the Lord Jesus this Advent Season by giving up even judging yourself. Let Jesus judge you. Let Jesus judge others. Give them the same mercy that God has given you. Forgive them, love them, for Christ has loved and forgiven you.

When the Lord comes, you will stand before Him and receive nothing but praise in Him, for the Lord Jesus doesn't even have one tiny bit of condemnation for you. He is 100 percent judgment free. He's completely totally, perfectly, Christmas and Calvary and Easter, it-is-finished punishment free. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

December 17, 2014

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

“All this He does out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.” (Small Catechism, The Creed, First Article)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Father is good. Good is who He is. Good is what He does. Good is what He’s about. He does good all the time. God is good.

Creation was good. The Father made it good. How could it not be good? He made it. Everything fit neatly and rightly together. Everything drew its light and life from Him. Adam received all his good from God. Every good and perfect thing came from the Father. It was all good, all the time.

Then the serpent deceived Adam. He told him that Adam could do a better “good” than God. That’s really why the Fall happened. It was about man wanting to be the source of his own good.

Not good. Everything became not good. The good relationship, good order, and good harmony of creation were replaced with hiding from God, strife, suffering, and death.

God is so good that He doesn’t do good for us because we deserve good. He is good for goodness’ sake in spite of how un-good we are. He isn’t merciful because we deserve mercy. He gives mercy despite our firing spit balls of hate at Him.

Out of fatherly, divine, goodness and mercy, the Father sent His Son to save us. We didn’t earn it. We don’t deserve it. He did it because He is good. In Christ, creation is good again. He redeemed His creation. He bought us back from our sins, from death, and from the power of the devil with the holy life and bitter sufferings and death of His Son.

Creation is still fallen. There is still sickness, suffering, hurt, and pain. The children of Adam still hurt one another. They still hurt themselves. Death still seems to reign.

But the Father makes all things good. He takes the un-good that befalls you in this life, and He makes it good. He works it all out for your good and the good of those around you. You may not see it. You may not feel it. You may not experience it in this life. But faith knows—it trusts—that God must be good to us. It’s who He is. Good is how He rolls.

Prepare today for the Lord’s coming by thanking God for His goodness to you in Christ. He is good. You are good in Jesus. This is most certainly true. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

St. Thomas the Apostle

December 22, 2014

Today’s Reading: John 20:24-29

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 43:1-24; Revelation 9:13-10:11

“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and put your hand and thrust it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believe.’” (St. John 20:27)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Our Lord sends His men to preach His Gospel! The Apostle’s words weren’t their words, they were Jesus’ words! You can bank on them for your forgiveness. You can trust that Jesus is delivering His gifts through them.

St. Thomas refused to believe the testimony of the Apostles. They saw the Lord, but he wasn’t there. He should have put his faith in their preaching to him. But he thought his way was better. It was crass unbelief!

The Lord didn’t have to show Himself to Thomas at all. But He showed him His hands and His side for your salvation. Thomas saw and believed. You believe because you have heard what Thomas saw in the Word.

The Lord also speaks through your pastor when he speaks the Lord’s Words. He was sent to forgive the sins of repentant sinners and to retain the sins of the unrepentant as long as they do not repent, in the stead and by the command of the Lord Himself. He was sent to forgive you.

Be free enough to be prepared for Christmas by hearing your pastor’s absolution. Go see him. Unburden yourself of what you have done wrong in your life. Hear his forgiveness.

Sure, you don’t “need” to see your pastor to be forgiven. You can pray to God or confess your sins to your neighbor. But don’t miss the gift of today’s reading! It’s not an accident that today is St. Thomas’ day. Today is a nice reminder that you are best prepared for our Lord’s coming by being forgiven and trusting the words of the ones specifically sent to you by Jesus to forgive *your* sins. He who hears your pastor forgiving and retaining sins, hears Christ. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“Almighty and ever-living God, You strengthened Your apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in the resurrection of Your Son. Grant us such faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that we may never be found wanting in Your sight; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” (Collect for the feast day of St. Thomas)

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2014

Today's Reading: John 1:19-28

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 42:1-25; Revelation 9:1-12

"He said, 'I am the voice crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.'" (John 1:23)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. How do you get ready for Christmas? I'm not talking about putting your tree or decorations out. How do you get prepared for the coming of the Savior?

You don't make yourself ready for Christmas. The Lord does! You are made ready for the Lord's coming by hearing the voice of John the Baptist. The Baptist was a voice. He preached God's words. He preached repentance unto the forgiveness of sins.

John the Baptist was not the Christ. He was not Elijah or the Prophet promised by Moses. He confessed this. He did not deny it. John confessed that he wasn't the Savior.

The low places where we sinners find ourselves in this world, John's preaching leveled out. The valleys of icky, disgusting sins, his sermons filled in. The mountains of pride and arrogance and self-righteousness, John's words laid low.

Be prepared today for the Lord's coming on Christmas by repenting of your sins. Stop doing them. Quit them. Don't just be good for the reward of something in your stocking. Be holy because God is holy, because you have already been made holy in Christ.

Receive the One that John's voice points you to: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Cling to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Find your life and meaning in His death and resurrection.

That's what John preached! Repent and put your ears on the One born of Mary! He's coming to take away your sins and sadness and to give you life and the Spirit. Your sins are forgiven you.

For these days before Christmas aren't just about getting your gifts purchased and decorations up. Do that! That will be a real gift for those around you. But this time of preparation is really best used to receive the gifts that Jesus delivers to you in the waters of your Baptism, in the Word preached and read, in His Supper. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"Stir up your power, O Lord, we implore You, and come among us, that by Your grace whatever is hindered by our sins may yet be speedily accomplished through Your mercy and satisfaction; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." (Collect for Rorate Coeli Sunday)

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

December 18, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 34:1-2,8-35:10; Revelation 6:1-17

"And I saw when the Lamb broke on of out the seven seals, and I heard of the four living creatures says as with a voice of thunder, 'Come!'" (Revelation 6:1)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Lamb is the Alpha and the Omega. He's the Beginning and the End. Through Him all things were made and apart from Him nothing was made that is made. The End comes through the Lord. He is the Lord of the End. Only Jesus can break the seal because He is the Lord of the end of all things.

Before the End, come the horsemen. The Lamb breaks the first seal and then comes the white horse ridden by one with a crown and battle bow representing all the tyranny, warfare, and power plays that precede the end. He comes and conquers and conquers and conquers.

The Lamb breaks the second seal, and then comes the red horseman. He takes all peace from earth. His great sword brings forth murder and bloodshed. Men murder one another.

The Lamb breaks the third seal and the black horseman comes forth. The scales in his hands cause markets to tumble and economies to fail. There is scarcity and want. There is hunger and famine.

The Lamb breaks the fourth seal, and so advents the pale horseman. His name is Death. Hades follows him. He kills one fourth of the earth with the sword, famine, sickness, and even nature (attacks from the beasts of the earth).

The Lamb who died and rose again for you breaks the fifth seal and the martyrs under the altar of God cry out. They kept the faith even after they fell asleep. They plead for vengeance on the earth. They are given a white robe of the Lamb's righteousness that covers their sins, reminding them of their Baptism and are told to rest a little longer. The end is coming.

Then, the Lamb breaks the sixth seal and all hell breaks loose. All that He said would precede the End happens. The whole earth and heaven are rocked with earthquakes and the people cry out, pleading for rescue from the wrath of the Lamb.

Be prepared for the Lord's coming today by repenting of your fear of the End. You have nothing to worry about in Christ. The Last Day already happened for you on the Cross when the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world. He delivered the End to you with your white robe of His righteousness at your Baptism. All that the Last Day will show you is that He is the Lamb of God who saved you. He is, after all, the Lord of the End. So it must be good for you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

December 19, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17

“After this I look, and behold, a great crowd which no one was able to count, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.” (Revelation 7:9)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. *Adventus* is the Latin word which means “coming.” Advent is about coming. Our Lord is coming. The End is near. Yesterday, we heard about the Lamb breaking seals. It’s already begun.

You have nothing to fear. You will be safe and free from judgment. Nothing will harm you. You will never see the second death. You have already died in the waters of your Baptism. The Last Day for you is the fulfillment of all the promises of God in His Word.

You are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. Your robes are stained white with the blood of the Lamb who sits on the throne. You stand before God with the rest of the children of Israel with palm branches in your hand.

You are at peace with God. You are at peace with those around you. Your sins are forgiven. Your debt is paid, for salvation belongs to your God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

You didn’t earn it. You don’t deserve it. Your good didn’t outweigh your bad. You didn’t work it out with God. You didn’t fix it.

You have been clothed with it. You wear Jesus. You put on His righteousness. He was washed onto you. You are baptized. You have been marked and sealed with the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You have been redeemed, purchased, by the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

When the Lord advents, there will be no more hunger for you, no more thirst. The sun won’t burn you anymore and you won’t be drenched with sweat ever again.

The Lamb, your Lord Jesus, who is in the center of God’s altar, the center of all of heaven, will guide you to good pasture. He will shepherd you. You will drink from the water of life. You will live forever. And if you still have sadness, He’ll wipe the tears from your eyes.

Prepare for the Lord’s coming! That’s what Advent is all about. Your Lord Jesus is coming to save you. It will all be over soon—the suffering, the pain, the death. It’s already started. The seals are breaking. Faith believes it’ll be over soon. Faith trusts that it is already happening. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

December 20, 2014

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 40:18-41:10; Revelation 8:1-13

*“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)*

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Christmas may be white, but Advent is wet—wet with the Righteous One. The church prays on the Last Sunday of Advent, “*Rorate Coeli!* Let the heavens rain down righteousness!”

On Christmas, the heavens open up and God comes to us. He takes on our flesh to save us. God comes out of the womb. Let it rain, Lord! Let it rain salvation!

Now, it doesn’t rain salvation because you changed your behavior. The heavens don’t declare the glory of God because you gave your life to Jesus. Your heart, your faith, don’t even make it get cloudy. Repent of trying to make salvation about you! Let this repentance prepare today for the Lord’s coming.

Your salvation is wet. It’s baptismal. It’s outside of you—coming from God to you. God’s mercy washes you with the new birth and a renewal in the Holy Spirit. Righteousness rained down on you in the words, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Apart from Jesus, water is just water and there is no salvation. There’s just the dry desert of having to earn favor with the universe and the cold, unforgiving, randomness of “luck” which seems to favor others and not you. It’s a world where there is only sickness, and pain, and where dead people always stay dead. Apart from Jesus, if there even is a God, He judges us by what we do and don’t do. Then in the end, we get what we deserve.

But you are not in a Christ-less world. The heavens have opened up and rained down the Righteous One. Christ came on Christmas. He lived the righteous life that God requires of you and He suffered the punishment you deserve for not living it. He rose again from the dead. You will rise, too, in Him.

Rorate Coeli! Let the heavens rain down the Righteous One! His storm of righteousness has poured down on you and those around you. Hop in the puddles of forgiveness. Splash your friends and enemies with His forgiveness. Christ is coming! He is your righteousness. He is your salvation. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.